

# Victoria Abroad Evaluation Form

PLEASE TYPE THIS EVALUATION FORM & EMAIL IT TO VICTORIA ABROAD AS A WORD DOCUMENT

## A: Student Information

VUW degree(s)	BA/BSc
Major(s)	Political Science, Psychology, Environmental Studies
Exchange Institution	Uppsala University, Sweden
VUW Tri & Year of Exchange	Trimester 2, 2015

## B: Finances

Please detail your basic costs in New Zealand dollars. This will help future students plan their own budgets. (Enter your number rounded to the nearest dollar.)

Books	\$40
Accommodation	\$4000
Return Airfare	\$3000
Local Transportation	\$150
Meals	\$1500
Visa	\$220
Health & Insurance	\$800
Personal Spending	\$2000
Communications (phone, etc.)	\$100
Other fees (specify)	Student Nations and club entry: \$70
What unexpected costs did you encounter? What items were more or less than expected?	Travel to nearby Stockholm and other areas in Sweden is rather expensive and discouraged extensive local travel. Groceries were also more expensive than expected. Being Sweden, there were few pleasant surprises money-wise.

How did your financial expenses compare to what you originally expected to spend?

I ended up spending much more than I originally intended, as I discovered I was less frugal than I previously thought. To make the most of your time in Uppsala and Sweden, it is necessary to spend a bit more than one would perhaps care to.

By what means did you maintain your finances? What would you recommend? (Credit card, foreign bank account, travelers checks, etc)?

I used my Kiwibank debit card, either incurring the \$6 cash withdrawal fee (large amounts at a time) or minimal % eftpos charge. Setting up a Swedish account was off-putting for the relatively limited time I was there due to various bureaucratic obstacles, however if one is proactive and wants to avoid the (manageable) surcharges that come with using your NZ account, it is eminently possible.

What financial advice would you give students attending the same university as you?

As stated above, you can set up a local bank account but I had no problems using my NZ account.

What was the average cost of a can of coke or coffee in your host country?

Coke - \$3.50. Coffee - \$5. Could probably find cheaper, but on balance walking into a café expect to pay more than you would in NZ.

**C: Visas & Insurance** *\*Please note this information is recommended by VUW students & current at the time of their exchange. For all up-to-date visa information you must check with the embassy/consulate of your host university.*

Did you have to apply for a visa? If so, was it difficult? What was the process, how long did it take and how much did it cost?

I applied for a student Visa and it was an extremely easy and efficient process. It is handled via Australian Swedish embassies, however I had no trouble finding extensive information online. The visa itself also arrived much earlier than expected. When in Sweden, you take your stamped visa to the migrations office (ask someone to tell you explicitly where it is – it's quite difficult to find, even using Google maps) where they will issue you with a residency identification card. Make sure you get the visa stamped when you go through immigration when arriving in Sweden – I arrived on a flight from Prague and wasn't required to go through immigration for some reason, and could only get it stamped when I returned from a visit to the UK 6 weeks later, delaying the ID card process. This card is very important for obtaining bank accounts, joining gyms etc. so it is imperative to get on it ASAP.

Do you have any advice for future students when applying for visas to your host country?

Do it well ahead of your exchange to ensure it doesn't arrive too late.

Did your host university have a mandatory insurance? Or a particular insurance they recommended? If Yes, what was it and how much did it cost?

I procured insurance through student flights anyway, so cannot speak to this issue. I do believe health insurance is required. My trip involved extensive travel before and after the exchange period to the price would not be indicative of a typical exchange. Nonetheless, it cost somewhere in the region of \$800.

What insurance company did you use and would you recommend it to future students?

I had no issues so cannot inform of the efficacy of my company.

### D: Academics at Host University

Which courses did you take while on exchange? Please rate the difficulty of each course (1-5, 1 = Very Easy & 5 = Extremely Difficult) and leave any comments you may have.

Course Title	Language of Instruction	VUW course equivalent or elective	VUW points/credits value	Rating (1-5)	Comments
<b>VUW Trimester 2/2015</b>					
Swedish Politics	English	Introduction to NZ Politics	15	3	Very interesting and content-driven. Good course to take if interested in understanding more about the broad local political climate and history.
Animal Psychology	English		15	2	Unlike anything I've encountered in the Victoria curriculum – a true intersection of psychology and biology. A bit on the easy side, however.
Sex, Gender & Ethnicity in Psychology	English		15	3	Brilliant discussions of group dynamics – would not need to be a PSYC student to thoroughly enjoy.
Swedish Language	Swedish/English		15	2	The only class that ran through the entire semester, was very enjoyable and relaxed – came away with a surprising amount of Swedish in the end!

## **Course Registration/Enrolment**

Please describe the registration process at your host university. What kind of help was available?

My exchange contact (Marilyn) was very helpful and responsive, providing detailed and useful responses to my questions. The Swedish semester structure takes some getting your head around, so it's very helpful to have someone to talk to who knows how it works. Registration occurred online and was very simple, and despite apparently stringent requirements the system/structure is thankfully relatively flexible.

How successful were you in registering/enrolling for classes you wanted? What advice would you offer to next year's exchange students about registration at your host university?

I only missed out on one of my preferred classes, and was able to pick up Swedish language instead (a good fallback as registration is practically unlimited as does not happen until the semester begins, unless you take the summer course) which turned out to be quite a blessing. Classes are quite small however (one had just 9 students) so I would recommend applying immediately when registrations open.

Do you have any advice for future students when choosing and applying for courses?

I haven't heard of any "bad" courses at Uppsala – so while options for exchange students are limited don't worry if you miss out on your preferences; you might end up pleasantly surprised by the alternatives (like I was).

## **Academic Experience**

How did your academic experience differ from your time spent at Victoria? Did the academic experience meet your expectations?

The structure of semesters takes some getting used to. You tend to do only one class at a time for around 5/6 weeks each. Contact hours are limited, which means a lot of self- and group-directed study is required. You also need to be much more on-top of it in regards to time as the course moves very quickly – if you fall behind it is difficult to catch up on. The benefit of this is that you have more hours per week to concentrate fully on just one subject, meaning that while the courses aren't especially broad they can afford to be quite deep which can be very rewarding. Studying this way for a semester or two can be very complementary to your study back at Victoria, and while I wouldn't want to undertake the Swedish model full-time I am very glad of the alternative experience.

How did the style of teaching at your host university compare with that at VUW? How did the workload

compare to what you would expect at VUW?

As stated, lecturers acted more as guides for individual study – presenting interesting concepts and questions for the students to then go and discuss/apply. This was an interesting and more extreme alternative, that I am sure will definitely benefit me in the long term in regard to my work ethic. Workload tended to consist of a final exam or essay, complemented by a seminar presentation or shorter essay. The semester is much longer than in New Zealand (20 weeks) while overall less coursework was required. There

What would you recommend as an appropriate course load for other VUW students visiting your partner university? What specific courses would you recommend to visiting VUW students? Why?

Course load requirements are relatively strict at Uppsala, and therefore there is little flexibility in terms of how much/little you can take on. “100%” course load is eminently manageable however, and most students could easily take on more if so inclined.

What advice would you give VUW students about succeeding academically at your host university?

Don't be fooled by the lack of class hours – significant work outside of class is required! Utilise your peers – the Uppsala curriculum is designed to best complement those who engage in group discussion of content.

What was your impression of the computer facilities, library, and internet access at your host university?

Campuses are very nice and clean. In terms of computers, there seemed to be a distinct lack for general use however as I used my personal laptop I may just have missed them. I know there are some, though. Internet access is a bit fiddly (constantly have to re-enter passwords) however is generally pretty reliable.

If you went to a country where English is not the native language, how did you prepare for this? Were there any intensive language courses provided by the host university?

Sweden has the highest English language proficiency amongst nations for whom it is not a first language. You will have no problems. Swedish language class is fun and interesting, but not necessary.

## **E: Accommodation**

What form of accommodation did you stay in?

## Halls of residence (Flogsta)

What were the pros and cons of this form of accommodation?

Pros:

- Only real viable option (flatting is much less prevalent there)
- Made some close friends on my floor
- Short bike ride to Uni, town and other halls

Cons:

- Housing companies eager to get extra money out of you – they will attempt to charge you for extra cleaning after you leave (ensure you have an official inspection before leaving) and are relatively uncooperative on domestic issues (they get there in the end, if you hound them enough).

What accommodation would you recommend to future students?

Halls – very easy to apply, plenty of availability, good way to meet people immediately and your cheapest realistic option.

How early can you move into accommodation?

Some people on my floor were there about 6 weeks before the semester began – may require negotiation however.

What options were available for meal plans or cooking facilities? How satisfied were you with the food?

My hall was self-catered – most are – are the facilities were adequate. It is up to you and your floormates to coordinate to ensure the kitchen stays clean – otherwise it can get pretty horrible.

Do you have any tips of advice for future students when applying for accommodation?

Again, get in as early as possible! Some are better, more expensive and more in-demand than others so don't expect them to last. There's always free rooms at Flogsta however, which is pretty rudimentary but nice enough – so its unlikely you would miss out completely. For most of my time there two of the rooms on my floor were unoccupied (out of 12)

## **F: Personal & Cultural Connections**

What was it like making friends? How successful were you at making friends with local (i.e., not international) students?

Living in the hall was great for meeting Swedes – who really need a bit of time to warm up so continued exposure is about the only way to make proper friends with a lot of them – once you know a few however going to events and nation clubs etc. is a great way to meet more. It might feel like you're making all the effort, but the extremely reserved Swedes appreciate it I assure you!

What was it like to adjust to the culture of your exchange country/university?

Everyone speaks English, so in many ways it feels like being in a rather strange English-speaking country as you can pretty much operate as you would in NZ. Winter is definitely a shock though, mostly in terms of the lack of daylight hours which can get very depressing – not to mention the fact the entire populace seems to retreat to their homes during those months. On the whole, however, I felt very at home there not long after arriving. Uppsala especially, being essentially a large town, is a great place for adjusting.

What, if any, cultural differences did you find particularly challenging? How would you recommend students to prepare for these differences?

The Swedes are extremely reserved – sometimes to the point of frustration. It can occasionally be a bit isolating when it feels as though the locals are purposefully avoiding you, but it definitely isn't personal as almost all the other exchange students I met expressed the same feelings. As I said before, once you get to know them they are truly some of the nicest and most welcoming people. Sweden also has a lot of endearing social and cultural quirks which I definitely missed on my return!

What parts of the culture did you most appreciate?

Definitely the myriad traditions and holidays – an essential aspect of Swedish communities that is largely absent from mainstream New Zealand society.

How were you treated by local people? By university staff and faculty? By students?

Everyone is extremely amicable by nature – don't think I ever met a Swede I didn't like! Group work and shared thinking is strongly encouraged – a very positive thing depending on your preference. Unfortunately the majority of courses available to exchange students do not have Swedish students in them so there is limited opportunity to work alongside them.

As far as you could tell, how easy would it be for students with disabilities to study at your partner university? For students who are visible minorities in your host country? For students who are gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgendered?

I witnessed no obvious discrimination, and did not encounter much prejudice in my time there. Uppsala has an interesting demographic, its population constituting largely students, the elderly and immigrants. The city is relatively socially harmonious, indicating that few discriminatory prejudices underlie civil society there.

Did you face any issues regarding discrimination in your host country? What were they, and what advice would you give to future students?

Not personally, nor did any of my friends of varying backgrounds.

### **G: Extra-curricular/Social Activities**

What organized activities (clubs, sports, etc.) were available to students? What extra-curricular activities would you recommend to future exchange students?

Various activities are organised through the student nations (clubs), and most typical (and some unusual) interests are catered for by at least one nation or another.

What do you recommend other visiting students see or do on their weekends or holidays?

Visit Stockholm often – it may be expensive but a mere half-hour train ride makes it a manageable day trip, while I was never exhausted of the city despite many many visits. Living in Uppsala is almost like living on the outskirts of Stockholm itself. Ferries to the Baltic countries are also extremely easy to book and very cheap as well – you will spend almost as much crossing to Estonia and back as you would commuting to Stockholm.

What opportunities were there for students to work on-campus? Off-campus?

You can work at the nation cafes for a small payment and a meal, and at nation functions.

What volunteer or internship opportunities were there for students?

Volunteering at the nations.

### 5 things to take to your host country or region

1	\$\$\$
2	Sturdy boots
3	Warm Jacket
4	Gloves (cannot stress enough)
5	Proactive attitude

### 5 pieces of useful advice would tell a VUW student going to your host university

1	Get a bike ASAP – don't waste money on the bus
2	Get the immigration process out of the way immediately
3	Make sure you are proficient at self- and group-directed study – lecturers are very hands-off and contact hours are minimal
4	Don't be deterred by the reservation of many Swedes
5	Don't cycle at night without a light – you <i>will</i> fall in a hole

### Top 5 Things to do

*What are your 'Top 5 Things To Do' future VUW students at your host university or city/country?*

1	Visit Stockholm
2	Scandinavian/Baltic travel
3	Traditional Swedish cuisine (unless you can't stand fish)
4	Snow (there will be a lot)
5	Northern Lights (occasionally faintly visible from Uppsala, very clear views in the north of Sweden)

## H: Personal Experience

Please write one paragraph about your exchange experience. Plus, don't forget to submit some photos to the exchange office!!

My exchange to Uppsala was an incredibly valuable experience, and is definitely something that will remain a significant part of my life for a long time. Before arriving in Sweden, I assumed I would immediately assimilate into my new life and surroundings. However, through a series of transient learning experiences I discovered much about my personal capabilities and limitations as reservations hindered my ability to fully invest in my experience. Such lessons were both enlightening and encouraging, and by the end of my time in Uppsala I felt a renewed sense of purpose and drive not only in my studies, but my life in general, after committing fully to getting the most I possibly could out of my time there. I shared some thoroughly enjoyable experiences with a fun, interesting and supportive new group of people, and amongst other obvious (but no less true) clichés, I felt myself pushing beyond my comfort zone in many different situations. An exchange is perfect for those looking for an individual and unique challenge with people sharing similar – yet equally personal – experiences, and I am a more wholesome person for doing it.

