

Mark Varadi - exchange semester at University of Zurich

General information

It was a truly great experience spending one semester in Zurich, Switzerland. Both personally and professionally I benefited from this exchange. University of Zurich offered excellent courses and the student community was diverse and very welcoming. Throughout the exchange semester lasting friendships were made, both with international and local, Swiss students. Zurich is a fantastic city and had a lot to offer, I was able to establish a sense of belonging from the first days onwards. The lectures/tutorials at University of Zurich were very enjoyable to attend, some are even quite interactive. Most of the course I took there were related to economics, finance and management. I was able to choose both bachelor and master level courses so I took a mixture of both. Had a total of 7 courses, which constitutes 25 ECTS.

Preparation

With regards preparations, the host university was very helpful with providing guidance and I was kept informed. I was provided with all the relevant information, so nothing came as a surprise when starting the semester. I visited Zurich during the summer, few months before the exchange semester started, to see the university campus and search for accommodation. I was also offered to stay at one of the student houses by WOKO, the student-housing organisation. However, the student house was located relatively far away from the city centre and the university, so I decided to rent out a studio downtown. Almost all of the exchange students were staying at one of these WOKO houses, so I would recommend that as it is very social.

Arrival

Upon arrival on the 5th of September, a welcoming information session was held which gave a taste into what the exchange would look like and explained the necessary administrative matters to be taken care of. So, during the first days I took care of all the paperwork and administrative matters, such as applying for a residence permit at the city hall. During the first week already, I started meeting and getting to know other exchange students and also local, Swiss students. The social network expanded very quickly, I met many most of my friends during the first two weeks. Zurich in September was particularly nice, we had beautiful weather, so did some hiking nearby and lot of activities outdoors. Many exchange students take an intensive German course during the first two weeks, which I would also recommend to attend as it is a great way to meet people.

Courses

I took 7 courses to obtain 25 ECTS in total. All courses were taught in English.

-Introduction to Game Theory (6 ECTS)

An introductory course on game theory about understanding and modelling strategic situations and its wide range of applications. It is great and useful course in economics studies. The examination was challenging.

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

This course was offered only to exchange students. We learnt about Swiss history, culture, politics, economy and a lot more. In addition an optional day-trip to one of the more traditional Cantons was part of the curriculum. Very interesting course, a nice way to learn about Switzerland. A relatively easy course to obtain 4 credits for.

-International Tax Planning (3 ECTS)

A master level course that teaches the international tax planning techniques used by large multinational companies and the relationships between domestic and international taxation. A very interesting and useful course with an excellent professor. It's rare that a university offers a course on tax planning so I highly recommend it.

-International Management (3 ECTS)

This course covers the important aspects and teaches the principles of doing business in a global and international environment. Examination was essay type and relatively easy.

-A primer in Entrepreneurship (3 ECTS)

This course teaches the basic principles of entrepreneurship, including forms of business ventures, some accounting and finance principles and aspects of starting your own venture. The concepts were easy to grasp, the exam however proved to be challenging for many students.

-Financial Markets and Institutions (3 ECTS)

A master level course. It covered topics of financial intermediation, financial institutions in Switzerland and policy issues regarding financial institutions. This is a very difficult theoretical course, but covers important concepts in quantitative finance, I found it interesting. Examination is challenging.

-Intermediate Corporate Finance (3 ECTS)

It is a seminar based, interactive course. There were four valuation assignments throughout the course there were to be solved in groups. The final assignment was about a corporate finance case of our choice, and that had to be presented at the end. It was a very good course, but quite time consuming. I highly recommend it!

Finances

Switzerland in general and specifically Zurich is an expensive place to live in. This is an important aspect to consider before deciding on going on exchange here. Going out, eating out and similar sort of activities are quite costly. I am an outgoing person, so I frequently visited restaurants, cafes and bars that resulting in higher cost of living. Exchange students are given a one-time scholarship of 2100 CHF at the beginning of the exchange period.

Rent - 600 CHF per month (an approximate amount for the student housing, studios downtown are 1000+ range)

Cost of Living - 700 CHF per month

Social Life - 300 CHF per month

Transport - 70 CHF per month

Traveling - 1000 CHF for the whole exchange period

Daily life

My days were very social and I participated in a diverse range of activities. Was proactive in organising social gatherings at various places, restaurants or frequent gatherings even in my apartment. We spent a lot of time exploring new places, visited several museums and once visited an art fair. During the Zurich Film Festival, I attended a film premiere. During some weekends, I travelled to other Swiss cities, such as Geneva, Montreux and Lausanne. The studio I was renting was in the city centre, in walking distance to almost everything. The neighbourhood was very nice. The lake was 10 minutes away from my apartment, went running or for a walk near the lake many times. In the neighbourhood there were several restaurants/cafes which served as popular meeting points for me and my friends. Zurich has a lot offer in the terms of art & culture, gastronomy and outdoor activities.