

## **If you don't go to Chile for exchange, you're doing it wrong!**



Hey! My name is Nikolaos Korovilas and my first choice for exchange was to study at the Facultad de Economía y Negocios (FEN) at the Universidad de Chile in Santiago. Luckily, I got it! After having an indescribable experience, it's time to tell you why this destination should be your top choice as well! Santiago is a typical metropolis; big, fast and dirty. But that doesn't take anything away from its rich culture and beauty. The European fall semester is great to go because you arrive when winter is starting to turn into spring. Whilst there's many things to do during the winter, there's more to do during spring/summer and, fortunately for you, most of your days will be spent in the warmer seasons.

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### **Preparation**

The preparation for the exchange semester at FEN in Chile is really easy. Looking back, everything was straightforward and clear. The exchange advisor is great and she will continuously contact you about the procedure, all the details needed to create your FEN account, the list of courses you can take and everything else you can possibly think of.

#### **1) Visa**

FEN accepts both student and tourist visa. I recommend (and FEN recommends) that you get a tourist visa. If you don't know, a tourist visa just means you fly there and when you enter the country at the airport they will stamp your passport, that's all. No prior visa applications or anything. Check if you're allowed to enter the country with a tourist visa, which if you're from EU you probably are.

Benefits of a student visa are a Chilean ID card (nice souvenir) and discount metro card (which you will get 3-4 months into the semester probably). Costs of student visa depend on where you're from and they can range from 50-400 euros. Also, you have to waste an entire day to get registered and get your ID card and everything. Lastly, (if you care) they may not stamp your passport when you

travel and enter and exit the country as you have to get in the country with your ID since you're registered, instead of your passport.

Benefits of a tourist visa are that you have 0 costs and just get in the country with a visa for 90 days maximum. Whenever you want you can exit the country for a trip and come back and the 90 days are renewed. The spot to go to is Mendoza in Argentina, which is a 20-30 euro bus ride each way from Santiago and close to the Chilean borders. Take the bus and visit the vineyards from where Argentinian wine comes from with the money you could have spent on a student visa! The best thing is that most students come with a tourist visa so you'll definitely find company to go anywhere if you get in a group and plan something!



## **2) Vaccinations**

Check whether you need any. Chile does not need any special vaccines, but always good to check. If you want to travel, check if you need vaccines for there. If you want to go travel to an area in/near the Amazon Rainforest, you probably need one.

## **3) Travel Insurance**

Arrange travel insurance and include skiing and watersports, if you want. In the beginning of the semester it is still winter there and FEN organises a ski trips in the Andes! Definitely a great day skiing and meeting new people! I used IPS (<https://studentsinsured.com/en>), it's cheap from my understanding and you can put the exact dates you want to be covered.

## **4) Accommodation**

It's better if you don't book an apartment from before you leave. Book a hostel for a couple of days and then find a house from there. Most people choose this way, so the hostels are filled with exchange students. I did the same and the hostel I booked (<http://hostalprovidencia.com>) was filled with people from FEN (it's close to FEN). You meet people at the hostel and/or at FEN the first couple of days and then you find a house together. There are MANY student houses ranging from 5-20 exchange students per house, so there's definitely spots available. By end of July there's not much left, so find something before then.

For me, living with many exchange students is part of the whole exchange experience. Being around people a lot of the time and having fun. However, if you don't like that you can also find a house with a Chilean resident/student and share an apartment with them. Some of my friends did that, and it's a good way to practice your Spanish! Rent can be cheaper than the exchange student houses, but even those are cheaper than Rotterdam so anything you want is feasible.

## **Courses**

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1 ECTS = 1 Chilean credit. All courses are 6 credits = 6 ECTS, therefore you need 4 courses to fulfill the 24 ECTS requirement. The semester started 19<sup>th</sup> July and ended 23<sup>rd</sup> November. The end date of the semester depends on the courses you take, more on that later.

### **Latin America in World's Affairs (LAWA)**

A very interesting, insightful and funny professor who lectures you on the socioeconomic and political situations of different Latin American countries. 2 midterms each worth 25% of the grade and based on 5 academic articles each. Final group presentation/paper worth 50%. Highly recommended.

### **Globalization, Treaties and Trade Agreements**

Same professor as above, in a course that goes hand-in-hand with LAWA. A lot of the things you learn and heavily linked to LAWA as you discuss a lot about current situations (we discussed Brexit, Trump's presidency etc. in both classes, for example). Same structure as LAWA grade-wise. Highly recommended.

### **Strategic Alliances, Mergers and Acquisitions**

Chilean professor who was an executive in a large electric company. Gives a lot of insight and personal experiences on many topics. Very interesting lectures on socioeconomic, political and cultural factors to consider when acquiring or merging with another company. Midterm worth 25%, group presentation worth 50% and final exam worth 25%. Recommended.

### **Global Development**

Course on various topics based around milenium development goals and sustainable development goals. Each lecture is a different topic, such as poverty, global warming, education etc. 3 group presentations worth 10% each and a midterm and final exam worth 35% each. Recommended.

There is a 1-2 week period in the beginning where you can add/drop courses, so don't worry. Attendance of 80% is required, except for Global Development.

The level of difficulty for these courses is below the level of difficulty you're used to in Rotterdam. All projects are group projects, which is good on exchange because you can just be around your friends when working on what needs to be done. I chose my subjects so I had class on Mondays and Thursdays only. You can do the same, or go with courses that don't have any final exams. I had 2 final exams and it was fine.

Note that all my courses I chose were taught in English. These are directed towards exchange students mostly. The exams for exchange courses (notably, courses taught in English) are very early in the exam season. Final exams started 5<sup>th</sup> November and ended 23<sup>rd</sup> November. My 2 finals were on the 5<sup>th</sup>, the very first day. They do this because they want to let exchange students finish early in order for them to spend the last times they can together, and travel (I think, could've also been a coincidence, who knows). Regardless, finishing early was a big reason why I went to Chile as we only begin back in Rotterdam in January and so I travelled for 2 months.

Courses taught in Spanish however are directed for Chilean students. These courses are quite difficult (FEN is ranked top 3 in Business and Economics in Latin America for a reason), are very time consuming, and you can have exams halfway or the end of the exam period. If you're fluent in Spanish or want a challenge to learn more Spanish you can take a non-English taught course, but they are more time consuming and you will not have as much free time.

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## **Finances**

	<b>Monthly (€)</b>	<b>Total (€)</b>
<b>Rent</b>	350,00	1750,00
<b>Costs of living</b>	350,00	
<b>Social life (restaurants, nightlife, weekend trips, and more)</b>	150,00	
<b>Transport (Uber, taxi's, metro)</b>	30,00	
<b>Insurance</b>	30,00	180,00
<b>Travelling</b>		A lot

I really wanted to stay in an exchange student house whilst on exchange and so I found one with 350 euros a month. You can find apartments with cheaper rent, 200-250 but they are in not as good areas and you'll live with another Chilean person or two. Most rents my friends paid were around 300-400 euros, and 400 euros was considered a lot. Anything above 350 isn't worth it.

Supermarkets are surprisingly expensive in Chile, unfortunately. Restaurants and other costs of living, like taxi's, are cheaper than in Europe but supermarkets are expensive for worse quality. You can save a lot by going to the La Vega mercado for all vegetables, fruit, meat etc., it's open everyday.

Costs of living, social life and transport don't have a total because it varies a lot month-by-month. I also travelled during the semester and so sometimes you use Uber more one month than the other, or you enjoy the social (night)life more one month than the other.

Finally, with travelling it all depends on you. If you want to travel for 2 months after the semester, go ahead. If you don't want to travel at all, that's cool too. You just need to budget everything yourself when you decide what you want to do, or you choose what to do depending on your budget.



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## Daily Life

Application procedure is straight forward, you'll receive emails from the exchange coordinator in Chile with all the information. Finances are different person-to-person and so are the courses chosen. But the daily life in Santiago can define your exchange experience. **So pay attention!**

Let's start with when you arrive in Chile. First of all, you can't bring any food or agricultural products. So just bring your clothes. Take either a TransVip shuttle bus which is cheap or a company taxi. There will be many non-taxi-company people asking if you need a taxi, especially if you look foreign. They'll probably ask for a high price, 30 euros or more. If you speak Spanish you can negotiate the price, one time coming back to Santiago during my travels I negotiated down to 20 euros. (I didn't know any Spanish before going to Chile, so negotiating is good practice and putting Spanish to good use as well!). But definitely just take the company taxi's or the shuttle bus to get where you want to go.

### **Where are you going to live?**

The FEN campus is on the 'borders' of the Providencia and Bellavista districts of Santiago. Preferably, you'll find your place in Providencia as it is one of the best/safest areas of Santiago. Most exchange student houses and many apartments are there, as there are many university campuses around. Outskirts of Bellavista (so from the university until the main street (Pio Nono) is good as well, but something beyond that is not recommended. **Stay in Providencia, everyone else will as well.** Everyone walked to university as well, 15-20 minutes tops.

### **What can I do day-to-day whilst in Santiago?**

As the courses are less demanding than what you're used to, you and others on exchange will have a lot of free time. As said earlier, I only had classes Mondays and Thursdays. On Tuesdays and Wednesdays I went to Spanish classes and learnt Spanish! Another 6 months and I would definitely have become fluent. Language lessons are MUCH cheaper than in Europe (and what Erasmus offers), so take the opportunity! I had 3 hours a day, but you can also do 2 hours, 3 times a week. My classes

started off with 3 of us, then it became 2, and for the last month it was private lessons basically, so you learn very fast. They give a discount for FEN students, highly recommended! ([www.natalislang.com](http://www.natalislang.com)). You can also go to the gym on campus which is free of charge, but isn't the best gym you'll go to. Every Tuesday we (the guys on exchange) 'rented' the pitch and played football. Not into football? They have basketball, volleyball, rockclimbing sessions (they have a rockclimbing wall on campus) and even free dance lessons!

### **Where will you go out for social life?**

Pio Nono is the main strip in Bellavista and it has an area of really nice restaurants (they are expensive for Chilean standards but cheaper than European standards). Furthermore, Barrio Italia is in Providencia and contains many different cafés, restaurants and pretty cool shops you can spend middays with your friends at.

### **What about the nightlife?**

Luckily, Bellavista is the place to be at night and it's close. Everything is open and the streets light up with people and music from bars and nightclubs. You'll have a party every Wednesday called 'Miercoles Po' which is where exchange students from many different universities go to, and it's a weekly standard as venues change weekly.

But **BE CAREFUL! NEVER walk alone in the side streets of Bellavista at night.** Bellavista isn't a good area and although there is nightlife in the center of the district, around it is really not good. If you have to go to a venue somewhere in Bellavista that's not in the central area walk in a big group of friends or even better take an Uber.

Furthermore, **use Uber.** Uber is cheaper than taxis, and safer. Refrain from getting into taxis alone at night. Just always use Uber and you're good, it's popular in Chile. An Uber from Providencia to Bellavista is 3 euros tops, and if you share it with friends it's negligible.

### **Eating and nightlife are cool and all, but what else is there to do?**

What isn't there to do? The first 2 months go skiing in the Andes. When the weather gets warmer (which it will, quickly) go trekking in various hills around the city. I did 3-4 treks, and I wish I had done even more! They take half a day and you go with a group of friends, get to the top, have a picnic and relax, and then come back down. Take the bus and go to the coastal city of Valparaiso for the day and see the beautiful graffiti artwork around the city (it's very famous in South America). It's only 5 euros each way. You can even go for a weekend and see Viña Del Mar and the Dunes of Concon. Or take a surf weekend trip to La Serena or Pichilemu (I had never surfed before, but it's good fun!). Want to stay in Santiago? Hike up Cerro San Cristobal for the sunset with your friends, go to the top of Costanera center, the tallest building in South America, for a view of the city or just hang around in many of the parks throughout the city. At the end of the day, there's nothing better than having a Chilean asado with friends at someones house!



### **Any final tips?**

Most houses do not have central heating and it can get quite cold at night, especially in the beginning. So just wear many layers and you'll be fine. The temperature in the winter can vary a lot, for example once it was 3 degrees at night and 19 degrees during the next day. This large temperature difference will make your throat sore for a while in the beginning, but you won't get sick or anything.

Unfortunately, Santiago has a pollution problem because it is surrounded by mountains so pollution stays over the city and doesn't go away. Those treks in the hills around the city are a good way for you to get some clean air!

I did not have a credit card (even when I travelled) and everything was fine. I recommend you get a credit card however as it's much more handy than a debit card, and credit cards are accepted in more places than your debit card.

For your mobile, buy a SIM-card at any store and get as much data as you want each month. 1GB for 1 month is about 10 euros. For many companies social media (WhatsApp, Facebook, Snapchat) is free, meaning it doesn't use any of your data. Only data is needed, you can't call outside of Chile with your phone anyways.

The electric sockets in Chile are the *thin* European ones. The adapter you use to charge your phone likely has a thin plug, but your laptop may have a larger/thicker plug. The large ones don't fit in Chile, but you can easily find adapters in any store here or in Chile.

Finally, be careful! Pickpocketing is indeed a national sport. **When you go out at night (and even during the day), NEVER take any bank cards, debit or credit.** Just take cash with you and you're fine. If you do not own any ID besides a passport (unlikely, but I had that), then just take a scan of your passport with you. It's accepted when you go out at night as well.

**When in the metro, any bags or backpacks in front of you.** If you're a girl, then don't even take a purse/bag that doesn't have a zipper to close with you to Chile (seriously, not exaggerating).

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Chile is a great place to go for your exchange semester abroad. There will be many exchange students at FEN, so you'll meet new people. If you don't speak Spanish (like I did before I went) it's a great opportunity to learn Spanish! If you understand Chilean Spanish, you'll be able to understand any other type of Spanish. If I couldn't persuade you to go to Chile, I don't know what else will. If you have any other questions, or any questions about travelling around South America, feel free to contact me on Facebook!

