

Victoria Abroad Evaluation Form

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

A: Student Information

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| VUW degree(s) | LLB / BA |
| Major(s) | International Relations, Economics |
| Exchange Institution | Konstanz University |
| VUW Tri & Year of Exchange | VUW tri 2 2014 |

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.)

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| Books | I purchased no textbooks during my time at Konstanz. The library had an extensive collection. |
| Accommodation | 400-480 dollars per month |
| Return Airfare | 2300 dollars |
| Local Transportation | A semester long bus ticket was available or 50 dollars. |
| Meals | Eating meals at the university cafeteria worked out to be approx. 10 dollars a day. |
| Visa | 100 dollars. |
| Health & Insurance | This was compulsory and costed approx. 120 dollars per month |
| Personal Spending | This depended and fluctuated throughout the semester depending on what activities I was doing / where I was travelling. Between 50 to 250 dollars a week. |
| Communications (phone, etc.) | I used my phone from home but a German sim cost me 15 dollars a month for texts, calls and some data. |
| Other fees (specify) | - |
| What unexpected costs did you encounter? What items were more or less than expected? | I found the food and beverages to be similar in price to city living in Wellington. The beer and wine was extremely cheap (it was southern Germany after all). |

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

My financial expenses were greater than I had anticipated on account of the extra travel around Europe I did. I also was involved in a lot of Uni sport (Krav maga, Skiing), although these were relatively cheap.

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

To be enrolled we had to open a German student bank account, which I used as well as my NZ debit card and cash passport.

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

To save more than you anticipate spending because there will always be unforeseen costs and it can be difficult to earn money once you are over there.

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

2 Euros

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?

My New Zealand Passport gave me a visiting visa for 90 days. Ove I was in Konstanz the University assisted me greatly with applying for my visa. I took part in the month long optional German Language Course, which begins in March and September respectively, before the semester begins. The course contained an orientation segment where staff members helped students to set up bank accounts, obtain health insurance and also apply for their student visas. This process would have been very difficult and annoyingly bureaucratic were it not for this orientation program.

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

I would highly recommend enrolling in the intensive language course and orientation program in the month before the trimester starts.

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?

There was a mandatory health insurance covering accidents and basic health care (visits to GPs etc.) There were several different companies that students could sign up with. I used Barmer GEK insurance which was roughly 120 dollars per month. A liability insurance was also available for an additional 10 euros a month which covered accidental property damage or harm to people. This was also available through the University.

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

All the insurance companies we could choose from were very similar in terms of price and cover, so any would suffice.

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 |
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| VUW Trimester 1/YEAR | | | | | |
| Democracy, Elections and | English | 300 level | 10 | 4 | Harder than I |

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| representation | | POLS equivalent. | | | anticipated but featured some very interesting / depressing articles about western democracies. |
| Energy policy of the EU | English | 300 level POLS equivalent. | 10 | 4 | Very interesting but condensed course (only 3 weeks long). |
| Phonetik Kurs B1 | German | 200 level GERM equivalent | 10 | 3 | This was a phonetic course and was fantastic for sounding more like a German! |
| Intensivdeutschsprachkurs B1 | German | 200 level GERM equivalent | 10 | 3 | This was the month long course prior to the semester beginning which was instrumental in learning the language. |
| Grammatik B1 | German | 200 level GERM equivalent | 10 | 3 | More dry but super useful nonetheless. |
| Landeskunde B1 | German | 200 level GERM equivalent | 10 | 3 | This course loosely covered German geography, but the lecturer was crazy so it was a mixed bag really. |
| VUW Trimester 2/YEAR | | | | | |
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Please describe the registration process at your host university. What kind of help was available?

Students used an online program called STUDIS to register for courses. Some classes had limited spaces and so had to be signed up to early. Many others only required students to be signed up to the "exam" on and not the course itself. Support staff were on hand to provide advice when needed.

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 was forced to change some of my politics papers on account of classes being overfull, but still thoroughly enjoyed all of my courses. I found STUDIS to be a straightforward platform to use however.

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

My advice would be to know when all of the deadlines for signing up to your classes are. This can be tricky when the list of classes on offer is not disclosed until very late by NZ standards (ie one month before the trimester begins).

Academic Experience

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

My academic experience was fairly similar to that of VUW. Most classes were small and compact, and featured a large degree of reading and preparation before each class, as well as traditional assessment formats at the end of the trimester (exams, essays, practicals). I anticipated my academic experience to be fairly rigorous and I would say that expectation was met.

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?

All of my classes were relatively small and compact, allowing for good levels of discussion and interaction with lecturers. My experience of learning via the Socratic method at law school helped me in this situation. The workload I found to be similar, in terms of preparation required before each lecture and the difficulty of the content matter.

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?

I would recommend doing an equivalent course load of the three papers you are wanting to have transferred. Additionally I would emphasise the value of enrolling in the orientation and intensive language course available in the months prior to the semester beginning. I thought the selection of courses was impressive and there are many courses you might wish to take out of interest.

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

Simply take the same work ethic that you employ at Vic and be prepared that you will have a lot on your plate to balance socially whilst you study.

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

Good and modern.

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?

Yes there was the intensive language course in March / September and I would highly recommend this as a way of setting yourself up to learn a language whilst you study abroad.

E: Accommodation

What form of accommodation did you stay in?

University accommodation (Seezeit). I was in a four bedroom apartment with shared communal living spaces. I lived there with three German University students and it was close to campus.

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

The university provided accommodation was the cheapest option by far. The cons were that the Hausmeisters speak no English and are very rude if you come to see them without an appointment! Try and stay on their good side if possible.

What accommodation would you recommend to future students?

Seezeit. Any of the options are great. Europahaus has a reputation for big parties, but my experience was vastly shaped by all of the people I met at Sonnenbuehlstrasse Apartment 9.

How early can you move into accommodation?

From the beginning of whichever month you choose. It is important to apply for this accommodation well in advance (ie when you are still in NZ).

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

The kitchen in my flat was fully furnished and cooking meals was relatively cheap. Additionally the campus lunches were cheap, tasty and filling.

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

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

Do it early. Europahaus is not the make or break experience.

F: Personal & Cultural Connections

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

I found it easy to make new friends; the key is to just put yourself out there. Many of the exchange students were from all over Europe and so English was not their first language, which made things fun. I befriended many of the local students who were involved in the initial orientation and intensive language program. They were a huge help to me in terms of getting settled in and furthering my German language education.

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

It was certainly more of an adjustment than I anticipated, but I came to love it and miss it by the time I had to return to NZ.

What, if any, cultural differences did you find particularly challenging? How would you recommend

students to prepare for these differences?

Try and be on time for everything. Punctuality is not always my strong suit so there were some clashes there.

What parts of the culture did you most appreciate?

The German people's hardworking nature and their ability to put all that aside at the end of the day and enjoy a good beer.

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

Very warmly. Everyone was more than happy to help me and discuss how things were going.

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?

As far as I could tell all the campuses had disabled access. Some of my friends I made whilst in Konstanz who identified as LGBT didn't have any complaints.

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

No. Konstanz struck as me as a tolerant university with many diverse student groups and initiatives aimed at inclusivity.

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 were a large amount of clubs and sports available to students, with a changing list between winter and summer and many good campus facilities to make use of. I took part in skiing, krav maga and zen meditation for instance.

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

Definitely visit as many sites and go on as many adventures in your time off as possible. If it is winter then make sure you Ski / Board as often as possible in Germany / Austria / Switzerland. If it is summer then bike around lake Konstanz.

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

There was a large board on campus listing part time jobs for both on and off campus.

What volunteer or internship opportunities were there for students?

There were a variety of volunteer and internship opportunities listed on a similar board at uni, although many required German as a first language.

5 things to take to your host country or region

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| 1 | Kiwi gifts to give friends and people hosting you. |
| 2 | A good phone / camera (with a life proof case!) |
| 3 | Your passport (important) |
| 4 | Warm clothes for winter (it gets really cold) |
| 5 | An open mind and a thirst for adventure. |

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

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| 1 | If you don't come home broke then you've done it wrong |
| 2 | Do something intrepid every weekend |
| 3 | Swim in the lake / river (even if its winter!) |
| 4 | Try and befriend german locals as well as international students |
| 5 | Don't stress out if you don't meet your best friend on the first day your there. |

Top 5 Things to do

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

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|---|-------------------------------|
| 1 | Oktoberfest. |
| 2 | Skiing. |
| 3 | Visit Reichenau. |
| 4 | Visit the Rheinfalls. |
| 5 | Go the Weinfest in Meersburg. |

H: Personal Experience

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

Looking back on my time at university, it is clear that going on exchange to Konstanz was one of the best decisions of my life. The friends, experiences and relationships I've cultivated on my time abroad were truly life-changing. I found my time abroad to be critical time in my life for personal development and growth. It allowed me to return to my studies in NZ refreshed and motivated.

