

Exchange Semester University of Zurich Fall 2015

By Bas Monsewije

As part of my bachelor in Econometric and Operational Research I have been on exchange to Zurich during the fall semester of 2015. In Zurich I have studied at the University of Zurich for one semester that officially started after the second week of September and officially ended in the last week of January.



Preparation

Before I left for Zurich I had to take care of a couple of administrative issues. First of all I had to register and fill in a couple of documents for the University of Zurich and apply for an intensive language course at the beginning of the semester. Furthermore, because Switzerland isn't part of the European Union I had to register for a separate scholarship facilitated by the Swiss Confederation. Overall, the administrative work that I had to do, wasn't overwhelming and didn't take that much time. However, finding a room in Zurich did take a lot of effort. A couple of months before the start of the semester I started looking for a room at several student housing organizations. At the same time I applied for student housing offered by the student housing organisation WOKO. Eventually, I was lucky enough to get an offer to let a room for one semester. Moreover, I received an additional offer by WOKO for which I had applied. In the end I took the offer of the room that I arranged myself. The apartment was brand new and I had to share the kitchen and two bathrooms with only three other students. Moreover, my flatmates had been living in Zurich for quite a while and were willing to show me around and introduce me to their friends.

Arrival

The official start of the semester was in September, but because I was given a place in the two-week German course I already left for Zurich in the end of August. After my arrival I had to take care of a couple of issues. First of all I had to register at the local Kreisbüro, open a bank account and buy a public transport subscription. Overall, my arrival was quite smooth.

The first two weeks of my exchange semester in Zurich I took part in an intensive German Course (2 ECTS) organized by a joint-corporation of both University of Zurich and ETH Zurich. These two

weeks have been very valuable to my whole semester. In combination that I practiced my German I also met a significant part of the other exchange student and international student who would start their bachelor or master in Zurich. In addition, ESN Zurich organized several social events to further get to know other student and the city itself.

Courses

After the first two weeks of my semester abroad had ended, it was time to official start with the semester. Before I left for Zurich I was already asked to prepare a learning agreement in which I had to indicate which courses I wanted to take and incorporate in my bachelor. This issue was one of the minor problems during my semester that took in the end quite some time. As a result of that I did part of my major and my whole minor in Zurich, I had the option to select from a vast list of courses of all faculties. The enormous choice I had, was quite difficult to handle, but before my first week of classes started I had selected a list of certain courses that looked compelling to me. Eventually, I attended all in the first week and afterwards made a selection of the courses I wanted to follow during the semester. This is also my advice for prospective exchange students: first select than attend and than make a decision.

In the end I did the following courses:

- A primer in Entrepreneurship (3 ECTS)

A primer in Entrepreneurship mainly focused upon the principles how to start your own venture. The lectures were't that challenging, but the lecturer was informative and highly committed. However, I have to make a notion of that the exam in comparison to the classes has been significantly more challenging.

- Development Economics (6 ECTS)

Overall, I would say that this was my favorite course that I attended in my exchange. The course in development economics dealt with the question why some countries grow faster than others and was fully based on academical papers. During the class the lecturer talked about different policies, like the prevention of AIDS and malaria, and explained the macro-economical consequences. However, notion has to be made that although it was very interesting it was also most time consuming.

- Agent-Based Models in Financial Markets (3 ECTS)

The course in agent-based modeling was taught by a quest lecturer who was professional involved in agent-based modeling. This addition feature made the course very practical and highly interesting. Although the course was part of a master program, the assessment of the course wasn't too hard. In the end I had to make my own case-study about an agent-based model and present the results to the other students. I would definitely recommend this course to both students who are want to take their first steps in modeling financial markets and more advanced students.

- Animals and Humanities(3 ECTS)

As I wanted to explore a different subject for my minor I selected a course from the Faculty of English literature and linguistics. To sum up the course: it was a combination of evaluating literature and philosophical articles that focuses around the connection between animals and humans. Overall, the course was highly interesting and I was able to follow the course without any knowledge in English literature or linguistics.

- Cultural Contact and Exchanges: Theoretical Approaches (3 ECTS)

In addition to my course in Animals and Humanities I took another course in English literature and linguistics. Both the material and lectures were very interesting and very interactive. During the semester we had two quest-lecturers who talked about their work, which was a very nice addition to the course. In general, I would highly recommend both English literature and linguistics course to someone who is interested in exploring new topics outside their usual curriculum.

- More than Cheese and Chocolate: Switzerland in the Modern World (4 ECTS)

The last course that I had selected was one especially designed for exchange students. During classes we spoke about the political system, cultural phenomena and the country’s history. The course was very fun to attend to and not difficult at all. Moreover, besides the classes we also made an excursion to a canton in Switzerland to see a cultural feast for ourselves. I strongly recommend this course to every foreign student who visits Zurich. It was very interesting and nice additional topic that I could discuss with local Swiss people.

Finances

A general fact about Zurich is that daily life is very expensive. Going out to a cafe, restaurant or club is in general costly. Moreover, the prices you pay for food and public transport are not comparable to the prices in the Netherlands. Thus, before you decide to come to Switzerland make sure you are willing and able to spend quite an addition amount above you are usually used to pay.

Rent - 670 CHF per month	Scholarship - 2100 CHF
Cost of Living - 50 CHF per week	OV compensation 100 CHF per mont
Social Life - 60 CHF per week	
Transport - 60 CHF per month	
Traveling - 600 CHF	

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Daily Life

The beautiful scenery, international city, old main university and vast free choice of sport more than compensated for the high prices. On average I had about two to four hours of classes from Monday till Thursday, and therefore quite a lot of time free to spend. Most of the time I would meet up in the afternoon to have lunch in one of the many mensas and afterwards go for classes or some sport. During the weekend I would mostly head into the center with my roommate



or some friends to explore the city or go for a swim in the lake. Zurich is really worthwhile and has a lot to offer in terms of culture. There are several art museum, an Operahaus and concert halls. Moreover, the city is located next to the Zürisee, which I would highly recommend for a swim in the summer.

During the night I went out in the several diverse clubs that Zurich has to offer. In general Zurich has a great night scene and a broad diversity of different clubs, yet I advice is to watch your money, because otherwise you will end up with an empty wallet the next morning. Moreover, I also travelled around to the French part of Switzerland, Lausanne, went for a hiking trip in Graubunden and top it off visited the Oktoberfest in Munich. Overall, there are a lot of options when you get bored of Zurich.

Overall, I haven't regretted any moment during my exchange semester in Zurich. The combination of the beautiful old city, university and the country itself made my exchange a memorable experience and I would go back in a heartbeat.

Please do not hesitate to ask me for any questions or assistance. I wish you all the best on your exchange,

Kind regards,

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