

# 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 Prof
Major(s)	Architecture
Exchange Institution	The Technical University of Munich
VUW Tri & Year of Exchange	Trimester 1, 2014 (NZ)

## 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	None
Accommodation	NZD\$170 per week (4 person apartment, incl expenses)
Return Airfare	NZD\$1,600 (direct including connections. High as late booking)
Local Transportation	NZD\$35 per week (cash paid on bus, no pass which would be cheaper)
Meals	NZD\$7 standard takeaway meal. NZD\$4 for a homemade meal from groceries
Visa	NZD\$80
Health & Insurance	NZD\$150 for one month NZ travel insurance + NZD\$80 per month for German health In.
Personal Spending	Not much personally, food and drink are cheap, tourist attractions will add up however.
Communications (phone, etc.)	NZD\$10 per month on average (prepay) as I was using a free messenger instead.
Other fees (specify)	
What unexpected costs did you encounter? What items were more or less than expected?	Expense of entry tickets to attractions, though not as high in tourist hotspots in Europe, but it will add up. Bus and tram costs add up too. Food is very cheap, and breadstuff are the norm. Lots of supermarkets around.

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

*I was surprised at how long my money lasted, but I was conscious of saving money, and of course, when you're studying, you're not spending!*

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

*I simply withdrew cash from my NZ account at ATMs for a fixed fee each time (so I would withdraw large amounts to minimize the number of transactions) then deposit into a local account with a debit card. I found the fees by this method not noticeably different to other methods.*

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

*Shop at the local supermarkets, there are a lot nearby, and they are cheaper than buying lunch around town. But even better is the school's cafeteria, which offers large cooked meals at subsidized rates.*

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

*2 and half euros-ish. Not much cheaper than here really. But I made mine at the uni! (plunger)*

**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, mandatory, but a fairly simple process and there are a lot of other foreign students will be trying to work out the same thing.*

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

*Queues are shorter in the morning! Diabolical later in the day...*

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, I had to provide evidence of insurance policy with Germany. AOK Insurance was the company, at about 50 Euro per month.*

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

*As above.*

## 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>					
<i>Design studio, Prof Musso</i>	<i>Eng/Ger</i>	<i>Design</i>	<i>15</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>Easy compared to Vic studio, and practical, over theoretical, not so engaging.</i>
<i>Hist. of Industrialistion</i>	<i>Eng</i>	<i>Arch451 Arch Hist.</i>	<i>7.5</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>Really simple course of lectures, super easy high-school-level projects.</i>
<i>Orientalism in Arch (history/theory)</i>	<i>Eng</i>	<i>Arch451</i>	<i>7.5</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>Really intensive theoretical and broad study of orientalism, but tough. Big essays.</i>

<i>Scenography studies</i>	<i>Ger</i>	<i>Elective</i>	<i>7.5</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>Cool paper that looks at scene building in films, symbolism... I think, it was in German... but an easy assignment.</i>
<i>Membrane structures</i>	<i>Eng</i>	<i>Technology</i>	<i>7.5</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>Simple series of lectures of basic engineering of tension membranes. Projects in teams with engineering students.</i>
<i>Short Design courses (3)</i>	<i>Ger</i>	<i>Elective</i>	<i>1.5-3</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>Very cool 1-3 days design projects proposed by design pros – easy credits, but interesting and diverse. 1 did 3</i>
<b>VUW Trimester 2/YEAR</b>					

### Course Registration/Enrolment

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

*Extremely difficult to determine (in English) what courses are available (that semester); what they are, and whether they are VUW equivalent. Unbelievably disorganized system with no reliable help anywhere (compare to VIC) but unlike Vic, it doesn't matter; students just sign up to any and every course as registration opens online (0-3 weeks or so from the start of term) then drop later. Many courses started late in the term too, so you might be hoping to enroll in them, only to find it full, or in fact not held in English etc, so it was always best to have a reservoir of courses that you could keep or ditch as needed. Mad!*

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'll go on, shall I? The registration for some courses opened early in the morning, so a few times I got up at 2am or so to enroll, just to make sure of a position! This was never needed however, but, you can never be too sure, and I wasn't the only one doing it.*

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

*As above, enroll or just attend everything and work it out formally later, it is such a cruisy system, and class sizes fluctuate grossly in the first few weeks. Profs don't care... Also, remember to enroll in the*

corresponding exam! It is not automatic!

## **Academic Experience**

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

*It was pretty easy, the general performance standard is much lower than at Vic, but that's not to say it was a breeze, I still had a lot of grunt work to do, mainly as I took so many classes to make sure I had enough RELEVANT cross-creditable points available (which is another system that doesn't work very well).*

*But I know people who took less classes than me with apparently no ill-effect, and also some people got lucky with courses that turned out to be laughably easy, while still quite high in credits. Others whose studios were simply worth more credits than others; for no additional worth. The "system" is extremely vague and exploitable, if you're that way inclined. It's a different attitude entirely.*

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?

*As above. Most of the professors I met were more practically minded than the theoretical bent that Vic tends to have, but not all. Generally, the work was less challenging and less varied. The fun and engagement came from the experience of a different culture, and meeting these very different attitudes.*

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?

*Mine seemed similar to a Vic workload in terms of hours put in. You will find yourself a little limited in the number of courses available, but don't be too precious about which are relevant or weighted high enough, you can fill the gaps in variety and credits with the short design course (10 or so per semester) that continually pop up. I did quite a few of these, that ranged from random technical design challenges, to photography/creative writing challenges to one (the best) where I had to build a scale model miniature of a photograph of a hallway the prof issued us with. That was awesome.*

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

*Do the short courses to make up credits, I ended up with a surplus. If you just work to Vic standards, you'll amaze everyone there.*

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

*All pretty familiar, though they have about 8 professional full colour A0+ printers sitting in the computer lab for students to use. Not cheap though.*

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 have studied a bit of German before, but in the case of Germany, all the students and staff speak English, and a lot of the citizens around. You can get by with little or no German at all. It's too easy, really.*

## **E: Accommodation**

What form of accommodation did you stay in?

*Apartment with 3 Germans, aged 25-30, non-students. At least, when I managed to find one, I was in a hostel for the first few weeks of term.*

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

*Cheaper and more stable than hostels obviously, quieter than student dorms, and here you get a real taste of real German everyday life and the people.*

What accommodation would you recommend to future students?

*Apartments for the reason above; and preferably with natives for the 'full experience.'*

How early can you move into accommodation?

*Huh? I arranged nothing in advance, my bad possibly, but I had travelled a month before reaching Munich, so stayed in hostels until I'd found an apartment. It was no joke either, not when you're up against lots of NATIVE students!*

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

*I shopped in supermarkets, cooked at home, made coffee at the Uni, or ate at the school cafeteria.*

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

*Not easy, but there are dedicated websites that list available apartments etc. But like I said, it'll take time.*

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

*Try in advance of arriving; it's hard to start your studies when you're living in a hostel!*

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

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

*Hard to make friends with natives, thought German's are friendly and polite enough, you just don't have so much in common with them. Unless you live with them, as I did; we were all friendly and would go out etc. Very easy to make friends with other exchange students obviously; my best friend was this girl from Poland ;-)*

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

*I'm pretty adaptable! But it certainly is different,*

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

*It's all pretty familiar really, the Germans are quite 'direct' and 'abrupt' which at seems abrasive and impolite to us with indirect and sympathetic English sensibilities, but once you realize this, there's no problem.*

What parts of the culture did you most appreciate?

*They are all a pretty cruisy bunch, the cliché of the smileless mechanical Germans who have no sense of humor is completely untrue. As soon as you hit midafternoon, they take off to beer gardens and sit amid the sunny trees. I personally think we're more worklike and unfun here!*

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

*Good, they are all very polite.*

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?

*Well I can't pretend to be able to offer any useful perception on this subject, but from a passing appraisal, I wouldn't anticipate any serious issues of acceptance.*

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

*Nope, the worst thing I experienced was having to repeat myself for clarity until I managed to drop some of the more 'foreign' and intimate artifacts of our dialect. Oh, and the NZ humor can be pretty dry by comparison, so you sometimes need to confirm when you're joking!*

### **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?

*Don't know, didn't look.*

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

*Get on a bus and see some of the other cities/ countries within half a days ride. Berlin and Prague were 2 of the mustsees, and you've got no excuse for not seeing them.*

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

*I knew some students who were working, and when I went to interview someone at an Arch practice for a project, they actually offered me work. Don't know about on campus.*

What volunteer or internship opportunities were there for students?

*Don't know, didn't look.*

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

1	<i>Offline maps on your phone</i>
2	<i>There's a good Android app that translates written text realtime using the phone camera, called World Lens. Good for signs</i>
3	<i>Electrical adaptors</i>
4	<i>Camera, and lots of storage</i>
5	<i>Backup money, you don't want to get stuck.</i>

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

1	<i>Organise accommodation in advance</i>
2	<i>Do your travelling before your study, as the German term overlaps into the Vic, so you'll have no time after term for fun.</i>
3	<i>Bus and train passes work out cheaper, get at the start.</i>
4	<i>Use the opportunity to learn German, immersion is the best way, if you're brave enough.</i>
5	<i>Talk to everyone, make friends amongst other exchange students, if for no other reason than to know what's going on!</i>

### **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 whenever you get chance, earlier rather than later in the term when it gets busy.
- 2 Do some of the short design studios, it's a very different thing to here at Vic. Always interesting.
- 3 Go to a few beer gardens, and some of the best are the hardest to find, situated deep in parks etc.
- 4 Festivals; keep an ear out for things going on.
- 5 Tutor English to either German or exchange students; what is fairly popular is language swapping, were exchange students will teach each other their native languages, using English a middleground. You could offer advanced classes in English!

## H: Personal Experience

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

*It was a very cool experience, the whole show was new and interesting, and I especially appreciate it as it was all rolled into study, and my school fees (and a bit more) largely covered it, making an OE possible. It is a great scheme, and I can't believe more students don't take the opportunity. The setup at the university was far more informal and seemingly adhoc, but it seems to work in the end, so you just have to learn to be less precious about everything; hard to do coming from the much regimented systems at Vic.*

*I'm still in touch with at least one person I met there, and its 12 months on, which is remarkable. Travelling for the month beforehand was a good choice, I saw San Francisco, London, Paris, Rome and Venice on my meandering route from NZ to Munich, staying at hostels and in cities only as long as it interested me, as I had no fixed dates, flights or anything. It's amazing how easy it is to get around in Europe, and instead of being depressed when I had to end my touring and get to Munich, I was so burnt out by the first adventure that I was happily ready to settle into studies! And it was actually quite a while before I had the urge to leave Munich. Sadly I had to rush back to NZ at the close of term to start the second semester here, and even still arrived 2 weeks late, which was an unfortunately bitter note to the end of what was a fantastic experience.*

*Do it. It's easy. It's a largely free OE, it gives you a good excuse to travel and it gets you out of Victoria for six months! Do it!*

*Note: I lost all of my photos after my hard drive crashed. Pro tip: backup. Even when on holiday, backup.*