

# Victoria Abroad Evaluation Form

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

## A: Student Information

VUW degree(s)	BbmedS/LLB
Major(s)	Genetics
Exchange Institution	Universidad de Jaen
VUW Tri & Year of Exchange	Semester 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.)

Books	\$100
Accommodation	\$260 per month
Return Airfare	\$2400
Local Transportation	\$20 per month
Meals	\$40 a week
Visa	\$100
Health & Insurance	\$400
Personal Spending	\$5000
Communications (phone, etc.)	\$25 per month
Other fees (specify)	
What unexpected costs did you encounter? What items were more or less than expected?	Train was quite expensive in Spain

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

Actually about the same. I think I had to borrow \$1500 but that was because I did extra travel too

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

Cash passport and credit card. I found cash passport difficult as it took 3 business days to process so if I forgot to do it by Thursday NZ time, sometimes I had to be super tight over a weekend waiting for the NZ weekend to finish so that I would have more money on my card.

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

You often need cash for things. So its good to get big amounts of cash out each week to then use.

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

\$1.50

**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 need a visa for Spain. Make sure you do this in plenty of time, because I had a problem where I only got my university of Jaen confirmation 5 weeks before leaving, and I only JUST got my visa in time, because they have to send it to Madrid and back. Remember – all things Spanish tend to be slow so allow at least a few extra weeks.

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

The office in Wellington can be a little unhelpful. Make sure all your documentation is correct the first time around!

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?

No.

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

I used 1cover, it was cheap and great value, always get comprehensive too.

**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
<b>VUW Trimester 1/YEAR</b>					
<b>VUW Trimester 2/YEAR</b>					
Derecho Romano (Roman Law)	Spanish	Elective	15	5	I couldn't speak much Spanish when I first arrived, therefore studying in Spanish was

					very difficult for me. I even had to sit my exams (orally) in Spanish. The content wasn't too bad – but I had to work very very hard.
Derechos fundamentales y constitucional ordinales (Spanish constitutional law)	Spanish	Elective	15	5	See above – but this teacher was extremely difficult to understand – even the Spanish students struggled with her. So for me it was very difficult.
Spanish B1	Spanish			4	
Health Psychology	English	Elective	20	3	This was a fantastic class. At exactly the right level, interesting content – and in English which was a nice relief for me!

### Course Registration/Enrolment

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

It was terrible. Very confusing, very little information available. I ended up getting an email about a month after I started telling me 'what to do when you first arrive' but obviously one month was a little too late!

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?

Well the courses change a lot from year to year (at least for law) – so just because they say there will be law classes in English one year doesn't mean they will exist the next year! Also for the first 3-4 weeks you could basically go to any class you wanted without formally enrolling. But this was a university policy for foreign students, and the actual teachers did not give you any compensation for this. For example I had a test week 3 for one of my classes – so I was lucky that I had been attending it from the first week and was able to pass the exam.

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

Try out a few, but go to all of them and then drop them rather than picking a new one up part way through.

### Academic Experience

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

The standard is very different. Students don't work as hard, and the teachers don't seem to expect as much. If Spanish was my native language, I think that I would have found it quite easy.

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?

They didn't use lecture slides or notes as much, mainly talking and a bit of blackboard writing. Students didn't have laptops either. Workload was about the same. For example in law, they wanted you to do readings and had quite a few assignments etc

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?

4 or 5 including Spanish

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

Go to class! Get to know your teachers. It helps if they can see that you are attending and trying hard.

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

Good. The library rented laptops, the library staff were helpful. The internet was easy once you worked out how to log in.

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?

They sometimes have one but not in my year. I went to a one week intensive course in another city before I started. I really needed to learn more Spanish before going. It was very hard for me – as I hadn't really studied Spanish in NZ or at school or university before arriving in Spain. I had only taught myself through the internet and Spanish speaking friends

## **E: Accommodation**

What form of accommodation did you stay in?

Shared flat

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

I lived with really nice girls from 4 different countries. It was amazing. Very different to NZ flatting as it was very independent for example we all did our own cooking etc.

What accommodation would you recommend to future students?

Flatting is by far the best option in Jaen. No one stays in the uni accommodation at all.

How early can you move into accommodation?

Up to about 3 weeks before class starting and up to about 3 weeks after class starting

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

I had a kitchen in my flat. It came fully equipped and was great.

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

Use your buddy to help you to find somewhere to live. The landlords don't speak any English normally. Also go to look at at least 3 or 4 places before you choose.

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

Make sure you tell them you will only be there for one semester!

## **F: Personal & Cultural Connections**

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

Making friends was really easy – there are lots of events to go to. And in such a small place everyone kind of gets to know each other quickly. I had a few local friends. I found the small town Spanish girls to be very different and it was quite hard to make friends with them.

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

It took longer than I thought. Especially with different attitude to timing – everything is so late! And takes so much longer to sort anything out.

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

The culture of siesta! Every shop is closed between 2:30 and 5:30 in the afternoon. So you have to be prepared and don't try to shop in this time.

What parts of the culture did you most appreciate?

The relaxed attitude. And you have to be very go with the flow.

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

Normally pretty well! Hardly anyone spoke English but still managed to have interesting encounters with locals. The university staff were really helpful. Local students were pretty unfriendly to be honest. They didn't help me in class or anything – even though I was the only foreign student.

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?

I don't actually know re:disabilities. From memory I think there was wheelchair access etc? I had quite a few gay friends there and they seemed to find it okay, I think it is easier for guys than girls. Being lesbian still isn't quite as accepted in small town Spain. But for males there was a reasonable sized gay community.

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

Not for myself, but I had a situation at my flat where my Spanish flatmate was quite racist and hurtful to my Romanian flatmate on a regular basis. This was unusual for me as racism isn't something I am used to encountering. We just had a talk with her when we were in a positive space and tried to calmly tell her it wasn't okay to talk to Florina like that. Apparently racism can be a bit of a problem in southern Spain.

## **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?

So many! ESN – the Erasmus Students Network organizes loads of events and trips you can go on. The Gym at my uni had great classes and also sporting trips. I went on a rockclimbing excursion which was great fun. I also took Yoga class and Crossfit class.

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

Go on as many weekend trips as possible! Rental cars are so cheap in Spain so it is easy to hire a car and get around. Also go for lots of hikes – the area around Jaen is beautiful and there are amazing mountains with great views.

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

There were some jobs with English schools off campus. Apart from that nothing really. I work as a freeland hairdresser so I used Exchange student Facebook pages to advertise my business and I got a bit of money that way.

What volunteer or internship opportunities were there for students?

Nothing really.

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

1	Good camera
2	Spanish dictionary
3	Things from New Zealand (flag, money, all blacks top etc)
4	Good hiking shoes
5	A good carryon bag so you don't have to pay for luggage on your internal flights

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

1	Learn as much Spanish as you can before you go, there is not a lot of English
2	It will be disorganized – its Spain
3	Take every opportunity that is offered to you
4	Download whatsapp
5	

### **Top 5 Things to do**

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

1	Hike to the Jaen castle and beyond
2	Take a weekend trip to Almeria or the beach
3	Join the rock climbing club!
4	Ski in Sierra Nevada
5	Learn Spanish!!

## H: Personal Experience

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

It would be remiss if I did not begin this description by saying that my exchange has 100% been the best experience I have ever had in my entire life. I left New Zealand expecting to make great friends, have a good time and learn some Spanish. Instead I found an amazing, incredible international family of 22 exchange students, with whom I shared more laughs, adventures, crazy nights and once in a life time experiences than I could have imagined. From organizing group hiking trips, hiring houses for ski trips, flying together to Morocco, or spending a week visiting one of our friends in Iceland, we took every opportunity that the exchange experience allowed.

This was also a time of personal development for me, as I learnt about myself, what I enjoy, and my strengths. I also enjoyed being influenced by the Spanish way of life, learning to relax and go with the flow. In Spain everything can be done mañana, and "no pasa nada" became my most commonly used phrase.

Also, before I left I could not speak Spanish. I had learnt a little via the internet but I had never taken classes at school or university. In Jaen I had to study law in Spanish, write all of my assignments in Spanish and sit two oral final exams in Spanish. A serious case of getting thrown in the deep end. But in a sink or swim situation, I decided to swim the best that I could. Now I am extremely grateful, as I am proud to say I passed all of my courses, and can now speak (more or less) Spanish. This was an amazing personal achievement for me.



