

# Victoria Abroad Evaluation Form

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

## A: Student Information

VUW degree(s)	Bachelor of Arts
Major(s)	Media Studies
Exchange Institution	Erasmus University Rotterdam
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	-
Accommodation	\$4,260
Return Airfare	\$3,600
Local Transportation	Approx. \$300, or close to nothing if you buy a bike.
Meals	Approx. \$1,400, spent €30-40 per big grocery shop for the week
Visa	-
Health & Insurance	\$395
Personal Spending	Approx. \$4,000, although I spent most of it on travel.
Communications (phone, etc.)	\$100
Other fees (specify)	Immigration fee: \$444; washing: just under \$4 per wash; while I didn't purchase one, bikes are the preferred method of transport and a decent one can range from \$80-170 (€50-100)
What unexpected costs did you encounter? What items were more or less than expected?	I found supermarket shopping to be much cheaper in the Netherlands than in New Zealand for me; eating out could be expensive at times although it largely depended on the place.

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

I consulted with friends who were in Europe to gauge some everyday costs (i.e. transport, meals etc.) before I left so my budget was relatively sound. However, supermarket shopping was significantly cheaper than in New Zealand so I over budgeted in this aspect. I had not included a return flight in my budget as my parents were originally going to use points to, however, I decided to pay for this myself yet still had significant funds.

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

As I travelled before staying in Rotterdam, I used an OneSmart card which earned Air New Zealand airpoints as well as using it to get euros from ATMs. I took €1,000 in cash for my travels as well. However, it was almost a necessity to get a local Dutch debit card as a lot of institutions primarily only take Dutch pin cards. I was with ING bank which charged €4.95, from memory, every three months but, as this bank did not require a BSN number to establish an account, this was a popular choice for students (as BSN numbers did not come out for some time after registration). This was also useful as rent could be transferred via the app; the website is not in English, but the app is.

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

Don't cut corners when budgeting and don't under-budget. You don't want to be struggling or worrying about money.

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

Don't drink coffee and/or tea but hot chocolate was approx. \$4-5. Coke ranged from €0.50-1.50 depending on where you bought it.

**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 student visa did not cost but I was required to pay an immigration fee of \$444 (€300-something, but will depend on currency conversion and bank telegraphic transfer fees). Students living in the Netherlands will need to apply for a residence permit. Details for applying will be emailed once accepted to the university and is relatively straightforward and will take up to 6 weeks.

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

Visit the IND as soon as you can to get a residence permit and then once you have received it, make an appointment for registration ASAP. Take your birth certificate in case procedures for residence permit have changed and your birth cert is required; I had a few issues with this but in the end was not required.

**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?**

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

Southern Cross Travel Insurance; was pretty standard, did not need to claim.

## **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	VUW points/credits value	Rating (1-5)	Comments
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		or elective			
<b>VUW Trimester 2/2015</b>					
Made In Holland	English	-	10	1	This course concluded before Christmas so is a good option for those wanting to be home early. Interesting at times for non-Dutch students and the workload is very light.
Media Entertainment and Popular Culture	English	Expands on aspects of MDIA 103	10	2	Very easy content, and the teacher was flexible with those students leaving before Christmas.
Social Media, Prosumption and Identity	English	-	10	2	Very interesting social media examinations in which theory is tested through practical activities, we made social media profiles and examined identity construction throughout.
Media and Diversity	English	-	10	3	Having completed MDIA 306, this was a really disappointing course. Emphasis was placed on research methods through examination of intersectional factors but was not interesting or inspiring.
Global Advertising	English	-	10	3	Very different to anything at VUW; highly practical advertising skills which have not been established throughout my Media major.
Communication Technology and its Impacts	English	-	10	2	Easy to do well, it seemed as though the lecturer marked kindly particularly for the examination.

N.B. Most of the courses on offer are very different to that offered here and expand on Media-

related topics not covered at Victoria; there is a significant emphasis on practical skills with consideration for occupations in mind.

### **Course Registration/Enrolment**

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

The course coordinator, Emma was extremely helpful and all information for EUR, including registration was emailed well before the deadlines. For enrollment into the university, one online form was required which included uploading an official transcript, passport and a few other details. Course registration was also easy as Emma kept all exchange students well-informed; registration was a bit anxiety-inducing as it was somewhat based on a first-in, first-served basis. Another online form was used to rank the courses wanting to be taken.

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 managed to get into all the courses I chose. Keep an eye on time differences for application dates and times, and also maintain a good rapport with the course coordinator who will be more likely to place you in your desired classes.

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

Choose courses which you are both interested in, and those which cover content not offered at Victoria.

### **Academic Experience**

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

I was overwhelmed with the workload when the semester first began; the number of assignments per course, as well as overall (as for 60 VUW pts, 6 papers are required rather than the usual 3 for one semester at Victoria) is overwhelming to begin with and I was very surprised with this. However, the assignment lengths are comparable with that of 100 level so can be easy to complete.

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?

Teaching is very similar as at Victoria. See above answer regarding workload.

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?

Three courses per term (two terms per semester) is doable; if you are wanting to have more days off to travel or the like, it could be arranged to complete 4 papers in the first term and 2 in the second and vice versa. I would recommend Social Media, Prosumption and Identity as it was exceedingly interesting and the lecturer was great. Global Advertising is also a very useful course for any Media student wanting a career in advertising – the workload is quite large but still useful content.

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

Make a start on assignments the minute they are assigned otherwise it can be tricky juggling multiple assignments from each course.

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

The Polak building was a new study area on campus so was beautiful and new although it was difficult to find space a lot of the time. The library was undergoing renovation so was somewhat inaccessible while I was there. I had no issues with the internet.

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?

English is widely spoken so no real need to learn significant Dutch although it is polite to learn a few basic phrases. It can be unnerving and alienating when signs and official information is all in Dutch but you can get by.

## **E: Accommodation**

What form of accommodation did you stay in?

I stayed in university accommodation called the Hatta building which was on the campus.

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

Pros: as it was on campus, there were no hassles getting to university. As it is an international accommodation option, all of the students living there are from around the globe and wanting to make friends.

Cons: much more expensive than other university or private accommodation.

What accommodation would you recommend to future students?

I would recommend the Hatta building as the facilities are good. However, as my room faced onto the side where a huge construction project was occurring, I was hugely impacted by noise, smells, bugs etc. and attempting to contact SSH about it was painful. The construction will have been completed by the time anyone else goes on exchange here, although ask about other construction projects on campus.

How early can you move into accommodation?

August 15<sup>th</sup>.

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

For three residents per apartment, we were provided with two bar fridges, five cupboards and hob.

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

Look on Commodity Marketplace Rotterdam (similar to Vic Deals) or Nestpick for private accommodation.

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

Do your research and look around but also be quick.

## **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 Hatta building as well as being friends with the other VUW exchange student made it easier to make friends; all of the residents are wanting to make friends so it is definitely easier to make friends this way. The class sizes are also small and filled with primarily international and exchange students so once again, is easy to become friends with others. Local students are actually a rarity as the city and university are very international.

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

Pretty easy. Small things like not being able to read products in the supermarket can take some time to get the hang of but otherwise it is similar to New Zealand. The sheer number of bikes is interesting and very different – make sure you look the right way when crossing the road, and make sure to check for bike lanes as well. I had some difficulties with some students not being as socially-aware as those in Wellington which caused a lot of tension at times.

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

Mitigating any differences you come across is probably more of a case of adjusting rather than preparing.

What parts of the culture did you most appreciate?

The city and university are so multicultural which is really refreshing; we also had Syrian refugees stay in the gymnasium on campus which was a good reality check.

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

No different to at VUW or Wellington.

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 I mentioned, the city is very diverse and I would see no difference in treatment of minority students from in Wellington. Biking is a preferred transport option but trams are also very reliable so students with physical disabilities should have only a little trouble getting around.

Did you face any issues regarding discrimination in your host country? What were they, and what advice

would you give to future students?

No, however, some students aren't as clued up about social issues as Wellington which is surprising and can cause some tension.

## **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?

While I did not participate in any extra-curricular activities, there are a wide range of options available, e.g. gymnastics, basketball, football, volleyball, debating, ballet, gymnastics etc.

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

Definitely make the most of the central location in Europe and travel. Do as much university work during the week which frees the weekend to do day trips or trips to places around Europe. If you have long weekends, this makes it even better. Otherwise, Markthal is a great indoor market with a lot of food choices for an outing.

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

I did not come across many opportunities for non-Dutch students on or off campus. Speaking Dutch for jobs requiring any sort of interaction with the public is almost essential.

What volunteer or internship opportunities were there for students?

I was not made aware of any opportunities.

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

- 1 A good Winter jacket.** It gets extremely cold and rains basically every day in Autumn and Winter. However, indoors are almost always centrally heated and so layering is not necessarily a good idea. In saying that, thermals are still essential!
- 2 Decent walking shoes for travelling.**
- 3 Comfort food from home.**
- 4 Adapter(s).**
- 5 Camera(s).**

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

- 1 Travel as much as possible.** Travel was a priority for me so I made sure I had more money to do so. However, I found it difficult to find time as the workload was quite big.
- 2 Go over earlier than the semester start date, or stay later.** Because it is harder to fit long trips into the semester, I would advise to book a tour, solo travel or travel with a friend before you move into accommodation or afterwards.
- 3 Buy a bike as soon as you can but only if you feel comfortable.** I struggled to find a bike because of my shorter height but I also realised I probably wasn't confident enough to bike among the locals.

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| 4 | <b>If you want to be home for Christmas, ask which courses allow for this.</b>   |
| 5 | <b>Don't under budget.</b> It is awful to have to worry about money when you are just trying to enjoy yourself. Of course don't spend like a madman but do treat yourself. |

### 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 | <b>Day trips to cities in the Netherlands, and other close neighbouring countries.</b> |
| 2 | <b>Go to Markthal. Try the noodles from Let's Wok.</b>                                 |
| 3 | <b>Try Haribo Jamaica Fizzy lollies, and Tony Chocolonely milk chocolate.</b>          |
| 4 | <b>ESN Introduction Days.</b>  |
| 5 | <b>Visit IKEA (and have the cinnamon rolls).</b>                                       |

### H: Personal Experience

The opportunity to go abroad, and to EUR is not something to be passed up; for someone who had been waiting to both move out of home and travel Europe, studying overseas was a significant chapter in my life thus far. It was extremely emotionally-draining and difficult to be away from family and friends for that length of time but the experience and independence gained from my time was worth it. Being able to establish a support system and network in Europe and around the globe was really important to open new pathways.