

REPORT ON:

MY EXCHANGE SEMESTER IN SANTIAGO DE CHILE

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Hi there! My name is Jan van Berkel, and I have chosen to go to the South-American metropolis Santiago de Chile during my exchange semester in the fall of 2015 (or the spring 2015 in Chile). Santiago is a vibrant, big, dirty but especially amazing city. Studying at the Facultad Economía y Negocios, Universidad de Chile has been a valuable experience to me which I'm happy that I participated in. Honestly, Santiago is not as pretty as Rio de Janeiro, nor does it have the character of Buenos Aires. However, for South American standards Santiago is a very safe city (just beware of the pickpockets!). Moreover, Chile is a nice country to live in: people are friendly and things are well organized.

Preparation

The preparation for an exchange semester at FEN in Chile is relatively straightforward. Not much has to be arranged in advance, and there is not much reason to worry about things. Please do pay attention to the following things though:

1. Visa. Most European citizens do not need a visa to study in Chile for a semester. Check it up front though. If you want, you can get a Student Visa. This costs you some time filling in forms and a lot of money. Once in Chile you'll be eligible for a metro discount. However, due to the bureaucratic nightmare at the government, this takes around four months, and by that time you're likely to leave Santiago already. Not advisable. Just go for a 90 day tourist visa which you'd have to extend by re-entering the country (a weekend trip to Mendoza in Argentina is a nice option for doing that).
2. Check whether you need any vaccinations. If you have travelled before, the answer is most likely 'no'.





3. Arrange a travel insurance. Check whether skiing is also covered (in the mountains next to Santiago you can ski in winter; see picture above).
4. For the dutchies: make sure you deactivate your studentenreisproduct. Straight forward procedure, google it.
5. Buy flight tickets. Tickets to Santiago are pricy. Buy them as far in advance as possible. Another option (what I did) is buying a one-way to Lima, and a return flight from Rio de Janeiro. I have travelled the rest backpacking over land. Wanted to see something of South America anyway. These tickets were cheaper (€850.- @wtc.nl, select a different return city).
6. Make sure you stay in close contact with the university. In my case they did not communicate anything prior to arrival simply because for unclear reasons they didn't have the 'right email address'. Would be nice if you could already get in touch with the other exchange students before arriving in Chile.
7. If you want to, you can already look for apartments in Santiago via the internet. Wouldn't worry too much about it though: once in Santiago it is not too hard to find something.

Courses

The courses in FEN are all six credits, and hence, you will have to follow four of them to obtain 24 ECTS in total to count for your minor and your electives. The semester started on the 22nd of July and ended for me on the 9th of November. Please note that especially the end date of the semester is depending on the courses you choose and might, hence, differ from person to person and from year to year. I have taken the following courses at FEN:

- International Marketing. I personally really hate marketing, and could better have chosen another course. The lecturer did her best to give interesting and interactive lectures, but unfortunately did not get much further than reading the slides. All lectures were at eight o'clock in the morning (check that before taking the course) and have compulsory attendance. Still not sure to what extent the word 'compulsory' in Chile really means compulsory. This course did not have a final exam.



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- Urban Economics. A very economical course taught by a very good and competent lecturer with an excellent command of the English language. If you do not like economic models, skip it. Does not have compulsory attendance, does have a final exam at the last class.
 - Latin America in World Affairs. A very old, experienced and funny professor who knows a lot, but gives lectures in which the majority of the students is unfortunately sleeping. The course is very interesting and definitely presents an insight into Latin American politics. Besides that, the course does not require much time. Please note that it does have compulsory attendance though.
 - Globalization, Treaties and Trade Agreements. Taught by the same professor as the previous one and has exactly the same setup. Also an interesting course which does not require a lot of work. Please do bring some reading materials to the lectures to keep you busy.

In general the level of the courses for exchange students is lower than what I was used to back home in Rotterdam, leaving me with extra time on other things. The university also offers sports and some arts classes for those interested. Not sure to what extent (if at all) the ESE is willing to give you credits for these. Moreover, the university has a gym. Admitted, it is not a world class gym, but will easily do for most. It is a nice place to get to know more students and a great way to avoid the heavily overpriced gyms in Santiago which do not offer much value for money.

Money

Prices in Chile and especially in Santiago are not as low as you might wish or expect. Rents are highly depending on the area where you live in, and on luck. I ended up paying CH\$150,000 (€200.-) monthly all included. This was the lowest price I have heard so far. Many have paid around €300.- for their room. Please note that prices are always without heater for the winter. You'd have to pay extra for that. Just bring some warm clothes from home. That also solves the problem. Groceries in the supermarket are on around same price level as in the Netherlands. Go to La Vega or the farmer's market for better prices for eggs, vegetables, fish and meat. Moreover, the streetfood is of excellent quality and since there are so many vendors, you can end up having a rather varied diet. Transport is generally much cheaper: one trip with public transport is around CH\$700 (around 90 cents), and taxis will suddenly fall within an affordable price range. Don't even hesitate to buy a bike here; unless you want to spend an hour looking for a place to lock your bike and your nerves are made of steel. Below a short overview of my average monthly expenses.

- Rent: €200.-
- Food: €150.-
- Going out: €100.-
- Transport: €15.-
- Studying Material: €0.-

Please note that the only thing I have bought as studying material was a notebook of a euro since there were no books required for my courses. Additionally, to avoid a bullet point of 'costs of goods stolen' I advise you to either have a good travel insurance or make sure that you are extremely careful with your belongings. Only take a copy of your passport and some money with you (not your whole 'European' wallet. Unfortunately, pickpocketing

seems to be a national sport. And yes, they are good at it. For fixed costs which I only encountered once during the semester please see the enumeration below:

- Flight tickets: €850.-
- Travel insurance: €20.- (insured with my parents; €20.- were the additional costs of getting insured outside of Europe as well).
- Vaccinations: €0.-

When it comes to travelling, Chile and the rest of South America have more than enough to offer. There are numerous nice trips you can undertake. Some of them require more of your budget than others. Most of the destinations in Chile between La Serena and Valdivia can be done over the weekend by taking night buses. Day trips to Valparaiso, Vina del Mar, and the wineries are also possible. Besides that, you can do a nice day trip skiing in winter. For the destinations further away you would either need to take off some days of university or you would have to wait till the midterm-break or the end (or beginning) of the semester.



A trip to Easter Island (see picture on first page) is a different story: try to get the tickets as cheap as possible. Check lan.com in Spanish and with Chilean pesos as currency in order to get the best prices. Moreover, try not to go in the high season to avoid high prices. Also consider taking food with you. Either way, the trip is more than worth it!

Please note that I have linked any amount of money in my financial overview here to travelling since it is too dependent on what thing you are doing in the end.

Daily life

I was lucky enough to find a room in the center of Santiago a couple of blocks away from university. Hence, I could easily walk to university in just 15 minutes. I would strongly advice anyone to look for a room close to university. Except from the metro being expensive if used on a daily basis, it is also completely overcrowded pretty much every time you would like to take a ride. Adding to the convenient location was the group of people I was living with. I lived with four amazingly cool and friendly roommates: two exchange students from Australia, a cool guy from Germany studying architecture and a Chilean language teacher (who was subletting the apartment of his grandparents).



Besides going to university on a regular basis (please note that it seems to be possible to only have classes on Mondays and Thursdays if you select the right courses), Santiago is a great city for going out. The place to be, in this case, is the neighbourhood of Bellavista,

close to our university. Hence, living nearby university also means living nearby the party places. Bellavista is pretty much sleeping at day, but is full of people at night. Take care in that area of the city: you would not be the first gringo/gringa to get robbed at night. Only stay in the areas where big crowds of people are.

The exchange coordinator at FEN, Kaia Range, is amazingly involved in everything she does. She organises several activities in which you can get to know more Chilean students and you can get to know more about Latin American culture, and Chilean culture in particular. The door of her office is always open (there is no door at all), and she is always more than willing to help you with problems of any kind.

Another last remark I would like to make is that I urge you NOT to use any postal services from the Netherlands to Chile. They are either ridiculously slow, stuff gets stolen, or customs is preventing your package or bank cards from entering the country. Make sure your bank cards do not get stolen. If they do, please try to let them being send to someone in your (or in one of your friends') network who is coming to Chile who can then take your cards or a new phone to Chile. This is faster and more reliable (and what I did when my cards got stolen).

To wrap it all up: Chile is a nice exchange destination, and I can recommend any of you going there (like any of the other exchange destinations, reading the reports). In case you happen to have any questions, please contact me on Facebook for more information.