

Exchange Report - Fall 2016

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Monthly Activity Log

September

After I got to Helsinki with my flight delay, I was picked up by 2 other tutors to the hostel and went to a Business school held exchange student party that night. We were brought to the rooftop in the KY-building and got to have chances to mingle around. There was then a week packed with orientation activities and lectures that allow you to know the other exchange students and learn more about Aalto University. At the weekend, I went to Suomenlinna and Porvoo (another Finland city that is just 55 mins away from Helsinki) in the first weekend with my other exchange friends. The weather in Sept is the best for trips among my four months here. Then, me and my friend went for a sauna party held by ESN. Just don't be surprised when you saw people naked there! I also went to a local recycling center in Espoo recommended by my other friend. You can always find a lot of recycling centers offering cheap secondhand products around Helsinki. One of them called UFF. UFF gets quite a lot of branch stores and



you can always find some discounted recycled stuff there(There is one near the KY-building in Helsinki too!). I went to Tampere to find my secondary school friend and stayed in her apartment for 3 days 2 nights. We went to the observation tower and Moomin Museum. As there is mid-autumn festival, I went to a home-hosted Chinese dinner party and another BBQ party hosted by two group of friends. In late September, a friend from HK comes to visit me and we went to Rovaniemi(Santa Claus Village), Suomenlinna(Yes, Suomenlinna again!), St. Peterburg, Turku and Estonia.

October

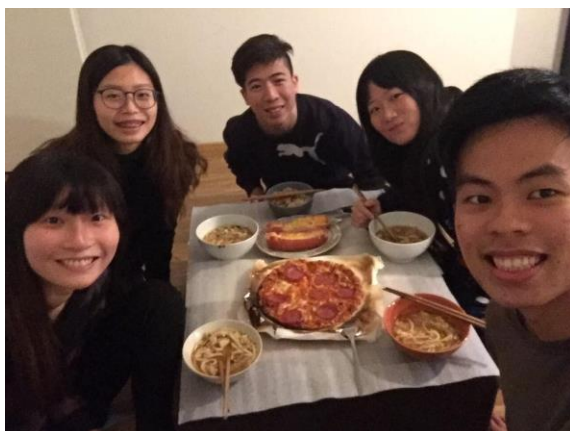


In October, another of my friend from HK comes to Finland to visit me and we go to London in UK together. If you go to UK, make sure you watch operas(you can get half price opera tickets in TKTS!). After my trip from UK, it is almost the examination period. Helsinki gets really cold after I got back from my UK trip in mid October. Sometimes I would go to study in studying rooms in Otaniemi(as I live in JMT, very close to the Otaniemi

campus) with my other exchange friends. There are quite a lot of studying areas and rooms available in Otaniemi campus but seems that many of the areas are not opened 24-7. My exams are mostly held in late October so I have spent a whole week of time studying and catching up my studying progress. Then after my exams, I went to Tampere and Japanese Day with my exchange friends.



November



In November, my exchange friends and I planned to visit some Baltic sea countries. We took the Linda Line to go from Helsinki to Estonia, then take night bus to go from Estonia to Lithuania. Lithuania, unlike Helsinki, is a bit unsafe if you travel alone. Estonia and Lithuania are relatively cheaper than Helsinki but most of the people there don't speak good English. After I got back from this trip, I

went to Eastern Europe with another HK exchange students studying in Mikkeli. We visited Warsaw(Poland), Krakow(Poland), Vienna and Prague for around 10 days. It is easy to find decent and cheap meals in Poland.



December

I went to ski with my other exchange friends in Swinghill in Espoo. It costs around 42 euros to ski for 3 hrs. It is my first time skiing but it was not a good experience. It is very



hard for you to get up once you fall and one of my exchange friends got injured and was sent to the hospital to repair her bone fracture! So be very careful in case you are planning to ski there too! There is a public holiday for all Finns called Independent Day in Dec 6. On that day, we went to hike and BBQ in the National Park.

It was quite fun but make sure you are wearing enough clothes if you are going

for any outdoor activities in December as you would get sick very easily when you stay out for too long. I went to Hameenlinna after my exam with one of my exchange friends. There are a lot of good cafes in Hameenlinna where you can spend a pleasant afternoon at. After that, I left Finland and joined my family to visit St.



Peterburg, Denmark, Stockholm and Tallin in late December before going back HK.

General Exchange Information

1) Visa Procedures

You can always apply the residence permit online with around HKD\$2600. Residence permit works the same way as Visa. If you are staying in Finland for more than 3 months, you would need one. Make sure you apply in advance as the processing time for residence permit can be quite long. But even if you can't get the residence permit before you leave for exchange, you can also ask your parents to mail it to you at the last resort.

2) Orientation Activities

For Fall Semester, Aalto has prepared a range of orientation activities to prepare you for their University lives. In the first day when I arrive, there is a party hosted in the rooftop of KY-building. We are asked to buy some drinks in advance for the activity. There is no one suggesting any activities that day and we are basically put into a situation to mingle each other. Aalto party is also arranged. The party is similar to Promotion Period in HKUST where societies would prepare games and performances for new students. In the orientation week, there are also some lectures arranged by the school to let us exchange students know more about Aalto University, as well as the logistics of courses registration. The school would also put you into tutor groups led by 2 full-time students in Aalto University, and probably they would arrange some activities among their groups in first few weeks.

3) International Services & Activities

There are a lot of activities posted on Facebook which you can join. You would probably meet the other of your exchange friends there too. Sit-sit is seemingly to be a traditional event for Finnish where participants would sit, sing and drink. There are different kinds of sit-sit events organized by your school organization like opposite-sex sit-sit and Halloween sit-sit.

Some International activities I recommend to join are International Dinner and Japanese Day. Remember to join the Facebook group of KY-sub as you can find a lot of activities to join in the page during your exchange.

4) Accommodations

I am living in JMT11 in Espoo area. It is quite close to the ontaniemi campus. You can walk there in 10 minutes.

In case you want to host any BBQ party too, just make sure you are not hosting it at your hostel like us as I've been told that AYY will charge each of the tenants 25 euros in case you activate the fire alert. As you just move to a new flat, you can request cleaning services from AYY or HOAS if you don't find the apartment in reasonable hygiene level. Note that the previous tenants would have their deposits deducted if the next tenants request for a cleaning service. For HOAS, an interesting thing is that you can reserve for free sauna online. Me and my friend always book the one in JMT10E Staircase. That sauna room is quite big(sufficient for 5-6 ppl) and gets a kitchen. You can book at most 5 slots(1hr each) a month for both sauna and laundry(for apartment rented under HOAS). Finally, if you accidentally lock your room, you have to pay around 50 euros for HOAS to open up the door.

5) Courses Registration

Most of the courses in Aalto don't get quotas. Hence, you can easily get enrolled into any of the courses you like. However, English courses may not be that readily available in every sem that I needed to take two Master level courses in the first period. Just don't be too panic in case you need to take master level courses. I personally think that master and bachelor level courses are of similar difficulties.

6) Teaching & Assessment Methods

Aalto uses absolute grading for most courses which I found it quite harsh. For example, I need to get 25 marks out of 50 marks in my final exam for Product and Inventory Management. Basically, it is pretty impossible for you to get 25 marks in a paper without any study. So 'exchange doesn't require studying effort' is just a fantasy in Aalto University. Indeed, most courses require a lot of studying effort and the workload is high. For one regular period, I would recommend to take 2 courses (three would be for those who are rather pressure-tolerant). In Fall semester, the semester is divided into 2 periods: Period I and II, each lasts for 6 weeks. One of the reasons of Aalto courses being harsh is that the courses are very intensive. You need to study the same content as one regular semester (lasts for 3 months) in HKUST in 6 weeks. If you go on any travels during the period, probably you will have a hard time catching up.

I find the courses in Aalto harder than that of HKUST. For instance, I have taken Econometrics for Finance which requires extensive use of R programming codes. And as most of the courses in Aalto are in Finnish, hence, there are not many English courses choice. That's why I have registered two master level course in Period I. But don't worry, I would say master level courses and bachelor courses are of comparable difficulties. I've heard from the others that Aalto University's Finance courses would be more difficult than the others which I agree too.

7) Sports & Recreation Facilities

There is Unisport gym facilities offered by Aalto. You can use the services after paying for around 50 euros for half a year.

8) Finance & Banking (including currency / expenses)

I spent around 70000HKD for the entire exchange trip.

9) Social Clubs & Networking Opportunities

Because there is only me in HKUST going to Helsinki, I got a bit scared coming alone at first. I

10) Health & Safety

Finland is very safe. I've heard that you can still find your phone even you leave your phone in a restaurant for half a day. I don't feel particularly unsafe going back at late night like 2AM.

11) Food

Finland doesn't get a lot of good food as compared to HK. I've once asked a Finnish and he said Finland basically gets no special dishes at all! But despite of that, you can easily find Northern European dishes like Salmon Soup in Helsinki.

Canteens of Aalto University offer cheap meals but with limited working hours(it'd close at around 4pm so you can't have your dinner at the Toolo or Otaniemi campus). However, I later learnt from my full-time friend that you can actually enjoy the discounted 2.6 Euros dinner at school-sponsored café called Uni-café. Aalto's canteens often offer buffets where you can get unlimited salad. Although it is called a buffet, you can only choose one main dish and that main dish is often limited to a specific portion. Special dishes like dishes with salmon are often charged higher than normal (i.e. around 4.85 euros).

If you miss Asian food, you can go to the Asian Markets like 東方行 in Hakaeniemi. Asian Markets are markets that sell a wide variety of Asian food. But the price is often higher than that in HK.

Also, you can directly drink the water (only cold water) out of the tap.

12) Transportation

Transportation is quite convenient in Helsinki. Most common forms of transport in Helsinki include bus, metro and trams. If you live in Helsinki Centre, you can easily travel around with trams. HSL is the transportation system in Helsinki. As I live in Espoo area, I take the unlimited two zones travel plan from HSL for around 51 euros a month. If you need only one zone unlimited travel, probably you need only 27 euros for a month.

Some of my friends pay for each journey too. For students, you need to pay only around 1.3 euros for each bus trip. And you can be offered free connecting journeys if you are transiting the bus within two hours.

Items to bring

You don't need to bring everything as you can get most of the groceries in Lidl supermarket or IKEA at fair prices. Here are something you are recommended to bring:

- router and Ethernet cable (for setting up Wi-Fi)
- warm blanket/electronic blanket (hall's heater is not enough!)
- warm clothes (in case you are not getting enough clothes, you may think of getting some in secondhanded stores)
- shoes that are WATERPROOF
- enough cash/credit card (you can settle almost every bills with credit card in Helsinki!)