



My Exchange Evaluation

Basic Information

Host University	Universiteit Leiden
Semester & Year of Exchange	Semester 2 2024
Otago degree(s)	Bachelor of Commerce and Applied Science
Major(s)	Finance and Environmental Management

Academics/ course load

Which papers did you take whilst on exchange?

Course title	Language of instruction	Otago equivalent
Sustainability in Practise	English	200 level physical geography paper
Sustainable Development: Big Issues New Answers (BINA)	English	2x 300 level physical geography course

Total Otago credits gained: 54 points 72 points 108 points _____

Any comments about these papers?

For this course you do one paper at a time. So for the first couple months I was doing the BINA and then for the last month before Christmas I did Sustainability in Practise. If I needed 72 points I would have had to do the last course 'Area Study' as well which goes from January 6th all the way until the end of January, this would have limited my ability to travel with exchange mates throughout January (as they all finished before Christmas as well).

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

Lectures in Leiden for me and I think largely are not recorded with many courses having attendance mandatory (this didn't seem to be that strict but you would want to go to at least most of your classes). The lectures for me were also far more interactive with it being slightly more school like 25-30 people classes with lecturers asking people on the spot for their thoughts. Lectures were also way longer, each week I would have class Monday, Wednesday, and Friday from 9am to 1pm/3pm

depending on the module. Almost all assignments were pretty straight forward group assignments and there wasn't that many of them. In honesty the lectures were long but I didn't really do all too much outside of attending, and I would say that the university itself was comfortably easier than Otago.

Accommodation

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

Housing in Leiden is very competitive, with the best way as an exchange student to get housing being through an organisation called DUWO. I believe that DUWO has some sort of partnership with the exchange programme and once you apply/get into Leiden you receive some sort of email correspondence regarding this – but I can't find this correspondence now looking back at my emails. Here is a timeline with important dates that I can find:

14/03/2024: Confirmation that I applied for DUWO housing and that I am now on the waiting list (this means that I paid the \$500ish deposit that is required to apply).

07/06/2024: Confirmation that I will receive housing with DUWO for the semester, and indication that on 11/06 the housing reservation portal and my respective login details will become available.

11/06/2024: Access was granted to view DUWO room and housing options from 8pm, and then from 10pm all rooms were released. I recommend having 20 odd tabs open with your top 20 rooms as they go quick. I was able to get the first room I wanted, however, I know some people only got their 10th or 15th pick.

13/06/2024: Contract was sent to me which I had two weeks to sign. At some point you have to pay 3 months' worth of rent up front, and I am pretty sure that is when you sign the contract, so be prepared to make this payment during the month of June.

Note: I had up to June 1st to pay the \$500 deposit, however, I highly recommend paying this ASAP as the speed of this payment determines whether you get a spot or not (I don't know why they only let you know whether you have a spot or not on June 7th, as the waiting list definitely fills up before then).

DUWO housing options consist of a range of different accommodations located in both Leiden and The Hague as these are the two places your classes can be located. I think the distribution is 4 in The Hague and 8 in Leiden. In my opinion Leiden is a far better place to be living for the best possible exchange experience, so even if your classes are in The Hague I would recommend considering living in Leiden. If this is your situation I would say the best accommodation option for you is 'De Zeven Provinciën', as this still in Leiden but closer to The Hague and right next to a train station (making it very easy and more affordable to get to classes). If your classes are in Leiden however, I would definitely recommend the accommodation I stayed in 'Hugo de Grootstraat'.

Hugo de Grootstraat is a building filled with 5 floors of exchange students (around 70 people) in a very central area. I would say it's the best building due to it having shared kitchens, common areas, and bathrooms, which in turn made it in my experience the most social. Due to all of these facilities being communal it also meant that my rent was relatively cheaper than other housing options.

Money matters

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

Accommodation: I paid 577 euros per month for my room in Hugo. This was however the cheapest in the building due to having the smallest room (11m²) in the basement which was the cheapest

floor due to having minimal light. Ground floor rooms are on average 700 euro per month, 1st and 2nd floor rooms are around 625 euro per month, and 3rd floor rooms are around 650 euros per month. All of these floors are good depending on what your priorities are, however, I would say the 2nd floor is the worst as it doesn't really have a common room.

Flights: My flight to Europe which I booked about 6 months in advance was \$1200. My flight home ended up being almost \$2000. This was because I wasn't sure when I would be leaving so did not book until 2 months before departure. If I were to do an exchange in Leiden again I would book a flexi flight in advance on the 20th of January, as this is the date which my tenancy ended and is in and around the date almost all of my friends left.

Visa: N/A as I have a Dutch passport

Food: Not exactly sure how much I spent on food but I would say eating out is slightly more expensive, meat is slightly more expensive, and eating vegetarian is cheaper. They also have good markets every Wednesday and Saturday to get fruit and vege.

Insurance: I got the StudentSafe insurance which Otago recommends, it costed me \$680 for 7 months away.

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

I highly recommend getting a wise card as this is a card you can use anywhere without incurring significant transaction fees. On top of this I would get a Dutch bank account because if you don't its really annoying when trying to split costs and transfer people. The easiest ones to set up are either a Revolut or an ING account.

Visas & Insurance

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

N/A

Did your host university have a mandatory insurance?

N/A

Extra-curricular/Social Activities

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

There's a number of different clubs you can join which have differing levels of international student involvement. I joined the tennis club which had club evenings on Tuesday night where you would go for a hit and then have a drink in the clubrooms after. If you are interested in joining a club, there's plenty of info and advertisement in the orientation week where you would be able to find something you are into.

ESN (Erasmus Student Network) also run a number of activities and trips. I went on their Oktoberfest trip with a bunch of new friends in the first few weeks of exchange which was unreal and set the foundations for, a bit cliché, but lifelong friendships. Once you get to Leiden you can also become an ESN member for 10 euros and get a bunch of worthwhile discounts including both Flixbus and Ryanair.

What was the university/ city like?

Leiden has similarities to Dunedin in the sense that it is very much a student city, it's very small but it's got great student culture and it's a pretty good university attracting exchange students from all over the place.

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

- Hortus Botanicus (Botanical Gardens)
- Roti King (Unreal Surinamese food)
- Da Lat (Vietnamese place)
- De Keyser & Pizzeria Piano B (Local pub and pizza place across the road)
- Duke of Oz (Sports bar)
- De Twee Spiegel (Jazz bar)
- De tuin van de smid (café in an animal farm, whole farm is really good for running)
- Various canal swimming and picnic spots

Any tips for future students?

Everyone gets a bike, and for an exchange your best bet is to hire one through Swapfiets. It will cost you only 14 euros a month and you'll use it almost every day. You and the person you refer can also get 10 euros off if they use your referral code (and vice versa).

Once you get a Revolut or an ING you can also sign up for the 40% discounted public transport fares which you have to pay 5 euro per month for (definitely worth it).

Overall Experience

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

Overall I highly recommend going on exchange as it is a very unique experience which you won't ever really get the chance to do again in life. Whether you go to Leiden or not I feel it's likely you'll have a great time, in saying that however, from experiences I have heard the Leiden one is hard to top. It's got a great culture and has great access to places all over Europe due to it being so central.



Oktoberfest trip



Christmas dinner party – one of the many dinner parties/quiz nights/pub golfs we did



Jazz bar



Biking round Leiden



Last bit of travel with all the exchange mates – Sahara tour in Morocco