**Partner University:** Malmö Högskola

**Major:** Interaction Design, School of Arts and Communication, Bachelor program

**Dates of Exchange:** January 10 - June 30 (classes ran January 16 - June 2)

**Pre-Departure:**

Before leaving on exchange, I focused both on learning about the new environment and on how I wanted to spend the limited time I would have. To do so, I did some general research in [https://studyinsweden.se/](https://studyinsweden.se/), which has general information on each level of post-secondary studies, student testimonies, financial planning resources, etc. To get an idea of what Sweden was like as a country (culture, sights to see), I searched mostly Youtube videos and travel blogs. I was also able to learn some things about Sweden in the SFU Exchange Orientation by talking to a Swedish student that was on exchange in Vancouver. I also had to apply for a study permit on [migrationsverket](https://www.migrationsverket.se), after which I got an email approving my application. As soon as I could, I went to the nearest Migrationsverket office to my student dorm to have my residence permit card processed, and it was soon mailed to me. On my Canadian passport, I had 90 visa-free days that can be spent within the Schengen countries, which Sweden is part of. I was immune to the 90-day countdown with a student permit. After the permit expired, the 90 days start counting down. Most younger Swedes speak English fluently. If you approach a group of Swedes, they would even switch to English just for you. It's good to know the basics of the language, but you don't need to be fluent to survive.

![Malmö Centralstation](image-url)
The academic details about my course were not all displayed together in one webpage. I had to wait until December to see my weekly class schedule, and the list of projects (and thus class materials. I found out after arrival that an Arduino kit had to be purchased) you would do were not clear until the class began. I recommend emailing the department personally in advance about it if you need to find out.

I was expecting a much harsher winter than Vancouver, but the temperature is only slightly lower. There is less rain and a lot more wind. Toque, scarf, and gloves are not multiple choice in the Malmö winter, and this is critical if you plan to ride a bike. Good boots are necessary and might even be worn in the spring months. Something else worth noting is that when you first move into your room in the student dorm, it’s empty except a few pieces of essential furniture. There isn’t even toilet paper. Interior decoration is all up to you, and there are plenty of ideas to be had from Scandinavian interior and product design styles.

![My room in Rönnen post-cleaning](image1.jpg) ![Good old Ikea lamp assembly](image2.jpg)

When you go to Malmö for the first time, I advise booking a flight to Copenhagen and then taking the train for 20 minutes to Malmö C (Malmö Centralstation). The view across the Oresunds bridge is spectacular. There are several bus lines in Malmö. Green busses run within the city and yellow busses go to more distant suburban areas. To ride the bus, you must have a reloadable Jojo card or pay with credit card, which is slightly more expensive.
The busses do not take cash. If you are making a more distant trip with a friend, you can purchase a duo pass to save a bit of money. Trains from Malmö central station can take you to different parts of Sweden, and it is only a mind-blowing 30 minutes to Copenhagen Central Station. If you purchase a ticket going from somewhere in Denmark back to Malmö, you may use that ticket again on the green busses in Malmö as long as you’re within the validation period. Always bring your passport when crossing the border. The residence permit card does not count as ID. On a more day-to-day basis, I would strongly recommend buying a second-hand bike. Considering that almost everything you need in the city is 15-20min away by bike, including most of Malmö University’s buildings. Having one will pay itself back in value. Malmö By Bike is a system of rental bikes spread across the city, but it is not as cheap and the quality of the bikes is not so good. Biking is the cheapest, fastest way to get around. Make sure to lock your bike wherever you go, as bike theft is common.

Bike lanes and parking are abundant in Malmö

As for the financial details, Sweden is very credit card-friendly and it isn’t necessary to open a Swedish bank account if you only stay for 6 months. You can exchange currency at Forex or another exchange shop (some in the Möllan area don't take commission). If I recall correctly, I had to attach a PDF
of a monthly bank account statement when applying for the student permit. If you choose to join some student networks or get the student card, there are fees associated with that. More expenses will be incurred in the first month than the others, mostly due to buying supplies and getting settled in.

**During exchange:**

The arrival was very welcoming, as there were student volunteers from Malmö University waiting at the train tracks of Malmö Centralstation to pick us up. We went to the school to check in, pick up our dorm keys, and they also took us in groups to get SIM cards and Jojo cards for the bus. For cellular services, you can buy a monthly package whenever you wish, which I found more practical than subscribing to a monthly plan. Plans and packages are much cheaper than in Vancouver. We also got a welcome bag filled with information pamphlets about the school, what to do and see in Malmö, a city map, and some other useful items. It was a good chance to meet other exchange students as well as ask questions. A shuttle drove us to our dorms (Rönnen and Celsiusgården) and some students already living in the dorm showed us around. The first week is welcome week, so you may participate in activities arranged by Malmö University's student union (Studentkåren) and the European Student Network. Swedish classes offered by the university also start in the first week.
The two “main” student dorms are Rönnen International and Celsiusgården. Exchange students are guaranteed housing as long as they apply before the deadline. I recommend doing this as it is difficult to find housing to Malmö and it will be troublesome to queue for a property. Application opened around 2 months before the exchange. You are able to see pictures of the rooms and you can choose a first and second priority for the student housing you want (not a specific room). Should you accept living in a student dorm, you'll have to pay an initial dorm fee for the first month and a deposit. The deposit is returned to you after you move out if you pass the cleaning inspection. Rent was slightly more than 600 CAD a month, and I believe it's half price in June. It is paid monthly using a pay slip, and you can pay at a Forex office or do a global money transfer through your bank’s webpage.

Rönnen and Celsiusgården have shared kitchen and laundry facilities, with your own private room and bathroom. The grocery store Willy's is a 3min walk from the dorm. Lidl is a cheaper option, but slightly farther away. You can also bike to the Möllevångstorget square for the fruit & veggie market that runs Monday to Saturday for cheaper produce. A cheap place to buy meat would be Orient Livs, a small convenience store across another street. A great way to bond with your flatmates is to chat and cook in the kitchen. Occasionally, some people will host a dinner where they make dishes from their culture and everyone eats together. In Rönnen, there is a weekly cleanup inspection on Monday for the kitchen. Each week, a group of 4 will do minor cleaning wherever necessary with a major cleanup on Sunday night.

The Interaction Design course is full-time (100%). It is composed of 5 projects, one for each month. Each project had a theme and certain restrictions. February was focused on user-centered design, March was about Arduino and coding, April was about research and HCI, and May was a free-for-all where you could choose your group and project theme. Lectures happened usually 2-3 times a week. Teamwork is done with the rest of the time, and if it's busy, could extend to the weekend. The Arduino section moves considerably faster than the rest of the class, and it would help to familiarize with the programming language Processing beforehand. The grading system is Pass/Fail. At the end of each project, you are graded on the team project as well as your individual project reflection. Should you fail, there is a re-exam and a re-re-exam that you do about a month after the project. Most classes were held in the Niagara building, but the Arduino section was taught in the Orkanen building.

The weather in Malmö is similar to Vancouver, but slightly cooler. Rainfall is not as intense, but since Malmö is a portside city, there is wind coming from
three directions. There is a prominent cafe and bar culture in the city, and you can have Swedish fika (coffee time) with a pastry (most common are cinnamon buns). Some exceptional fika places include a cheesecake shop by Lilla Torg called Pronto and a pastry shop called Hollandia. The west harbor (Västra Hamnen) is a popular place to have an outdoor barbeque when it is warm. It is also nice to ride your bike there, but don’t go when it's too cold because the wind chill is brutal.

I’ve attended a few design talks and the Arduino festival at Minc, a creative space for design and innovation. Sometimes on a weekend, there is an event in Copenhagen or Lund and some flatmates would go together by train. Aside from a few dorm parties and the occasional drink with my classmates at the student pub, I didn’t participate much in Malmö’s nightlife. Alcohol is state-regulated by Systembolaget, and drinks at restaurants and pubs are more expensive than in Vancouver. During holidays, pub crawling is common and some pubs may even lift the age restriction to keep numbers under control. The fancier restaurants and bars are in Lilla Torg, while the cheaper, quirkier ones are in Möllan. Kebab, shawarma, and falafel are relatively cheap and good to eat after a few drinks.
When seeing other cities in Sweden, there are generally museums, markets, and historical landmarks to see. I recommend spending around 3 days each in Gothenburg and Stockholm. An idea for a day trip would be to take the train 1 hour north to Helsingborg, then take the ferry to Helsingør, the Danish city, to see the beaches and the castle that inspired Hamlet.
Post-Exchange:

Throughout these months, I've tackled a myriad of challenges and learned about myself through tackling them. The most obvious one was going from living at home to living with over 30 people around my age from different cultures. Of course there were language barriers, but I was able to see the difference it made when you just know them from school versus when you live with them. Thanks to my flatmates, I've grown more confident, more open to express myself, and more adaptable in social situations.

![My flatmates in a floor-wide dinner](image)

The fresh new perspectives in which I studied design enabled me to think of the design process in a new light with positive differences. I've had memorable teamwork experiences and learned to work with people from different age groups and backgrounds. Thus, I've learned to be more adaptable in teamwork, but also to be assertive on how I feel about the project and what I can do for it.

Prioritization that comes with living by oneself and keeping all parts of life in balance was something I learned on the fly, and am still learning. I've also learned to be more in touch with my inner state, and I owe this greatly to taking classes at Malmö Wing Chun School, where our Sifu would talk about some principles that help enrich our everyday lives. Through coming to class, I've learned to be less reluctant to take risks. There weren't any students in my age group and instruction was primarily in Swedish, but I'm glad to have
followed my curiosity and tried something new. I was able to learn many new things, keep in shape, and bond with my classmates.

I wish I could have been more informed of the travel opportunities that came with being 20 minutes away by train from a major airport. Several of my flatmates would take 2 or 3 days to see another country, and especially during the winter months, I wish I’d planned a similar excursion. I’ve seen plane tickets to Brussels as low as 20 CAD on Momondo. While budget flights like these have tight luggage restrictions, they are good for just going for a short while to see another country and experiencing a new culture. I also wish there was a full syllabus explaining the materials needed for each part of the course, as I could have prepared better for classes and understand the highs and lulls of the semester.

Taken in the Reykjavik KEF airport. Moving out meant forgoing some belongings, but the memories and life lessons are to keep.

My advice to prospective students:

1. Expect the weather to be cooler than the forecasts. Also, the weather in June can be really unpredictable
2. It is more budget-friendly to pack your lunch. Restaurants and cafes are more expensive, and the cheapest food available to buy outside is Middle Eastern food.
3. Search for directions before biking somewhere if unfamiliar with the place, not during.

4. Spend more time with your flatmates, especially near the end. Your time to make memories together is limited. The best way to bond is through Swedish fika or a few drinks.

5. Be positive, stay curious. It’s a good way to learn about a new culture and deal with any daily situation.

6. If you have any questions or comments, don’t hesitate to email aza23@sfu.ca