

Victoria Abroad Evaluation Form

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

A: Student Information

VUW degree(s)	LLB/BA
Major(s)	Media Studies
Exchange Institution	University of Groningen
VUW Tri & Year of Exchange	Tri 1 2016

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	I spent around \$100 NZD. I borrowed from the library whenever a class had a textbook, but bought the course readers, which weren't very expensive.
Accommodation	About \$185 NZD per week
Return Airfare	I only brought a one-way ticket, as I am doing two exchanges. But one-way was about \$1700 NZD.
Local Transportation	I bought a bike for about \$200 NZD, and that was transportation in Groningen covered for the whole exchange! If we were taking the train to another Dutch city, we would buy them in advance online through a Facebook group for group tickets. This meant we could get reduced train tickets, down from 20 euro each way, to 7 euro return!
Meals	We ate really cheaply in Groningen! There were local food markets 3 times a week, where my friend and I would buy our fruit veges for our lunches and dinners, and we would go to one of the Albert Hein supermarkets (also not very expensive) to buy the rest of our food. We cooked together (which was cheaper than alone), but would probably spend about \$35 - \$40 NZD per person on groceries/supermarket each week. We would sometimes go out for dinner, but it could be quite expensive, often about 15 euros for a main (about 25 NZD).
Visa	
Health & Insurance	About \$600 NZD with Southern Cross
Personal Spending	I did quite a bit of travel during my exchange, and then for the summer months after. I would say I spent about \$9000 NZD on travels.
Communications (phone, etc.)	I spent about \$16 NZD per month on my top up card for 1GB of data. I bought a new Dutch sim card with Vodafone when I arrived, for about \$15 NZD.
Other fees (specify)	
What unexpected costs did you encounter? What items were more	The supermarket and cooking from home was cheaper than in New Zealand. Day to day was relatively cheap in Groningen, it was just the travel (especially over the summer) that added up! I spent relatively nothing on transport in Groningen too which was great – only my bike at the beginning of the semester.

or less than expected?

How did your financial expenses compare to what you originally expected to spend? *I spent a bit more on travel than I thought I would, but that was because I had a few places that I really wanted to visit and was willing to pay a bit more for flights etc to get there (i.e. Morocco – everyone should go!)*

By what means did you maintain your finances? What would you recommend? (Credit card, foreign bank account, travelers checks, etc)? *I set up a bank account with ING bank basically straight away – I would really recommend this. Then I just used my New Zealand debit card to book flights and anything else online. But don't use your New Zealand card while in Europe if you can have a Dutch account – it's so much easier to keep track of the Euros that you spend and also you don't incur any fees! It's also great having a Dutch card while you travel the rest of Europe too – as all countries in the EU take the card without charging you fees.*

What financial advice would you give students attending the same university as you? *Save as much as you can plus more than you think you will need – the New Zealand dollar doesn't get you that far once you convert to Euros unfortunately!*

What was the average cost of a can of coke or coffee in your host country? *A coffee would range from 2.50 – 3.50 euros usually. At the uni café they were cheaper, about 1.50 – 2 euros (although didn't have anything on Wellington's coffee quality!) You could also swipe your ID card at uni to get straight black coffee from a machine for 0.80 c which we would do in desperate financial times!*

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? *The university took care of this – I had to give my biometric details and have a photo taken, and then pick up my residence card from Zwolle (about an hour by train).*

Do you have any advice for future students when applying for visas to your host country? *No – it was all sorted.*

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? *Not that I know of.*

What insurance company did you use and would you recommend it to future students? *Southern Cross – yes, a comprehensive insurance scheme.*

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 1/2016					
Introduction to European and International Law (bachelors)	English		10	3	I had to take this as a pre-requisite in order to take some of my other law courses. There was a lot of lecture and tutorial time for this course, often the tutorials were just a repeat of what we learnt in the lectures which was a bit frustrating. The International part of the course was much easier than the European. But, many students in this course were first year law, so you're on the upper hand already with having completed your compulsories at Vic.
Legal History (bachelors)	English		12	2	Relatively easy, and the exam was heavily based on questions asked in the tutorials. You learn about the history of various European countries – Italy, Germany, France, The Netherlands etc. The lecturers made the course a bit dull however.
International Crimes (masters)	English		12	5	One of the best courses I've taken throughout my degree. Less about the law, and more about general policy

					surrounding international crimes, and looking at interesting case studies (on genocide, terrorism and torture for example). We looked at both the legal and criminological aspects behind issues, the lecturers were both great! One exam at the end of the course.
Human Rights Law (masters)	English		20	4	I enjoyed this course – not much class time, and it was interesting to learn how human rights law operates in the EU. The lecturers we had were all engaging. I would say you should have taken an Intro to European and International law before you take this course though. One exam, which was open book and was very fair/not too difficult.
Civil Procedural Law (bachelors)	English		10	1	I wouldn't recommend this course (it fitted in really well with my timetable which is why I chose it!) It was very dull. One exam, which had quite arbitrary questions, but everyone ended up doing better than they thought they would.

Course Registration/Enrolment

Please describe the registration process at your host university. What kind of help was available? *Quite easy – the Law administrator, Astrid, is great! She can help you with any issues that you have.*

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? *It was simple- no issues at all.*

Do you have any advice for future students when choosing and applying for courses? *Check your timetable before committing to courses, and also figure out your priorities (less workload versus interesting courses etc).*

Academic Experience

How did your academic experience differ from your time spend at Victoria? Did the academic experience meet your expectations? *Groningen was significantly easier than studying law at Vic. Far less hours per week, as well as the fact that I only had one exam for each course, no assignments, and the exams were all very fair. This made it an ideal exchange university, as you could focus on experiencing and traveling!*

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 workload was much less. The style of teaching was similar – lectures and then sometimes tutorials, depending on the course. There was no Socratic method either.*

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? *About 60 VUW points per semester was absolutely fine! I would really recommend International Crimes, and then European Human Rights as two courses to take.*

What advice would you give VUW students about succeeding academically at your host university? *Attend most of the lectures, especially as you often have less class time than at Vic! Readings didn't matter as much for the courses I took – it was more about the lecture content.*

What was your impression of the computer facilities, library, and internet access at your host university? *The library was under construction, which meant there weren't enough seats for all the students wanting to study during exam time. It was so hectic at 8.30am each morning, people literally shoving each other through the main doors to get a seat! We would instead study in our rooms or go to a little café nearby to study. I didn't use the computers at uni really, but the printers and photocopiers were great and really easy to use with your student ID card. Wifi was fine all over the campus.*

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? *There were so many courses offered in English!*

E: Accommodation

What form of accommodation did you stay in?

I stayed in Winschoterdiep (Wincho), one of the student housing facilities. Wincho is a 5-minute bike ride from town and uni, so ideal location wise. The rooms are spacious with big windows. You share a big kitchen with lots of others (about 20 of us shared on big kitchen). The kitchen facilities are fairly basic, but fine!

I was originally in Van Houtelaan, but I changed rooms into Wincho after a few weeks. In Van Houtelaan the rooms and the building itself was a lot older, dustier and dirtier. Wincho was only a fraction more in rent, but absolutely worth it!

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

Some of the pros and cons are stated above. It's an awesome way to meet other students. In our semester, quite a lot of the students living in Wincho were full time (so not exchange), but were also from all over the world, which was great!

Also student housing is ideal because furniture etc is mostly provided for you (you can also buy a bed and kitchen package with pots, pans, duvet, etc), so it makes life easier as soon as you arrive.

Cons – sharing bathrooms with lots of others (but the bathrooms themselves are totally fine!)

What accommodation would you recommend to future students? *Student housing – but be selective with which one you choose – Wincho and Korno are two of the better ones 😊*

How early can you move into accommodation? *We had to wait until the semester officially started, which wasn't that ideal, as everyone had to stay in a hostel or Airbnb for the intro week. If this is the same for you, make sure you book that first week of accommodation as soon as you can, as everything gets booked out (some of our friends ended up having to stay in hotels super far out from the centre of Groningen, which were also really expensive!)*

What options were available for meal plans or cooking facilities? How satisfied were you with the food? *We didn't have meal plans, we cooked ourselves. The cooking facilities were pretty standard – stovetops (that partially work), little 'mini' ovens (that were a bit borderline but did the job), fridges etc.*

If you lived in off-campus housing, how easy was it to find? What should future VUW exchange students know about living off-campus? *One girl in our intake lived in a flat off campus – but she seemed to enjoy it!*

Do you have any tips of advice for future students when applying for accommodation? *Apply as soon as it opens, so that you have the most choices possible 😊*

F: Personal & Cultural Connections

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

students? *It was a lot easier to make friends with international students than local. We joined ESN and attended different events, and also met people through classes, and through our accommodation!*

What was it like to adjust to the culture of your exchange country/university? *Super easy – everyone is so open and friendly!*

What, if any, cultural differences did you find particularly challenging? How would you recommend students to prepare for these differences? *No – not particularly.*

What parts of the culture did you most appreciate? *The openness and friendliness of the Dutch, the cycling culture, the international nature of both Groningen and the Netherlands.*

How were you treated by local people? By university staff and faculty? By students? *Treated really well by everyone 😊*

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? *It seemed easy for students with disabilities to study in Groningen. Also, the Netherlands is a very open country, so it would be great for any GLBT students too.*

Did you face any issues regarding discrimination in your host country? What were they, and what advice would you give to future students? *No I didn't*

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? *I joined ESN where I met people – most of our friends were through this. There were some Dutch clubs (like the rowing club), but I don't know any internationals who joined these, they seemed more reserved for Dutch full time students.*

What do you recommend other visiting students see or do on their weekends or holidays? *We did quite a bit of travel through central Europe, making the most of cheap flights, trains and busses, or taking some days of uni to extend the weekend. We also made the most of the group tickets for trains throughout the Netherlands – so would often go to Amsterdam for the weekend too. Or, we would hang out in Groningen, have picnics, go for bike rides, go to the markets, etc.*

What opportunities were there for students to work on-campus? Off-campus? *There aren't too many opportunities it seems, as Groningen is such a student city so it's quite difficult to get a job. I would save as much as possible before your exchange – don't rely on getting a job once you arrive.*

What volunteer or internship opportunities were there for students? *I'm not sure – I didn't look into this.*

5 things to take to your host country or region

1	A good coat for the winter – it gets very cold. Plus gloves, scarf, thermals and a beanie (especially while riding your bike in the winter, the wind chill can get extreme!) Also a raincoat!
2	A camera – so many great photo opportunities on your travels, or while just living in Groningen.
3	Bring a good sized hand luggage bag for weekend trips – I used mine so often!
4	Adapters for European plugs
5	A diary, or something to record your travels and times with.

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

1	When in doubt, say yes – to the trips, dinners, opportunities, etc.
2	Try and integrate and make friends as soon as you arrive – the friends you make at the beginning of your exchange are often those that you stick with throughout.
3	Hire your bike from one of the student bike hire stores – it is a little bit more expensive, but so worth it. You are covered if anything happens to your bike (stolen, it breaks etc), which does happen quite often.
4	Have your 'local' spots – i.e. local cafes you go to, people you buy your goods from at the market. These relationships grow and are super special – I ended up having drinks with the managers at my favourite café, becoming friends with them, etc!
5	Be open minded, you'll meet people from all over the world, all of these people offer something different & unique.

Top 5 Things to do

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

1	Explore Amsterdam beneath surface level – make sure you go a few times, hang out in the non-touristy areas such as Jordaan and The Pijp – such beautiful parts of the city, the 'real' Amsterdam! Lots of museums and galleries to explore too.
2	Have lots of picnics on the canals of Groningen – the greatest! Go to Albert Heijn (awesome supermarkets all throughout the city with the best snacks) and hit up the canals for lunch and sunset picnics.
3	Go to Keukenhoff near Amsterdam during the spring – the most daffodils I've ever seen (a few million of them!)
4	Try traditional Dutch food – stroopwaffles from the market, mustard soup, stamppot, and the Dutch cheeses – so delicious.
5	Take all the trips you can, but also prioritise the places you want to go the most. For example, I had Morocco as number 2 on my places to go list, so sacrificed a couple of other trips so that I could go on that one – (which I would 100% recommend, the most amazing country). Also, take a chunk of time to travel on the go if you can (i.e. for a month or two over summer or winter, before or after your exchange) – a life changing experience.

H: Personal Experience

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

If you can go on exchange – absolutely take the chance! I experienced a completely different way of life, and have the opportunity to see some incredible parts of the world. I met people from all walks of life, each who had something different and special to offer. Groningen was an awesome city for an exchange – you felt welcome and at home instantly. The people are full of life and are some of the friendliest and most welcoming people I've met. Riding your bike all over the city, picnicing on the canals & the biggest stress being which place you should travel to next – an unreal chapter in life! Seize this opportunity!