



My Exchange Evaluation

Basic Information

Host University	University of Bergen
Semester & Year of Exchange	Semester 2, August → December 2024
Otago degree(s)	Bachelor of Law, Bachelor of Science
Major(s)	

Academics/ course load

Which papers did you take whilst on exchange?

Course title	Language of instruction	Otago equivalent
SAS13	English	Laws/ Non Laws 200-300 level equivalent
SAMPOL235	English	Laws/ Non Laws 200-300 level equivalent
SAMPOL238	English	Laws/ Non Laws 200-300 level equivalent

Total Otago credits gained: 54 points 72 points 108 points

Any comments about these papers?

The papers that I participated in whilst on Exchange were all elective papers for me. I had finished my requisite papers for both Law and Science degrees whilst at Otago and, therefore, could choose whatever papers interested me and fit within the required (ECTS) points system on exchange.

SAS13 was a great paper to take! It honed in on the Culture and History of Norway and was suitable for exchange students. In my opinion, it was quite easy only having one two-hour lecture a week, including a compulsory essay and take-home exam.

SAMPOL235 involved the Politics and Global governance of International Protection. I choose to take this paper out of interest, having never done politics papers at Otago. I noticed this paper involved a lot of European political knowledge, which the rest of the class had already been immersed in. Nonetheless, I found it extremely engaging

and eye-opening and would recommend it to any students interested in refugee and asylum policy. Again this paper involved one two-hour class a week, a mid-term policy brief assignment and a take-home exam.

SAMPOL238 was the final paper I took. It is the Politics of Contestation, more specifically between Europe and the United States. It was a hybrid, transatlantic course with one lecture taught from Bergen and another taught from a U.S. University. The paper involved contested political issues with two, two-hour classes a week. It had no assignments throughout the semester however we were given the Exam question on the first day and were required to work on a thesis-type assignment throughout the semester which was to be handed in at exam time. Although this assignment was quite big, we were able to choose a contested political topic of our choice and work on this throughout the course.

How did the academic experience/ workload/ style of teaching differ from Otago?

My academic experience at Bergen was great. The classes were engaging and my lecturers were so lovely and welcoming. The classes I took were different to what I would normally participate in at Otago however a big difference in comparison was the workload. I am used to having 4-5 lectures/ tutorials a day and frequent assignments back at Otago. However, in Bergen, I tended to have 1-2, two-hour lectures per week and 1 assignment per semester for each class, allowing me to have A LOT of spare time!

One thing I noticed was that most Norwegians take their classes in Norwegian, so many of the English-spoken classes are taken predominantly by International students. It was nice knowing that everyone in my class was in a similar situation and it also meant that the exams tended to all be take-home.

The style of teaching was very similar to what I experienced at Otago, using similar university software and lecture material. Any questions were always answered quickly by staff who really care about you as an International student.

None of the classes I took had compulsory lectures however one difference to Otago was that the lectures were not recorded. In saying that I had friends whose classes were compulsory with a roll taken at the beginning of each lecture.

Accommodation

What accommodation did you stay in? What were the pros and cons of your accommodation?

I stayed in a student accommodation called Gronneviksoren whilst in Bergen. An Organisation called Sammen runs several accommodations around Bergen, which you can see on their website when deciding where to live. The Hall I was in was a 25-minute walk from uni/ town and easily accessible from the light rail, which is perfect!

All accommodations are slightly different however mine was a mixture of half Norwegians and half international students. The rooms are rather standard and international students get priority over the furnished rooms. You live in apartment-like complexes with 2-3 other students, sharing a kitchen living space and a bathroom. I was lucky to have my own room as I know those staying for only one semester in other accommodations tended to have to share a room with another student.

The only con I can think of about my accommodation was the lack of shared common spaces similar to those in Otago Halls.

Money matters

Please detail your basic costs, e.g. accommodation, flights, visa, food, insurance

The accommodation run by Sammen was relatively cheap in comparison to the cost of living in Norway. I paid roughly 200 a week for rent with electricity/ power etc all included. You pay this monthly with electricity being a flat rate, which is great for when it gets cold. As I mentioned previously, international students get furniture provided. However, you need to remember that when you arrive, you won't have anything like bedding or laundry supplies, so do keep that in mind.

I was fortunate to be able to travel for about 7 weeks before beginning University in August so my flights were not direct from New Zealand to Norway; however knowing the price of flights in and out of Norway, I imagine these would be quite expensive. I went to Bergen in Semester 2, so from August to December meaning exams go right up until Christmas. Flights around Christmas are extremely expensive, especially from Norway so I decided to come home earlier in December and do my take-home exams from NZ. My flight home was \$1800, and if I were to have left around the 20th of December, they would have been up to \$3000.

The Norwegian Visa itself was around \$800 which is good to know before applying. I am from Christchurch and the Norwegian embassy office is based out of Auckland so I then had to pay for flights to and from for an appointment. The appointment is then another \$200.

The insurance I used was roughly \$600 and this was the option available from the University of Otago. Personal insurance providers would have different rates but it is always good to check different options.

Norway in general, is an expensive location, food and drinks included. Once you have your main supplies the supermarket becomes less daunting money-wise, but everything costs more than NZ so do keep that in mind when applying. I love going out for food and drinks with friends and although it is pricey, you make things work.

What means did you use to access your finances? What would you recommend? (Credit card, Cash passport, foreign bank account, etc.)

I used a wise card, which allows you to transfer money between currencies from your phone. This was fantastic because you can use it through Apple Pay as well as a physical card from the comfort of your phone. I never once needed cash in Norway and found I only used it in other European countries.

Visas & Insurance

Did you have to apply for a visa? What was the process?

The visa process was quite a frustrating one. Many European universities send out their letters of acceptance really late in the Otago Semester, giving you little time between finishing exams, going to Auckland for your visa interview and leaving for travel/ exchange. From my memory, you apply for a student visa through VFS, which has the Norwegian embassy based out of an Auckland office. The appointment can only be made upon receiving your letter of acceptance from the host university, which I got in the middle of exams. I had flights booked a few weeks after exams, leaving little time between the appointment, sending my passport away to be verified and getting it back in time to leave. This tends to be an extremely stressful situation for most exchange students, no matter which university you are travelling to.

I chose to use the Insurance that was offered by Otago University. This was a great and easy option and nice to know if something were to go wrong you have insurance to help you out. A lot of people I know had things get stolen and lost while in Europe, so it's important to sort your insurance out prior to leaving.

Did your host university have a mandatory insurance?

I believe Bergen requires you to have some sort of Insurance as an International student. Once you have sorted your Visa and done the Police check in Bergen, you receive a Norwegian residence card, which means you are covered by the National Insurance Scheme (NIS). If you are registered as a student for longer than a year this is automatically done however for students staying one semester, you can apply for voluntary membership.

Extra-curricular/Social Activities

What organised activities were available to students? What extra-curricular activities would you recommend to future exchange students?

The University of Bergen offers a range of organised activities and extra-curricular opportunities for students. At the beginning of each semester, there is an organised event that allows you to learn and talk to people who run different clubs, sports teams and student organisations.

There were so many options to choose from including volunteering opportunities, social and competitive sports and cultural/ music clubs. A great programme to join is the buddy program which is organised to connect a local student with an international student. You help each other learn a new language and more about the city but, most importantly make a friend along the way.

It's really important to take advantage of the outdoors when in Norway. There are many hiking clubs to join which I did, or simply get a group together and go explore the surrounding mountains and fjords. Norway has the right to roam, meaning you can walk/ hike/ camp wherever you like so long as you leave the land in the same condition you found it. There are so many cabins around Norway, making it a fantastic weekend activity to get outside and immerse yourself in nature. When it gets colder, these hiking clubs turn into hiking and skiing groups, and tour guides take you to ski fields and backcountry skiing.

There is great public transport in Norway, making travel an easy and cheap option for students. Flights in and out of Bergen are on the pricier side, especially if you are looking to go to more remote locations like the North of Norway. My friends and I found it was almost cheaper to fly outside of Norway than it was to get to many places within, but planning well in advance can counteract this.

What was the university/ city like?

Bergen is a cosy city in the heart of Norway. Surrounded by seven mountains, it is the country's second-largest city but felt no bigger than Dunedin. Bergen has a student-friendly atmosphere, with much of the population taken up by students attending the University. The University of Bergen offers a wide range of academic programs, including medicine, and law and is particularly strong in natural sciences, including marine and climate research.

Bergen has a great student community, and its campus is located right in the heart of the city. The university is known for its international character, hosting over 2000 international students from around the world.

Any recommendations for things to do, places to visit, places to eat etc.?

Surrounded by mountains makes the city a really active place. Everyone is always walking, hiking, swimming or running around, no matter the weather. Hiking is so accessible and the tracks are really well paved so people of all

experience levels are able to get into nature. This is a huge part of the Norwegian culture and will definitely be something you will do a lot when in Norway.

Cabins are also a massive part of the Norwegian lifestyle, situated in some of the most beautiful locations makes this is great weekend getaway with your friends. As a student, it is also easy to rent outdoor gear like tents and skis, allowing you to participate in almost any outdoor activity you wish. Oslo and Tromsø are price-friendly city options to travel to. The Lofoten Islands are also on everyone's wishlist and definitely somewhere you should try and get to before leaving.

Travelling to other countries in Scandinavia like Denmark and Sweden is really easy and not too expensive. I would definitely recommend looking into Copenhagen and Stockholm if your budget allows.

Any tips for future students?

My tips for future students would be to look into all types of accommodation and figure out what's best for you. I personally didn't want to share a room with someone and enjoyed sharing an apartment with 2 others rather than 16 which happens in other accommodation options like Fantoft.

Norway is an expensive destination, so budget planning is essential. You still get student loans overseas which is great but when you pay for rent every month it is easy to let your finances slip in the meantime. Going out for food and drinks is a great way to interact with your friends and also meet others but just be prepared for the cost.

The weather in Bergen is unpredictable and often involves all four seasons in one. I recommend being prepared for the rain and bringing adequate clothing for the cold. Obviously, this depends on the semester that you attend, but warm, wet weather clothing and good outdoor/ hiking shoes are important.

Most importantly, make the most of every opportunity, don't be shy and say yes to as many opportunities as you can.

Overall Experience

Please write one paragraph (or more) about your exchange experience. Please include some photos!

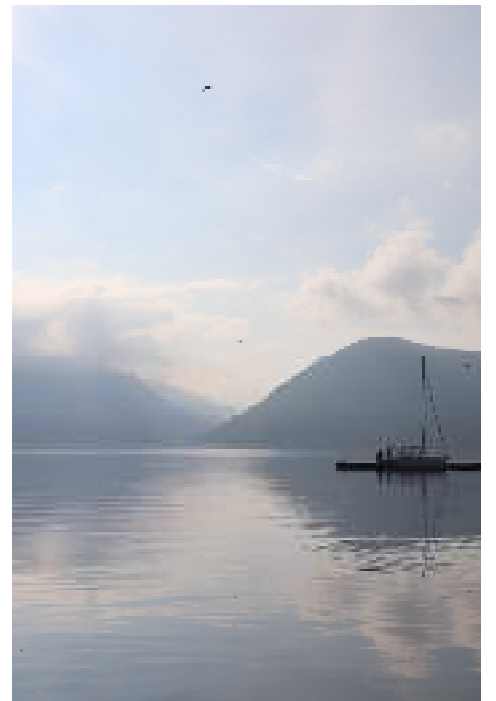
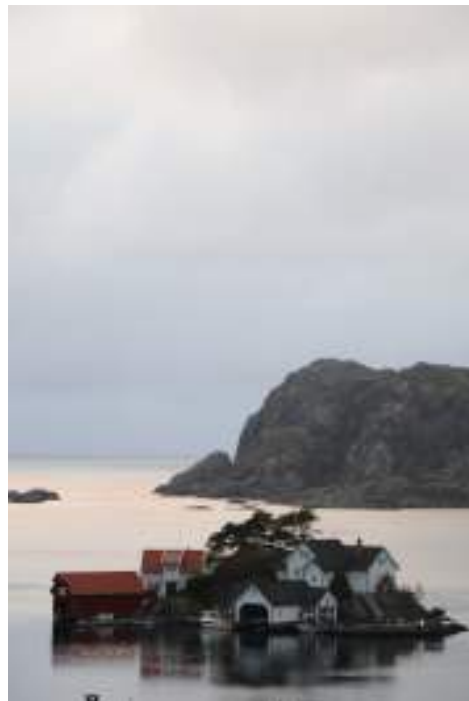
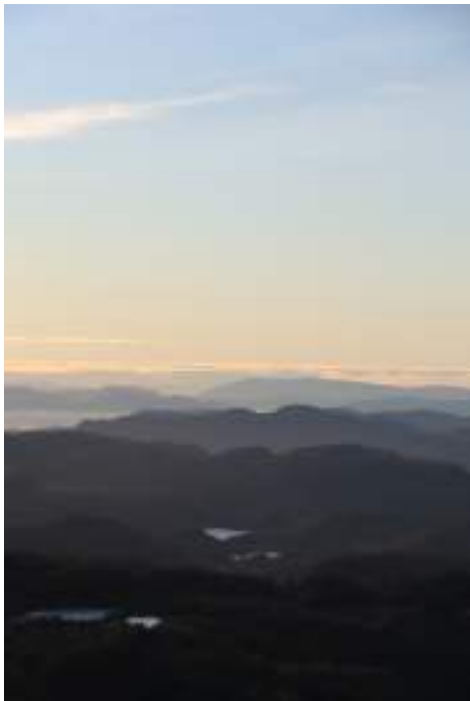
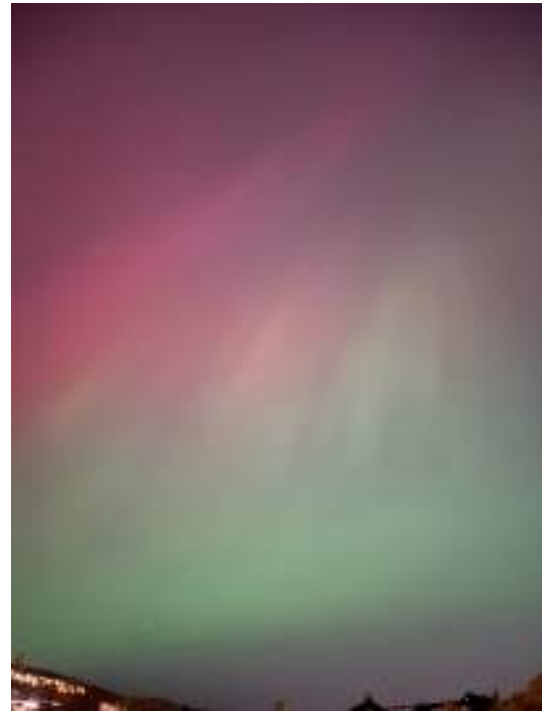
I absolutely loved my exchange! Initially, I was nervous about the unknown nature of what was to come from this experience. Moving around the world by yourself and not knowing anyone will always be a daunting task however, once you get over the hurdle of meeting people and settling into your new home, everything falls into place.

I love the outdoors and being in nature, so Bergen was a fantastic option for me. The immersion week at the beginning of each semester is a great way to interact and meet other students. The student accommodations, with shared living environments, also allow you to meet not only other international students but also local Norwegian students. There are always events on that are run by student organisations or your faculty, so you are never shy of things to do.

I made the most of being situated in Europe and tried to travel as much as I could. Having friends scattered around so many different countries is a really special experience when travelling. There will unlikely be another time in your life when it would be this accessible to go and stay with other friends also on exchange.

With guaranteed housing for exchange students and a huge range of courses taught in English, the University of Bergen provided me with an unforgettable study abroad experience. It was a huge opportunity for growth that I will have fond memories for the rest of my life. The people I met and the experiences I had are so memorable and the skills you take away from this will be transferred into the next stages of my life.

Photos: From Norway



Photos: From my travels throughout the exchange



