

Victoria Abroad Evaluation Form

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

A: Student Information

VUW degree(s)	Master of Architecture (Professional)
Major(s)	Architecture
Exchange Institution	K.A.D.K - The Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts
VUW Tri & Year of Exchange	Trimester 1 2015 (4 th year University)

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	\$0 – No compulsory books required in my course
Accommodation	\$900 a month (4200 DKK)
Return Airfare	Estimated
Local Transportation	\$170 (2 nd hand bike). Standard cash bus/metro/train rates are \$5 for shortest fare
Meals	\$265 a month (1200 DKK)
Visa	Residence permit to live in Denmark \$370 (1700DKK) + to have VFS global handle permit from NZ \$430
Health & Insurance	\$350 (health care free in Denmark)
Personal Spending	\$1000+
Communications (phone, etc.)	\$20 per month
Other fees (specify)	
What unexpected costs did you encounter? What items were more or less than expected?	The visa processing fees from Auckland based VFS global are outrageous (\$430). Because there is no Danish Consulate in New Zealand, they have to send the application to the Consulate in Sydney who communicate with Copenhagen.

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

Everything is a lot more expensive. It's just that simple. The minimum wage in Denmark is \$24 per hour so a cup of coffee that costs \$9 doesn't seem as bad for many Danes. For the tourist and the student it is a bit tougher. I found a room with a Danish family which came with daily meals, internet, hot water etc.

\$265 per month for food is cheap even in New Zealand standards. If you are making your own meals expect to pay more. Of course I ate out with friends, spent money on snacks and beer so the real cost was a lot higher, more like \$500 per month.

My accommodation costs were \$900 (4200DKK) a month or \$210 per week. This is very high but for a room in the city it is normal. In Copenhagen the price is stated per month. For accommodation I wouldn't pay any more than 5000DKK (\$1100) a month, which is what many offer (watch out for scammers asking for western

union transfers). Aim for 3000DKK per month but if you want to settle for 4000DKK per month it's not too bad. Some of my friends had rooms for 2500DKK (they do exist!).

My costs including everything with the family was 5400DKK per month (\$1200). My rent of 4200DKK per month was on the high side but the food cost was only 1200DKK per month therefore I was happy with the overall situation.

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

Assuming you have a Danish Residence permit and a postal address in Denmark, you are entitled to a CPR number (Danish registration number). This is free. Best way to find info here (<http://international.kk.dk/artikel/how-do-i-get-cpr-number>)

The CPR number opens all the gateways. Free healthcare, books from the library, the entitlement to a Danish Bank Account, and of course the ability to get fines!

Open the Danish Bank Account and transfer a large sum over incurring a once off fee. Now you can withdraw from ATM's for free using a Danish bank card.

At the start you can just withdraw relatively large sums from ATM's and incur a transaction fee \$6 per time. Or if you use your card (Visa/MasterCard) normally in shops you get charged a conversion rate per time (2%)

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

Everything is just so much more expensive it becomes hard to save money. Because of this, it is rare to eat out expect for pizzerias and kebab shops. Cheapest kebab I found was \$6 in Nørrebro which is the Newtown of Wellington. There are a range of supermarkets with greatly varying prices in Copenhagen. Netto, Aldi and Fakta are by far the cheapest. Others such as Irma, SuperBrugsen are more expensive but have nicer food. You will begin to love Netto. Beer is cheap about \$8 for a six-pack.

In Denmark they have a system known as 'pant'. When you buy cans or plastic bottles you are charged an extra 30c per item. However, if you return them to the supermarket you get your 'pant' back! It may not seem like much but it adds up.

In regards to stationary I would recommend taking as much over as possible as it is expensive.

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

Can of coke \$2, Coffee \$9

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?

Because I am a New Zealand citizen as was staying in Denmark for longer than 3 months, I needed a residence permit. It was very frustrating. I was only aware I was going to Copenhagen in December due to the application process. After you have been accepted you will receive a ST1 application pre-signed from your university and you take this with you to VFS. My flights out of New Zealand were on 26th Jan. The recommend process to apply is through Auckland based VFS global. Because there is no Danish Consulate in New Zealand, they have to send the application to the Consulate in Sydney who communicate with Copenhagen. As stated above the actual visa fee is \$370 (pay online) and on top the visa processing fees from VFS global are outrageous (\$430).

VFS is only available for in person appointments in Auckland on very specific days in the summer so investigate this as soon as possible. To add to the pain, I lived in Christchurch so had to book return flights at summer holiday prices (don't ask).

I reached VFS in Auckland on 8th Jan and by the time of my departure on 26th Jan the residence permit was not confirmed. They state it can take up to 2 months to get a reply. At Auckland airport I was held up (due to having a one way ticket into the EU) and no residence permit. I stated my situation and showed documentation from the host university and they let me through. Auckland Airport told me that at the Danish entry point I may be denied access due to a lack of exit flight within 3 months. I entered without question on the 27th of Jan.

Two months after the original inquiry 8th Jan, the Danish council got back to me stating I had not paid the full fee of \$370. This is online and it is impossible to pay the wrong amount. However, the fees are adjusted around the New Year every time therefore a mismatch occurred. After I paid the extra \$10 my permit was valid finally around April 17th.

The only safe way to avoid VFS and their service is to have return flights in/out of the EU and sort it out once in Copenhagen. This is perfectly legal as far as I am aware. NZ passport holders are allowed in Denmark for 3 months visa free. The only problem is that you will have to wait 2 months before the permit is valid and your application for a CPR is thus delayed. For me, I did not have a CPR number for the first 2 months yet healthcare and book loaning was perfectly free with valid ID.

If you are ok with the VFS fees and going to Auckland for the in person interview then do it as soon as you find out if you are into the University and have received your ST1 application from the University.

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

See above.

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 mandatory insurance that I was aware of.

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

I used Southern Cross travel insurance. My parents are lifetime members therefore it was slightly subsidized to \$355 for 26 Jan until 13 July.

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/YEAR					
Political Architecture (c. 5 weeks)	English	ARCI 411: Design Research	15	4	A course that intends to sharpen your project by positioning it within a global network of other, similar work. Nice course and great thesis skills obtained.
Image and Representation (c. 4 weeks)	English	Elective	15	3	Critical attention is drawn to the primal means of architectural communication. Very interesting/ thought provoking
Philosophicum (once a week)	English	ARCI 451: Architecture Theory and Criticism	15	5	Heavy theory based class reading philosophers such as Spinoza. The intention of informing design decisions in main project. Interesting but frequently felt too irrelevant.
VUW Trimester 2/YEAR					

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

Instead of registering in courses like at Victoria you enroll in a Master's programme. The programme preselects the courses you take. The architecture master programmes in English are here (<https://kadk.dk/en/overview-programmes-0>).

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 fortunate to be accepted into the programme I wanted however there were limited spaces in my class of only 15 people. There has been a large reshuffle with the programmes just last year therefore many are experimental and will be subject to minor adjustments. Check the website for the latest info.

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

Read the online descriptions as they are quite detailed and explain what types of things you will be investigating. I chose Political Architecture: Critical Sustainability because I felt it would be a challenge and I was right! Pick something different but obviously not so different you don't enjoy it. I ended up learning so much compared to other international students who felt they were repeating classes.

Academic Experience

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

At Victoria I had 4 parallel courses working together each with their own agenda. There was limited overlap between these. At KADK, my programme Political Architecture consisted of one core design project that ran for the whole semester. It was set in Chittagong, Bangladesh. Along the way the teachers held 'courses' where for a week or so they would run seminars involving reading, lectures, peer-peer work ending with a critique. The 'courses' involved learning something different which inevitably will influence the main design project. It is a very fluid method of learning and was sometimes confusing. It is now in reflection that I realise how effective it is as a research technique.

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?

In my programme it was entirely self-directed. Our instructors were trying explicitly NOT to teach us, rather see us learn it ourselves. This meant when we spoke with the tutors they would refrain from stating their opinion and rather guide and generate new thoughts. I would say it was completely different to Victoria and took some time to adjust. We had 1 or 2 classes a week for 2-3 hours each, then when the 'courses' took place it was more intensive. You have a lot of free time which is good and bad. A lot of the time you can feel like you are doing very little, however you have an incredible opportunity to read and research things you are actually interested in. If you know what you like, you can bring that in. The teachers are very respectful of the design process.

In general the efficiency of the class as a whole was very low. The final projects were all of a very high quality, however I couldn't help feeling the expectations and urgencies were low. I felt like I was not pressured at all. It becomes a test in self-management as much as an educational one. If you work with

intensity like at Victoria you will do very well but for me it felt natural to work at a similar pace to my peers. The studio environment is a lot less competitive than at Victoria however people are a bit more precious of their projects. Only 15 in the class is nice as you make friends in a very relaxed environment.

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?

The course load is indisputable. You enroll in the programme and they dictate the courses. Because you cannot cross-credit the SARC461 (2015): Professional Practice course the workload is technically around 45 points rather than traditional 60.

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

Define what you believe in and stand by this. The programme I took allowed students to explore their own interests with the incredible open-minded aid of the teachers. To make the most of how self-directed it is, read what you are truly interested in and explore things you wouldn't have thought of. It's hard to say completely but just when you get an idea just push it to the extreme, exhaust the possibilities and trust the design process. The programme is so open it would be futile not to exploit it.

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

Everyone has their own laptop, I never saw the computer room but it's generally for parametric design students. Wifi everywhere. Library has an incredible collection of books.

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 are free Danish lessons you can take. I took them and it was very rewarding and fun. 3hr class once per week.

E: Accommodation

What form of accommodation did you stay in?

I stayed with a Danish family in central Copenhagen.

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

PROS:

- Great way to learn about Danish culture and customs
- Many interesting stories shared at the dinner table
- Get to know Danish language
- Nice apartment and great access to city
- Very relaxed about my time schedules

CONS:

- Not exactly a flatting environment so having friends over and late night celebrations not the most

accessible.

- I paid for meals and dinner was at 6pm each night, so flexibility was a little difficult if I wanted to do something different.

What accommodation would you recommend to future students?

Depends what you like. If I could do it again I would go to halls of residence. However, these are incredibly hard to get into and most require you are there for a year. Most accommodation offers are that of a single room living with a landlord. Some of my friends lived with other international students and that was cool.

How early can you move into accommodation?

Really depends as there is no on site accommodation with the school.

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

Not relevant.

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

The university does provide a list of landlords that have rooms available. There is a limited number so as soon as you receive this list (December) apply to all as quickly as possible.

It was challenging. I arrived in Copenhagen with no accommodation, stayed at a hostel for a week and found something within that time. Half of the exchange students did not have accommodation on the first day. There are a lot of scammers out there. People offering their 'apartment' stating you can see the outside but not the inside and it would be great if you could send them passport and bank account details. I confronted 4 separate scammers even one person got me to visit their place only not to show up.

If you are dedicated you will find something. At the change of semesters it is hectic to find accommodation. If an ad comes on Facebook/housing site you should reply within 2 hours otherwise it's not worth it. They'll already have hundreds of offers.

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

For most housing use findaroomate.dk or boligportal.dk (small paid subscription but by far the best out there).

F: Personal & Cultural Connections

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

Danish people are renowned for appearing a little cold at first. I experienced this somewhat, however once you get to know them they are very friendly. They have a nice culture of entertaining at home so pot luck dinners are a great success to make friends. I am disappointed I wasn't forward enough with many Danes

because you need to take the initiative and invite them out. It's hard to generalise, but generally I would say be more forward than you usually would be. They are very friendly once you know them and will always appreciate and invitation somewhere.

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

I think adjusting to the culture was easy. Apart from the showers, I did not find it that foreign.

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

The rules are a lot stricter and people respect them. This is a big difference. If you cross the road when the man is red and a policeman sees you, it's a \$50 fine. Danish people will wait completely until the man is green no matter if it is 1am and not a car in sight. People truly do respect the state and the rules, and because of this it can feel a little too organised. There is actually a phenomena where many Danes feel as though they are living a contained life inside a box.

Another aspect is that to be average. Everyone is treated the same and it is therefore sometimes desirable to be average. Explicit examples are that of the small tax bracket between lowest and highest. Also there is a very good unemployment benefit resulting in comfortable living without a job. I have witnessed Danish friends scoff and yell 'show off' at guys driving past in porches. It has created this tendency for people to not be as competitive and prevents people from standing above the rest. I think this translates into the atmosphere at the host university.

As mentioned Danes can appear cold. For example if you accidentally bump shoulders with someone they may continue walking without an apology. This is not because they don't mean to be sorry, rather that they have already wasted your time enough by bumping and a conversation would prolong this wasted time! They are very friendly and rather funny (dark humour – watch out for that) once you know them.

What parts of the culture did you most appreciate?

Incredibly humble and really friendly once you know them. They know how to have fun and make jokes and are great to be around. I found the healthcare service quite frankly amazing and also there is a Danish law that all products have a 2 year warranty! I really appreciated their kindness, patience and desire to entertain. There is just so much happening in Copenhagen it is incredible. Multiple events, park festivals, royal parades each week in the city.

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

All extremely friendly and extremely good at English. Made me feel very comfortable living here!

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?

Very straightforward and open-minded people. No problems at all. Two of the most famous Danish tv celebrities are disabled!

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

would you give to future students?

Nothing at all, apart from a few old classics laughing at my accent.

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 is not the largest student base in regards to activities, so for me I sought out of university activities such as touch rugby. There are student nights hosted at the university which are of great fun. There are an incredible collection of exhibitions being displayed throughout the uni, highly recommend checking these out along with other student work.

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

Europe is your doorstep. Plan ahead with the relaxed timetable and book cheap flights. I can't recommend anything more than just find cheap flights and do it! I went to Sweden, Amsterdam, Dublin and other cities in Denmark.

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

Once you have a CPR number you're entitled to work in Denmark. On campus you can potentially be an exhibition technician helping with that. Not much on campus at all. Off-campus - well whatever you fancy, lots of bars, restaurants employ English speaking due to tourist surges.

What volunteer or internship opportunities were there for students?

None that I was explicitly aware of. The university attracts many firms that post internship offers throughout the campus on poster boards etc.

5 things to take to your host country or region

1	Warm clothes (esp gloves)
2	Money
3	Confidence
4	Stories about New Zealand
5	Your own stationary

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

1	Be more forward than usual, pursue friendships and open the Dane.
2	Buy a bike. So much cheaper for transport, easy to get around and excellent bikeways
3	Watch people in shops. Instead of ques some have a number system. You get the number from a

	machine when you enter
4	The university has a range of incredible projects. Walk around and check them out, students are more than happy to talk about them
5	Use this opportunity to define what you want and pursue honest interests in architecture

Top 5 Things to do

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

1	Travel to other parts of Denmark. Copenhagen does not equal Denmark
2	Learn the Language, it's great just to know a little and the Danish are happy you try
3	Copenhagen Street food on the waterfront is nice
4	Try go to underground music scene. Venues such as Vega and Jazzhouse have the coolest acts
5	Erasmus student network ESN has incredible events and trips around Europe from Copenhagen. Do them.

H: Personal Experience

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

I think the most rewarding aspect was being part of an institution with very different teaching styles to that of Victoria. I began to contrast the experiences and reflect on what I had learnt previously, whilst being constantly challenged and confused. The ability to establish a global network is the critical part of the program. You meet cool people from all over the world and begin to slowly piece a world map together. I have friends in many countries in Europe and intend on visiting them this coming summer.

I think there is a lot of hype about going overseas and it is very easy to over glorify it. 6 months is not just a holiday you begin to live and get into a routine. There are times when it is boring and you sit on Facebook/Instagram. There are times when you stay up late watching movies with friends. You can find yourself questioning "am I really have a crazy exchange? Is this actually amazing?" and of course you question it again and again.

But of course you are doing a lot, just by being in a new environment you are learning. Whenever I felt like I was doing nothing I'd just grab my bike and go somewhere random. Pick a couple of buildings and go visit. Incredible things at your doorstep. I felt although there were slow times I was always looking outward and constantly learning. But it's not until the end, when you look back, that you realise what you have just accomplished. The person that boarded that plane 5 months ago is now a lot wiser and in tuned with the world. The university has taught me many things, but the most rewarding is when I start to piece together the currents of the world, the places people move, the reasons and the theories. I have found it all incredibly interesting.

Incredible experience and what a great foundation Victoria Abroad provides. Thank you so much.

