

My Exchange Semester in Vienna

by Matthijs Kooger

Introduction

I am Matthijs Kooger, Bachelor-3 student at the Erasmus School of Economics (ESE). In the Fall semester of the year 2016/2017 I studied in Vienna, the beautiful capital of Austria. I departed at the end of September and returned home before the Christmas break. During my exchange, I studied at the WU Wien; the Wirtschaftsuniversität Wien (English: Vienna University of Economics and Business).

Preparation

My preparation consisted mainly of filling in the required paperwork for my exchange. At first, the tasks seemed quite overwhelming; choosing a university, writing a motivation letter, applying for grants, applying for additional dutch scholarships (Dutch: OV-vergoeding, aanvullende (Stufi) beurs). In reality, however the actual workload is less than it seems. The deadlines are very reasonable and both the Exchange coordinator (both at home and in Vienna) and local government officials (Dutch: DUO-ambtenaren) are very helpful whenever you are in need of advice.

Course registration in Vienna is very well organized; all course syllabi are crystal clear and the registration period for exchange students is clearly indicated. My advice would be to be prepared when registering for courses; not all courses fit together and it is your own responsibility to avoid schedule conflicts. In addition, some courses are very popular and the available seats can be filled up within minutes. This however, is nothing not be worried about; there are plenty of courses and the International Office is glad to help you with all of your questions.

Another point of attention is the exchange duration. Most universities have the same division as the Erasmus University has. The fall semester starts in September and ends in December and the spring semester starts in January and ends in June. At WU however, the semester starts and ends one month later; October till January and February till July. This means that some of the courses end at the end of January (or even the beginning of February). I personally know some students who traveled back to their home university once or twice because of this. Again, my advice would be to be prepared and choose the courses that end before the Christmas break.

Also, WU offers a lot of information regarding residences and the so-called Buddy Network. It provides information on possible places to stay and it works together with Oead, an organization that has residence halls throughout Vienna and rents especially to exchange students. WU also offers 'Buddies', Senior Viennese students that help you with all of your questions before take-off and - if you are interested - can introduce you to a lot of social activities and other buddies and their exchange students.

Arrival

After finishing the required paperwork, you are almost there. You can arrive a couple of days before the semester starts to attend the mandatory information session. If you are interested, you can also attend the introduction program; exploring Vienna with other exchange students in the two or three weeks before the semester starts. I did not attend this program but everyone I know was head over heels about the program, especially the beer and schnitzel part. Furthermore, there is some additional paperwork like registering with the local authorities. This however, only takes an hour or two. In addition, Oead only permits picking up the key on the day that you are actually moving in, so that is something to keep in mind.

Except for the information session, WU does not organize activities for incoming students. However, there are plenty of organizations that do. There are parties on at least four different days every week, which are very popular among exchange students and a great opportunity to meet new people. In addition, there is a so-called student union that organizes all kinds of activities. For example, they organize a running group twice a week, but also ski-trips, city trips and even a ball in the Hofburg (!). The city itself is one of the most amazing cities I have ever seen. There are so many incredibly beautiful sights to see. Food and drink lovers came to the right place.

My courses

In Vienna I attended four courses, each worth 6 ECTS. As I said before, the schedule was an important factor in registering. I had to avoid course conflicts, as well as courses that end in January. I settled on International Accounting, Management Accounting, Principles of Controlling (Full name: Principles of Strategic and Financial Controlling) and German Business Communication B2. The courses in Vienna are mainly in seminar-format. The advantage is that there are 7 to 12 sessions for each course. The downside is the length of the sessions; four to five hours are no exception, though it is not as bad as it may seem. The level of courses was quite arbitrary; most Dutch and Belgian student thought it was feasible, while Americans and Italians had more trouble with level of the courses. This is probably caused by the fact that the level of education we receive in the Netherlands is comparatively high. All in all, I would say you will have to put in some effort but compared to the level at the Erasmus University, it is certainly doable. The last thing I would like to talk about here is the German Business Communication Course. Every student can sign up for a language assessment, after which you will be placed in class that fits your level, ranging from A1 to C1. I attended the course B2.

This course was by far the hardest for me; I put in the most effort and the level seemed pretty high. However, participation was key here and as long as you tried your best, you would certainly pass this course. I would definitely recommend this course, since it is a great way to improve on your German and earn 6 ECTS in the process.

Finances

I did not fully keep track of my finances but I would say the exchange semester can cost only a couple of hundred euro's per month. Rent costs around 450 to 500 (for me 470) and groceries I would say you can do with 100 to 120 Euro's (maybe even less). Partying and hanging out with friends will of course cost some money, as well as doing some trips around Europe. Then again, these are costs you also incur at home, plus a lot of trips are once in a lifetime occasions. As a Dutch student I received around 640 Euro's (Erasmus+, Stufi and Public Transportation/OV). My advice would be: don't think too much of spending some money. It is one of the most amazing experiences in your life and there is more than enough time to party and drink gluhwein on campus or at the famous Christmas markets throughout the city. Thanks to its central location in Europe, it is perfect to visit cities like Munich, Krakov and Salzburg.

Daily Life

The daily life is similar to the life in the Netherlands. Vienna is one of the most modern cities I have ever visited. It has great facilities and its public transportation network is at least as good as the Dutch one. The university was built in 2013 and is very modern as well. One last disclaimer: the Viennese people are known for their initial grumpiness so be prepared for some rude people. Don't let it bother you though, because when you get to know them they are not half bad (maybe lovable even).

The fall semester has been an unforgettable experience to me. I can only recommend the amazing WU with all its great people and facilities as well as the city of Vienna with its many beautiful historic landmarks.