

Exchange in Stockholm, Autumn 2016

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At Stockholm University, Stockholm, Sweden 27th August to 9th January.

I spent the fall of 2016 on exchange in Stockholm. Preparations began already in the preceding spring, as courses had to be chosen in May. The exchange coordinators in Stockholm made the whole process very straight forward and simple, and hence there isn't too much that needs to be mentioned, as the coordinators will provide applicants with all information on procedures. Other preparation necessary is of course flight tickets, which Norwegian or SAS Youth offers at a very reasonable price from Amsterdam. (around 80-100€ return tickets).

The real challenge of an exchange in Stockholm however is finding accommodation. The university in Stockholm offers accommodation for exchange students that is located at "lappkärsberget" a.k.a "Lappis". 2/3 of applicants usually find housing here. I was not so lucky. Finding accommodation in Stockholm is not an easy task; I had no luck going through "blocket.se" and other housing sites. I was lucky enough to in the end find a place to stay in the city center through a friend of mine, who at the time had a room available for the fall. However, towards August it seemed like short stay apartments began emerging in Facebook groups, hence that is most likely the easiest way to find a place to stay.

I arrived a week late due to an internship, and hence I was unable to participate in the introduction week. I would highly recommend participating in this if possible, as all practicalities are apparently explained there. I was not informed about how this would work as I could not participate, so I had to find out by myself. During the introduction week, there are also bus-tours from the airport straight to the city organized for international students upon arrival. Alternatively, you can take the Arlanda Express straight from the airport to the central station; this takes 20 minutes and costs 150kr. Upon arrival on campus, I simply went to the information desk at "Studenthuset" where most things were sorted out within a short amount of time, after which I was ready to begin my exchange properly. I highly recommend signing up for "studentkortet" (student card), as this makes you eligible for student discounts in numerous stores, transport and activities around the city. In the first week, there are also additional introductions and get-to-know events for exchange students, that then continue in following few weeks. These are sometimes shared with Swedish students that begin their first year, creating a great opportunity for you to also meet locals.

The lectures begin straight away after the introduction week. The usual composition was around 1-2 lectures a week, 3hours/lecture, and one seminar (tutorial). Most courses have assignments that need to be completed during the course, that can give up to 20% of the marks in the exam. These are then discussed in the seminars. The exams themselves vary in length, but are usually between 3-5hours long. Every course at the faculty of economics is worth 7.5ECTS, and if you follow the suggested format of 2 courses per block, you'll end up with 30ECTS in the end. Overall the quality of the lectures has been good, with a workload that also spares you some time to explore Sweden. The four courses I chose were Intermediate Macroeconomics and Empirical methods in economics 2 in the first block, and then Economics of uncertainty and asymmetric information and International economics in the second block. NOTICE: exams for the second block are in the beginning of January, usually before the 15th. All courses would be incorporated into my elective space.

Intermediate Macro was by far the most challenging course of these; lectures were spent mostly with the professor doing calculations on the chalk board, followed by assignments that took up to 10-15 hours to complete at worst. Rather frustratingly, only 10% of the final exam was based on mathematics questions, although most of the time was spent during lectures/assignments on solving such questions. However, the lecturer provided good lecture notes, and if you studied these well enough, the exam was not too challenging to pass. 45% was needed for a pass. The second course in block 1, Empirical Methods 2, resembles Methods and Techniques at ESE. Here as well there were assignments to be completed, and STATA was to be used in doing so. Although topics were somewhat

similar to Methods and Techniques, more focus was put on understanding the technicalities behind for example difference in difference, instrumental variables or omitted variable bias. This was overall my favorite course and most helpful for thesis work in the future.

Block 2 was overall slightly slower paced than block one. International economics of course resembles ESE's course in international economics the most, with some extensions and, for me at least, new ways of understanding similar concepts. The professor also talked occasionally about his own work on the effects of a single currency on trade, adding a unique touch to the course. Economics of uncertainty and asymmetric information was the more difficult course in Block 2, with quite a lot of time needed to be spent on understanding the concepts of the course, such as agent/principal decisions, optimal contracts and insurance to mention a few. Overall a very mathematical course. For both courses in block two, being able to explain matters graphically seemed very important.

As part of your exchange you expect to also see the country you live in and enjoy your time there. At Stockholm university, you also do have the time to do so. However, Stockholm itself is not the cheapest place. Costs of living are higher than in Rotterdam when it comes to food, going out etc... In the city center, I would guess the prices for everyday food items add up to around 4-6000kr/month. In a normal restaurant, you should expect to spend around 150-300kr/ meal (main course), with occasional lunch deals offered at around 100kr. If you are planning on travelling by public transport a lot, it is recommended to get an "SL-card", which costs 560kr/month for students and allows endless travel within the Great Stockholm area. Alternatively, this can also be topped up with credit. For mobile phones, I'd recommend to go to "Comviq" and get a prepaid card, that can then be filled with as much data as you like easily online. Prices range from 100kr-300kr/month. You cannot get a contract without a Swedish personal number. There is a gym on campus, but as I lived in the city I signed up there, and paid 900kr for the three months.

Daily life in Stockholm as an exchange student consists of (apart from studying) spending time with other exchange students and experiencing what the city has to offer. Stockholm is not a city with the greatest student nightlife; many clubs can have an age restriction up to 24 years, and most charge an entrance fee, after registration. Sometimes it is necessary to sign up for nightclubs a week in advance. Every Thursday however the social sciences faculty however has its own little party house where dinners and other parties are organized. The university also has its own sports hall, where you can play badminton, Floorball, Ping-Pong, tennis etc.... Regular classes for these sports are also available.

Overall Stockholm is a beautiful city both in the winter and in the summer. When it is warmer, you can enjoy a trip out to its beautiful archipelago on a ferry, enjoy an "archipelago buffet" with your friends and take a swim in the sea. There are plenty of other places you can also visit including Drottningholm; the Royal family's summer house with its beautiful gardens. In the winter, you can enjoy an afternoon ice-skating in the city center or on the Christmas market in the Stockholm old town. Some mulled wine and ginger bread in the Old Town of Stockholm around Christmas time will for sure get you into the Christmas spirit. There are also constant trips organized by the ESN, such as cruises to Tallinn, Helsinki and St Petersburg, as well as trips to Lapland. Of course, Stockholm is not warm in the winter, so be prepared. Autumn 2016 temperatures reached as low as -8, with a sudden snowfall of around 20-30cm that stayed for a week.

I warmly recommend an exchange to Stockholm for anyone who has an interest in experiencing life in Scandinavia. Overall my exchange was definitely a memorable experience.