

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 Design Innovation
Major(s)	Industrial Design
Exchange Institution	Hochschule für Gestaltung Schwäbisch Gmünd
VUW Tri & Year of Exchange	Trimester 1 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	\$30 German language book
Accommodation	\$560 per month
Return Airfare	\$2200
Local Transportation	Less than \$20 per month, uni was within walking distance
Meals	\$5 lunch and drink from school cafeteria, \$15 for a meal out, groceries less than half of NZ price, I spent about \$30 per week at the supermarket
Visa	\$85 – this was for a 3 month Visa, longer costs more
Health & Insurance	\$800
Personal Spending	Around \$200-\$300 per month
Communications (phone, etc.)	\$20 per month
Other fees (specify)	
What unexpected costs did you encounter? What items were more or less than expected?	Unexpected – train tickets become pricey if you don't book ahead of time. Germany has more admin costs than NZ e.g. banks, Visa etc. Germany is very cheap so if you travel to other European countries so be prepared to spend more than in Germany. Groceries, drinks/beer and accommodation are much cheaper than in NZ.

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

I spent less than I would have thought, but I took plenty of money. I was never worried about money over there which was great

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

To get a student Visa you must open a “blocked account” which lets you take out around \$1000 a month. You need to prove you have enough funds in your account for the duration of your stay to be granted a Visa. Having a German account was very easy and free to set up. Germany is cash based so take money out from ATMs rather than paying with card.

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

Take as much money as possible so you can travel lots! Accommodation in Gmünd is quite cheap as

is food, beer, wine etc. I took around \$9k which was a good amount and I had some left over when I returned

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

\$1 for a coke, \$2.50 for a coffee

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, you can apply once you're in Germany. You must visit the foreigners office, ask to apply, fill out some forms, get a letter to take to the bank saying you need to open an account with €XXX (about €650 a month), take that to the bank and open the account. When the funds are verified you can take the verification back to the foreigners office and show them, then fill out more forms and hand over your passport and biometric photo. About a week later you will get your German ID/Visa. It is a lot of paperwork but they are efficient! It cost me \$85 (€50). You also need to prove health insurance. STA travel insurance is fine. Your passport also must be valid for 6 months after the date you leave Germany.

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

Do it before any travel as they will need to take your passport for a week. Be prepared to wait in long lines and do a bit of paperwork – a lot is in German but the school will help you fill it out. You have 3 months from when you arrive to get the Visa

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?

Yes but I had STA travel insurance so I didn't get it. They recommend AOK but I do not know the price.

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

STA travel – I would recommend it as it was easy and very comprehensive. It is a bit more expensive than some options in Germany but covers you for all travel and more than just health.

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 1/2015					
Cinema 4D	English		4	3	Rendering/animation program – cool tutor
International Seminar Week	English		4	2	Compulsory 1 week program
Presentation skills workshop	English		4	2	Compulsory 4 day workshop

Ergonomics 2	German		4	3	Only available for German speakers
Product planning 2	English		4	2	Plan and create a small business
Product design 4	English		14	3	Optional product course
Product design 5	English		14	4	Compulsory product course
Clay modelling	English		4	3	Interesting clay/ceramic/casting course
CAD 2	English		4	2	Solidworks skills course
CAD 1	English		4	3	Rhino skills course
Digital Rendering	English		4	4	Digital drawing skills course

Course Registration/Enrolment

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

You register as courses start, not beforehand like Vic. It is a bit chaotic but Claire (international coordinator) is very helpful as are other professors. You can go along to courses to see if you like them and it is easy to add/drop classes

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 registered in all classes I wanted. There is not a huge selection for international students. Don't sweat not being enrolled in classes before you go, it all happens over there.

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

Go along to classes that seem interesting and try new things while fulfilling the required courses Vic has set you. There are many small classes so a lot of opportunities to try new stuff

Academic Experience

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

The teaching style is much different from Vic and there is a real classic German design approach. It met my expectations although some classes did not require much effort.

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?

Workload was rather light I felt, the teaching style was good and they teach very German design. The classes were mostly 'studio' style classes. There is more group work here than Vic but also a lot

more classes, all very small. There were only final deadlines and no 30% hand-ins through the year.

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?

30 ECTS points is fine. I recommend taking the papers you discuss with your faculty and then once there whatever interests you – it can be from a different discipline too. There are a lot of small papers you can take so it is easy to go to a lot of courses.

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

The course work is not huge so it is manageable to succeed well. Bring your own style of design to your work as a lot of what the students produce there has a German vibe to it so it is nice to be outside of the box.

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

Fantastic workshop and computer labs. Very little 3D printing compared to Vic. Internet access is easy and fast at uni. Library is fairly good with a large English range.

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 already knew German before I left. Everyone at the uni knows English and all courses for exchange students are in English. Most people on the street will speak decent English and menus are usually available in English. There is a light German course at the uni which is compulsory if you don't know German, and a more intensive one at the nearby teaching university.

E: Accommodation

What form of accommodation did you stay in?

Flatting

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

Pros: freedom, very warm well built houses, very close to uni and the centre of town, everyone else flats.

Cons: sorting rubbish/recycling (Germany is very particular), can be hard to find a flat but you will get help if you ask, if you establish a flat with other exchange students all the paperwork is German so get your buddy to help out.

What accommodation would you recommend to future students?

Definitely flatting, don't move in to the student hall there as it is far away from the town and uni and all the residents are from the teaching university.

How early can you move into accommodation?

As soon as you're there. Germany does flat payments on a monthly basis so you will have to pay to the end of each month.

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

Food was pretty good, very cheap groceries. The uni has a decent cafeteria for cheap meals in the day which almost all students use.

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

know about living off-campus?

Off campus is the way to go in Gmünd. For me it was hard to find but I probably didn't ask around enough. There is a good facebook group for the town which Claire will put you on to, also buddies and Claire are helpful in finding accommodation. I didn't find a flat at first so I moved into the hall of residence which I didn't like so I moved out after a month into a flat. Best decision of the exchange!

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

Be friendly! Don't be scared to message people on facebook, especially other international students studying there too, you'll find them through the accommodation group. You will be friends with them eventually so it's best to talk to them early and maybe you can move in to a flat together.

F: Personal & Cultural Connections

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

Extremely easy making friends with exchange students – I have friends for life around the world now. Germans was a bit harder as they already have their friend groups but just be friendly and outgoing and it's no trouble. Knowing some German is great as they will be impressed by that. Germans can seem cold to some people but they're really not, just get talking and it's easy to make friends. Visit the local student pubs (KKF and Exil) and you'll meet heaps of people.

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

Germany is more formal and structured than NZ, and they like their rules/bureaucracy. That said it wasn't a huge cultural jump, and it was quite easy to adjust.

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

Nothing was particularly challenging except learning how to sort rubbish! As said Germans are a bit more formal/rules-y so be prepared for that. Some rules may seem tedious but don't let it bother you and you'll be fine. Just go with an open mind and take new experiences in your stride.

What parts of the culture did you most appreciate?

That Germans know how to plan things, they're on time and very reliable. They will also speak their mind and tell you what they think to your face with no sugarcoating. This can be a bit hard coming from NZ but they are not trying to make you feel bad, just saying what they think. Especially in design this can seem harsh when they critique your work but it is never personal.

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

Always well and with respect by everyone at uni. Once people know you're from NZ they are interested in you – sometimes if they hear you speaking English in the streets they will assume you are American which some people have a stigma towards but nobody has a problem with Kiwis.

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?

The university had decent wheelchair access. There was a prayer room for students who needed it (keycard access). As far as I knew there wasn't an LGBT group at the uni. Germany is less ethnically diverse than NZ but minorities are treated with respect at most times. There is some animosity

towards Turkish people there from some of the population, but this is a small portion of the population who feel this way.

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

Only ever when people assumed I was American/British and though I was a stereotypical tourist there, but when they know you're Kiwi no worries. The only discrimination was not getting into a club in Stuttgart because we were a big group all speaking English. It was a bit of a bummer but no huge deal.

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 are some sports clubs at the uni and some events. The uni hosts a few parties through the year and there is even a party committee. There is a student magazine which you can join and they appreciate native English speakers for proof reading and writing articles. There was a rock climbing club and decent sport facilities in the town. If you are looking for something in particular it is best to ask students and find what interests you. The students pubs KKF and Exil were always popular and there is a monthly karaoke night at Abwärts, which also has pool and bowling. Most pubs have table soccer too. There is a great pool about 7 minutes bike from the town centre when it gets warmer.

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

Travel!!! Is the best thing to do when you have time. There are some cool places nearby in Germany too for day-trips and Stuttgart is very close if you want to be in the city. You should also explore the area nearby – by bike is perfect and you can buy a bike cheap from the uni to explore the many bike trails and old castles and countryside around Gmünd.

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

Not many opportunities I think, I was not wanting to work while away though.

What volunteer or internship opportunities were there for students?

Not sure for exchange students but all German students must do an internship for 1 semester of their studies.

5 things to take to your host country or region

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1 | Marmite! It's great to make people try it. Other Kiwi food etc. as you will miss it |
| 2 | Kiwiana – kiwi soft toy, money, carvings/greenstone – they love looking at it and it's something to remind you of home |
| 3 | Power adaptors and a multiboard. The more adaptors the better, it's a pain having one and having to move it around all the time |
| 4 | Travel visa/mastercard. Even though you will get a German account it's great to have a credit card as backup if you go over your withdrawal limit or for online purchases |
| 5 | Books/kindle. It is very expensive to get English print books in Germany and the range is very limited |

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

1	Take plenty of money for travel – spontaneous trips will happen and it's good not to worry about money too much
2	Don't stress about the admin side of things when you first get there (enrolling in courses, registering at foreign office) as the uni will help you with these once classes start
3	Be friendly and positive – the culture shock might be a bit rough for some but if you stay positive and make friends you'll be fine. Things will always get better if you're homesick
4	Plan some things you want to do ahead of time – places to go or things to see etc. The earlier you plan travel the cheaper it will be and less stressful, although spontaneity is great too
5	Have fun! The coursework at HfG is very manageable so you will have plenty of time during your studies to enjoy yourself in your own time

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 Gmünd – it's a beautiful old town like nothing in NZ, with plenty of interesting places to see.
2	Visit Stuttgart – it's only 45 minutes away by train and the birthplace of the car with Mercedes and Porsche both having museums there. It also has good nightlife and club/bar/music scene
3	Travel as much as you can – whether within or out of Germany, the more places you see the better as you don't get that opportunity in NZ
4	Say yes to as much as you can – you're (probably) only on exchange once so say yes to as many new things as you can
5	Visit Berlin – it has quite a Wellington vibe and is one of the most interesting and diverse capitals there are

H: Personal Experience

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

GO ON EXCHANGE! I had the best time of my life on exchange and I'm so happy I took the opportunity to go; I don't regret a second of it. I was able to live in a picturesque German town and study at a great school with a very different teaching style to Vic. I made friends from all over the world and I have heaps of places to stay when I go travelling again. The experiences you have, people you meet and lifelong friends you make really make the exchange fantastic. Germany is a very easy country for an exchange student and there is a huge amount of support and infrastructure around exchange students there, plus the locals are all very friendly and happy to talk to someone from abroad. The exchange is what you make of it so put yourself out there and go!

