

Victoria Abroad Evaluation Form

A: Student Information

VUW degree(s)	Bachelor of Architectural Studies
Major(s)	Interior Architecture
Exchange Institution	Fachhochschule Mainz University of Applied Science
VUW Tri & Year of Exchange	1 st Trimester of 3 rd year (5 th semester) March-July 2015

B: Finances

Please detail your basic costs in New Zealand dollars. This will help future students plan their own budgets.

Books	\$30 (for German class optional)
Accommodation	\$500/month for 6 months
Return Airfare	\$2000
Local Transportation	\$440 included with the semester allows for any public transport within 100km of study
Meals	\$60/week
Visa	\$175
Health & Insurance	\$750 booked as a whole through STA
Personal Spending	\$4000-\$5000 Thailand, Turkey, France, Italy, Netherlands etc. depending on where and how long for trips before , during and after the exchange
Communications (phone, etc.)	\$12.50/month for phone, \$27 broadcasting fee for W-LAN
Other fees (specify)	\$144.50 Passport renewal if need be
What unexpected costs did you encounter? What items were more or less than expected?	Currency exchange rates; research beforehand the best options such as a cash passport as I had incurred over \$200 in just exchange rates from ATMs, online transfers, Reise bank etc. Cost of living and food is a cheaper than in Wellington and you can stay in a nice apartment style dorm for less than \$125/week. The semester ticket is ideal as it allows for unlimited rides within your region of study as long as the fee is paid

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

All in all it was quite similar as I had gone to the financial advisor through Vic social services in which my budget was loosely based on another students expenses at the same university. The cost of living is significantly cheaper for a decent room that is relatively close to campus and food brought from supermarkets with their own supermarket brand such as Rewe's Ja and Aldi or Lidl are especially cheaper than others such as Edeka, AllNatura, Tegut etc. But with making new friends and wanting to travel around Europe, it is inevitable for the cost of going out for food and drink, transport accommodation elsewhere is dependent on the individual. I probably lived through the exchange on a holiday budget rather than a student budget therefore my expenses were more to compensate for tourist attractions and social excursions. I recommend to sticking with your savings goals before you jet off as it will relieve you of some stress knowing you have a buffer from your saving s account.

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

I do not recommend a credit card unless you're staying in a big city that is very touristy as Mainz is relatively small in Germany, not many places accept credit cards as form of currency. Also most of Germany do not use Eftpos as most places require a minimum purchase of 20 euros to use the card and/or signature so always carry cash with you as it will be the easiest form to make payments. A way to quickly stop the currency exchange rates to affect the decline of using your own money is to open a European account so you can take money out, make payments free of charge at any given time. I unfortunately had great problems with Deutschebank in which it took 6 visits to the branch over 2 months for all the documents I needed in order for me to use my card. I had chosen this bank as it was a partner bank to Westpac which is my NZ Bank which had perks such as online transfer fees were diminished so I recommend asking your branch for advice and what options there are overseas. A friend had recommended to me a cash passport as it acts as a debit card once loaded with money for the respected currencies you plan to use so you can use it in most countries without incurring the exchange rate fees.

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

At the Johannes Gutenberg University of Mainz where you can make payments for student association events, accommodation etc. do not accept Eftpos payments, travelers checks etc. ;only cash when paying at the Bureau. In Mainz you are also required to have a Studicard if living in a student dorm in which the card can be used as a key to get in and out of the building/your room, to do laundry etc. If not in a student wohnheim it can also be used to buy food at the Mensa or paying for TOM (Tutors of Mainz), ASTA events the student association organizes by loading cash onto the card and paying for these events at their office. If studying at the FH Mainz, you will need to go to the Johannes Gutenberg University where several different offices for different needs such as accounting, accommodation, events etc. are located in different buildings in the same area.

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

The average cost of a coffee is 3 euros being upwards of \$5 NZD for often a coffee pod coffee and not the typical ones from New Zealand

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?

Yes I was recommended to apply for the student Visa while I was living in Germany rather than prior to the departure by the man from the German Embassy of Wellington as you have a 90 days grace in Germany and you cannot process the application too soon. FH Mainz had taken responsibility for all the non EU students Visa applications however there was a long wait to get to the German Visa Bureau. My 90 day visa had expired on May 21st but my appointment was not scheduled until the 29th of June. The process is simple as we are allocated the documents we need to bring for the appointment but it is near impossible to attain the Visa without the knowledge of German as many if not all of the German Visa Bureau knew very little to no English; you must go with a German speaking peer.

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

You must take responsibility for it even if it means you have to pester the administration of the university because at the end of the day, you are affected the most if the process is not followed through. Don't fret if you have haven't gotten the Visa and the current one had expired so long as you have proof of the appointment if questioned, it is legible for your continual stay.

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?

It is mandatory to have proof of some form of insurance for the application as a student at the FH Mainz University of Applied Science. The host university had recommended the purchase of German health insurance as it will most likely be different standards and policies than the one(s) purchased from New Zealand. The recommendation will cost around \$116/month for public health insurance. They also recommend to clarify the exact details with your insurance of what services you are entitled to in Germany as some are not recognized there.

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

I had purchased insurance through STA whom are authorized representatives of Allianz Global Assistance. My plan "Plan A International Comprehensive – Single" covered my whole trip from travelling within Asia as well as my main duration stay in Europe. I think the insurance company is ok, I do not have much experience to compare to however they do have international 24hr access lines to contact if you're ever in need of help as well as quick responses via emails. I am currently awaiting response from an Insurance claim regarding medical. I would recommend it purely because it is through STA and they are generally out for the best deal for value and quality for students.

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
VUW Trimester 1/YEAR					
Entwurf Raum A	German	INTA-311 – Interior Architecture Design	20	4	Class of 6 made up of 4 German and 2 international students. It began as individual to groups of 2 to whole group work to complete the project which was a competition which we were lucky enough to

					have won!
Entwurf Objekt A	English/German	SARC-323 – Colour, Pattern, Light	20	4	More industrial design than anything would've been similar to Furniture Design, Construction and Technologies paper offered at Vic
DesignBuild	German	Elective	8	2	Confusing course which had no projects or deadlines, it was about attending lectures by people from around the world who use natural materials to build as well as a one week trip to Villefontaine, France
Portfolio	English	Elective	6	2	Teachings of rules and ideas of how to make your portfolio, heavily design related taught by a super friendly teacher of the 3 classes we had
German	German	Elective	10	5	Course was fully taught in German, teacher rarely spoke a word in English
Buchbinden	English	Elective	4	1	Fun and interesting workshop class that allows you to make almost anything under the bookbinding umbrella. Lovely teacher who helps you and speaks English
Screenprinting	English	Elective	4	1	A short 2 workshop class to learn about silk screen printing
VUW Trimester 2/YEAR					

Course Registration/Enrolment

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

The enrolment registration process after the paper work from Vic Abroad required to submission of a portfolio to the administration for your Bachelor’s degree as well as login into your appointed user login to complete their enrolment process. This was a standard enrolment application with personal details etc. but also a CV, language certificates, and other referees were options and sometimes requirements that needed to be uploaded before submitting your enrolment application to FH Mainz University. Erich Weiler one of the heads of department was corresponding with me via email and responded hastily every time I had emailed an enquiry about any issues I was having with enrolling. His availability to help was resourceful and eased the application process by personally emailing you a letter of acceptance and would be there throughout your whole experience abroad in Mainz.

The course registration however had very little guidance, we were told to attend a lecture by all the professors who were essentially advertising their course to all the students of Interior Architecture. It was all in German but one of the professors took the international students aside afterwards to explain in English what each one as about however the many options were not applicable to us as the project classes were highly recommended as there would be no lectures. From here we had one day to register for our courses through their version of Blackboard/S-Cubed called O-LAT, however heading to the assistance for interior architecture was the easiest way to sort out the administration side of everything to do with IT as it would’ve been a bit of a process to get through the German. Basically the courses we could take was between 3 big project classes and a handful of electives but there were never briefs or other paperwork prior to this one day to hear about what each class would be about meaning you had to make decisions for the semester quickly.

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 had no idea what classes were available to us prior to that one day where the professors had a lecture of their course they will be teaching for the semester therefore I wasn’t sure what I had wanted to take or could take until that day. Their website is very broad and unhelpful in allocating requirements, expectations and project objectives therefore it I advise future students to be ready for a somewhat dysfunctional way of administration that is very much different from Vic. Keep your options open and take two 10 ECTS papers

from the 3 options as this will give you the best challenge for the semester. However if you wish to have less workload and complete only one project really well like most German students in their 5th/6th semester, you should communicate with Vic Abroad as to whether this would be sufficient enough to cross credit.

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

I chose my courses based on a previous student's choice of completing one spatial design paper and one Object design paper as well as an elective in portfolio. I however found that I had time for 4 other courses as some began and ended at different times and some were irregular. You apply for the courses the week classes begin after the one lecture they give to the students. I think it will be important to touch base with the assistance for interior architecture as well the heads of the school and the professors of the papers you are interested in so you don't feel left out from the get go. A big part of this is getting your student email working as well as OLAT so you are informed at all times outside of class time.

Academic Experience

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

I think that my academic experience was challenged whilst in Germany but for different purposes than in Victoria. This was regardless of the language barrier but the projects themselves. The academic experience was different as they were very fluid in their way of teaching with only 1-2hrs a week of university contact with the professor once a week of a particular paper and the rest of self-driven work. This made my impression of structure and efficiency of Germany alter as mostly, the professors are merely mentors but it is up to us whether we want to push ourselves. Another big difference is the lack of paperwork, marking schedules, timetable or each course; throughout the semester there were almost no indications how well you were doing as there were no deadlines other than the final project. The two 10 point papers consisted of one project for the whole semester. We had one interim for Object where marks were not allocated, this made it difficult for me to ascertain my progress as well as motivate to do better as there were already a lot of factors that were affecting my motivation levels. Because it was quite common for German students at this semester to only be taking one project, there was a lack of sympathy or consideration for the International students who were entering into the many different classes we were taking instead of the one that many German students were taking. I had not anticipated for such a different way of learning especially the vastly popular group projects at the university as well as being experimental from the materials to inform the design rather the other way around.

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?

The style of teaching included no lectures, it was mostly a tutorial styled setting where the whole class or the broken up groups are with the professor. He/She would explain what is expected this week or help generate ideas through discussion then it becomes one on one depending on the context of the lesson. A lot of it was mainly self-driven work and you were expected to turn up to every class with an exception of being able to miss 2 classes. This made it feel like there was a lot less workload as 4 of my courses basically

required no work outside of class with only 2 serious large projects and a handful of tasks to complete for the other classes. This may have been due to the fact we are international students and the expectation is very different than domestic students. Having been used to the minimum upwards of 10 hand ins per semester, my semester in Mainz felt a lot less stressful regarding university.

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?

The host university recommends for international students to take on board 20-24 ECTS that is equivalent to 40-48 Vic Points, I felt because we are used to completing a minimum of 60 points per semester, I chose more electives. I highly recommend taking one spatial design and one object design course to allow for diversity in your workload. Then you are free to choose electives where the timetable fits such as German, Portfolio and workshops such as bookbinding and screenprinting.

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

Be diligent and work for yourself, more often than not the critique you receive from your professors may not be projecting the way they want to come across. You have to be self-motivated to complete weekly targets you set for yourself since you only see the professor once a week and always ask questions and try to stay in contact with other students. You should allocate work time so that you can enjoy the rest of the time for friends and travel.

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

The computer facilities were small but accessible however there is quite a process to get your logins set up for everything available. It is not as advance as and vast as Victoria but it does the job or in my case mostly not used as most students worked from home. The library had lockers outside because you are not allowed to bring your bags into the library, it was very small and offered next to zero books in English so I spent very little time there. The host university used eduroam which is an internationally recognized wifi that can be used anywhere that uses the same network. The login to the desktop computers and iMacs were also a different login so be vary of the variance between each gadget you use that is wifi compatible.

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?

I had not prepared myself well for Germany other than using the Duolingo app because I was under the false presumptions that I'll be able to transition seamlessly into Germany. This was not the case as conversations that were deeper than surface level were difficult to have with German and fellow international students. This was improved throughout my stay as their English improved as well as the 3hr class we had on Thursday afternoons helped. There were optional language courses available outside of university for those that were serious about staying in Germany for work etc.

E: Accommodation

What form of accommodation did you stay in?

Student Wohnheim (university dormitory)

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

Electricity and power are included with the monthly rent and you get the option of single apartments or to share depending on the dorm. They are mostly easily accessible by walking if not public transport and is run through the University therefore they help you get settled in and give you information and options. This is also the most popular way for students that go to university in Mainz to live as it is not just ideally for first years but in fact houses many Masters' students etc. There is always a student bar at the bottom floor of each Wohnheim and each place has a weekly party night. However this means that most of the time your room is closed off from others so friends can be made from going to the bar at night, international friends, students from the university. This means a slower transition into German culture as well because living in a flat with other Germans will force you to learn their everyday way of living, customs and language more rapidly. You will need to furnish a lot of the items for living which is a pain when you are only staying for a semester such as a shower curtain, mirror, sink plug etc. You are able to purchase a 40 euro Starter pack that has basics including pots, cutlery, blanket, towel etc. You are also locked into a minimum contract of 6 months which is not ideal for students leaving earlier than the proposed date. The dorm I was in also only used cable so you had to purchase your own modem if you wanted to have wifi in your apartment.

What accommodation would you recommend to future students?

I think because the administration in Mainz highly recommends this form of accommodation through constant emails for their own security that we will be able to live and study therefore is the easiest form of accommodation to apply for. There are many options through the accommodation application online so be realistic of what your needs are, do you want to share with one person or many or just be by yourself? If so would you want communal kitchen and bathroom or have a studio room? Is this within your price range? Basically when a place is offered, go through your own pros and cons before accepting. However if you'd like a different experience than what you have most likely experienced from first year dormitories, go out of your way to look for rooms available in flats, corresponding through email maybe difficult but rewarding as you get to become integrated with the flat's existing friends therefore gain local knowledge of the place. Location of the flat is not a big factor as transport is covered under the semester ticket.

How early can you move into accommodation?

For spring/ summer semester, I was able to move in on the 1st of March 8 days prior to orientation week that began on the 9th of March

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

There were no catered halls of residence available in Mainz and only cooking facilities within the halls. I shared the kitchen which was made up of 2 stovetop elements, sink and a fridge no bigger than 1metre cubed with a flat mate. I was satisfied with the food that I could make given the limitations of kitchen equipment readily available but felt drawn back without the use of an oven, microwave and large fridge and freezer space.

If you lived in off-campus housing, how easy was it to find? What should future VUW exchange students know about living off-campus?

N/A

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

Not really, just follow the process and nothing can go wrong

F: Personal & Cultural Connections

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

At the beginning the German students are eager to help translate or show you things that you may need help with or something that is mundane to them but interesting to you. The faculty you are in also have tutors for the group of international students who are always friendly and ask how you are when you see them on the streets or around campus. You are also assigned a TOM buddy but whether you stay in contact and hang out is completely up to the two parties involved. I found that because most of the time the German students I was in class with only took that class or just one other, it felt like we were not doing the same degrees at times therefore the foundation of conversation wasn't there. However the little amount of contact time we did have and eventually a lot through the group project of 6, I made some German friends quickly from that. The Object class was divided into sessions and the internationals would be in one class so the professor can speak in English for one session, this made up of the most part of the semester therefore little contact with other students were had. The trip to France for almost a week was where some friendships were solidified as we had to drive there and back and live and eat together as a group improved friendships. But for the most part due to Academic style of teaching, there were very little class time and no designated computer room for a particular degree or year making the common space to work together is the computer rooms used by all the students or the tables in the Mensa. This meant that for all other classes where it were solely international students, it became apparent that International students were easier to make friends with. I was also a part of a program called "foreigners become friends" in which a local non student from Mainz can also be another friend. My friend was Anja and she had offered to help me countless times such as giving me a kettle, coffee machine, going to local events together and general catching up at her house for a change.

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

I think the culture is great, there is a lot of history and a lot of customs you can only learn by living and being there. It at times felt isolating not knowing what people are saying and what signs meant and having to ask for help a lot more than usual making me feel really incompetent. It was an adjustment period for me to accept help and to understand that English is not their first language therefore simplifying and repeating and slowing down my speech was imperative. You do quickly adjust to their culture as it is still Western culture; there is not a huge culture shock but you were able to analyse what was working better than what you would be used to and what could be improved.

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

Generally Germans are less open to include new people and a bit stand offish but they mean well. The

reality is that the friends you will make from exchange are mostly international as they are on a similar page to you at this current time. You spend more time together through the events organized but don't feel discouraged when you are not invited to a German's flat etc. It takes time with different people to open up naturally so just be open minded and realistic. The biggest cultural difference is the language, despite popular belief that all Germans use English, it's not quite true. Adults often can speak little to no English and a lot of students would've never needed to use English following high school classes, therefore don't expect to have engaging conversations like you would in New Zealand but understand that for some people they haven't needed to use English for years.

What parts of the culture did you most appreciate?

I really appreciated the history of each province and how they differ from one another from food and drink to traditions such as Christmas that is specific to a particular state. I really enjoyed how sustainable the country was from the recycling incentives to the windmills, solar panels that adorn Germany which is understandable as to why Germany is so rich in the way of living economically. The public transport is unbeatable and in a class of its own. There are so many facets of Germany that I feel that is underappreciated by outsiders such as cars, music, poetry, and architecture. I came to love that most shops are closed on Sundays including supermarkets etc. as it is a day reserved for spending time with family and friends. Also despite the drinking, it is uncommon to see people vomiting on the streets of town as people are mostly respectful even when binge drinking. I will miss biking on the cobblestone paths and stopping to buy a pretzel on the way to uni passing by beirgartens and being able to have disposable bbqs by the Rhine whilst drinking with friends. There is so much tradition and history in Germany but there is also a fun, quirky laidback side that people don't realise until you live here.

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

Locals are nice and can quickly tell if you are not a local and they try to switch to English for you, this is both generous but also not beneficial for those wanting to become fluent in German. The staff is general nice but they are a lot less concerned about how you are doing as that is not their responsibility as to whether you do work or not, they provide a service and whether you want to grow as a person from it, you can. The students are willing to help whether it be the incentive that they can get extra credit points by being an international buddy for a fellow international student or from the genuine kindness. I was given a free bike by a German friend which was an extremely lovely gesture however towards hand in week, it was evident that speaking in English is tiring and some students would not make the effort to speak in English for others to be able to comprehend.

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?

For what I can see, there were always disabled access whether it be ramps of elevators but you just had to enter through an inconvenient doorway, however for the Caritas building (workshop and student desk hire building) disable access into the building was less of a priority. It was easy for disabled access onto public transport as well as buses, trams and trains all had an area for wheelchairs, bikes, prams etc. Other than wheel chair access, I have no idea what the university offers for other students with disabilities. I also am

not aware as to whether there was a prayer room for the Muslims as they did make up the minority of the host country however Germany is a very diverse country and in particular Mainz in which they accept upwards of 150 exchange students per semester. From what I can tell, Mainz was a very chill, quiet student city that was heavily into recycling, spending time by the Rhine and local parties held at the university or PlankeNord, DIY so I wouldn't be surprised if the city was very accepting of students who are a part of the LGBT community.

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

I personally had not whilst travelling and living in Germany and Europe but my brother whom had been travelling in Europe at the time with me had some racist remarks said to him whilst walking down the street. I don't know if advice is the right thing to give, it's more of a personal reaction if you are facing some issues and how you can learn to deal with them. Whether it be talking to an authority figure if it is reoccurring thing that is happening at the university or accommodation or becoming indifferent to a strangers remarks because you know better than to react to pettiness.

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?

There was a gym and many other sports that were available to students as long as you register to have a sports card, the timetable is in the Sports booklet and you can attend almost all depending on seasonal sports and whether it was competitive or social. As an exchange student there are always a large range of activities planned by different organisations such as ASTA the FH Mainz student union that organizes mainly parties within campus, TOM events that is for all students of Mainz that range from weekend trips, trips to neighbouring countries, parties and get togethers. Foreigners become friends also organizes activities that cater for all ages. As well as travel agents especially for students notably "pm2am" which organizes a different trip to another country every week. Orientation week that was organized by ASTA included a huge range of activities from a boat trip, pub crawl, walking tour etc. however I was never made aware of the clubs that we could join during my stay so I can't say much about any other extra-curricular activities.

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

This is all very dependent on the individual and the group of people who you meet as your trips can change. I for one realized part way that whilst you are studying in Germany, it is best to explore Germany. There is a lot to see and not just the main cities but the littler ones such as Teutoburger or to visit the Black Forest. It is impossible to see the whole of Europe in the limited time of the exchange of a semester or a year so get to know that one country you're staying in really well instead of just spending less than 10hrs in 3 different countries in a weekend. Some of my notable trips include going to Belgium and Amsterdam twice, as well as a week in France, 2 weeks in Turkey and 2 in Thailand among weekend trips to Hamburg, Hannover, Berlin, Munich, Stuttgart etc. I really enjoyed my trips some more than others but it depends on the time, the people, just be positive. I really wished I had gone to Bauhaus and other places that have renowned architecture to explore and visit such as the Reichstag.

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

A friend of mine from Israel had gotten a part time job at a restaurant as well as volunteering at a horse farm both were found off- campus but there are some opportunities of sport that can be found in the seasonal booklet, you just have to be productive. For someone who stayed for a semester, we had very little say within the established student association but I'm sure if you were really interested, you could get involved quite simply by showing competency and enthusiasm. Some of the international students had held prior jobs in Germany such as an Au Pair or hospitality therefore the market is open, but you have to have the right attitude or a matter of being there at the right time at the right place.

What volunteer or internship opportunities were there for students?

From my group of 30 international FH Mainz University students, I know of 3 people whom are staying for their internships. It is very much possible to get an internship within Germany especially since Mainz is so close to Frankfurt, there are more opportunities. The 3 students however do have prior knowledge of German which is quite essential in employability.

5 things to take to your host country or region

1	Something that is quintessentially from New Zealand such as Canterbury gear
2	A decent camera
3	Waterproof gear including backpack
4	Moleskine
5	Maps

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

1	Get organized quick and smart, be aware of office hours so you can spend the rest of your time relaxing and having fun instead
2	Get a bike, either through MVG or Unibikes or online sites, it's a great way to see the city and nothing beats cycling with no helmet by the Rhine while others are sweating in the bus
3	Shopping at supermarkets are a lot cheaper than the farmers markets but sometimes you want to support the little guys
4	Be open minded to all people of all countries and be aware of the speaking their second language can be tiring so be considerate
5	Make the most of your time and don't dwell on the little things, money is money 10 years down the track that night you spent 50 euros is priceless compared to the memories made

Top 5 Things to do

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

1	Take the time to visit the populous cities such as Berlin, Munich etc.
2	Try each states local food and drink that you can only get in that particular region such as Bavarian beers or Swabian ravioli.

3	Go to the theatre often, it's for free and a great way to see more culture
4	Take the train to anywhere the semester ticket caters for and spend a day in the little unknown towns which are mostly filled with castles and vineyards around the Rhineland state
5	Bike around and find the

H: Personal Experience

My personal exchange experience has helped shape me into a better and worldlier person and I'm so glad that I was able to participate in such an experience. I have to admit, I struggled a lot more than I thought I would with the transition to a foreign speaking country. I had never experienced such a new low of feeling isolated and helpless with the language barrier and having friends and family so far away to reach especially with the time difference. But the highs and amazing sights and people you meet makes up for any bad experience. Never had I ever been in a room of 150 people to have come from 37 different nations and never have I ever learnt more about Germany and other countries cultures, religion, history, customs, education etc. than my time overseas. These are the things that can't be taught through a book or word of mouth by someone else, it really is something that is unique to the person. I realized how quickly another place can be called home when I was biking home at 4am and everything just seemed familiar and easy like I could live here. It must've been a similar experience for when I had moved to New Zealand when I was young. There are so many things people can tell you from their exchange but the rest is up to you and what you gain from it all. I had always thought I was independent but the more I travel, the more I realise just how important the people in my life are and how they have shaped me more than I know. I'm glad I now have the confidence to work out foreign public transport rather than taking the easy route of taking a taxi or going out of my way to talk to a stranger because why not? I've really opened up myself a little more and come to realise what is important and what are things you shouldn't dwell on. The exchange however long or short is bound to stay with me, I just wish it didn't have to stop as soon as it had.