



Exchange Report – Spring 2017

ERASMUS UNIVERSITY, THE NETHERLANDS

Rotterdam School of Management

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Monthly Activity Log

JANUARY

I arrived at Amsterdam Schiphol Airport in the morning of January 1st. I had my breakfast at a fast food restaurant for around €8, where I was surprised at the price level in the Netherlands. Since I registered the shuttle bus pick-up service to Erasmus University earlier, I went to the counter and saw a bunch of exchange students there. Everyone seemed tired but excited. We started talking to one another all the way to Rotterdam and bus dropped us off near our dorms. After settling down at respective dorms, we went to the closest “Albert Heijn” for grocery shopping together. Fortunately, there was still one opening on New Year’s Day in my neighborhood. A girl I met on the bus helped me fill up my grocery basket as I barely knew nothing about cooking. The first day in the Netherlands was exhausting but satisfactory.

There were fluffy snow and freezing rain all through the January. The first week has two introduction events (see below). Some classes are challenging while some are easy, but I managed to adapted well. My new friends and I started our Europe journey on the second weekend to Brussels (Belgium), followed by a 4-day trip to Paris (France) on the third weekend by skipping a few classes. The first month was really challenging since I needed to learn lots of things, including from making new friends, balancing my schedule, grocery shopping, cooking and travel planning.

FEBRUARY

Snow, patchy drizzle and chilly wind continued in February. I got more used to exchange student’s life in the Netherlands. Workload increased after the add-drop period. Dutch education tends to focus more on reading essays before class, emphasizing key points and solving problems in class, and writing assignment after class. Professors expect students to participate in class discussion, and they encourage the combination of theoretical framework and practical application. For example, the first half of the statistics course is about theory, while the second half required students to analyze real-world case by software “SPSS”. For another course, there was even a field trip to Rotterdam port, world’s largest flower auction plant, and Dutch village for students to see their operation management and information systems.

Travelling was still on despite the heavy workload. My squad and I went to Amsterdam for a one-day trip to enjoy Dutch culture and Amsterdam Light Festival on a cruise at night. In the last week, by skipping some classes, we had a 9-day trip to Berlin and Munich (Germany), Annecy (France), and Geneva (Switzerland). The second month was demanding while I learnt a lot in networking, time management and travelling abroad.

MARCH

Sunshine and delightful weather kicked in as Spring approached. My first trimester came to an end and it wasn't too difficult to pass the final exams after studying few days from merely zero knowledge. However, a final group project took me lots of time since I finished the tasks that should had been done by three people. I started with my 15-day spring break at Casablanca and Marrakech (Morocco) for 5 days. Then with my Taiwanese friend flew from Illinois, I explored southeast Europe for the rest of the time in Athens and Santorini (Greece), Vienna (Austria), Budapest (Hungary) and Prague (Czech Republic). Although desert and beach were terrible in early Spring, while I experienced a wide variety of cultures and gained more knowledge on diversity during March. It was a busy month to experience new things.

APRIL

Temperature turned comfortable along with gentle breeze. My second semester began and I noticed that much more essay reading and report writing were required. Additionally, I felt more and more stressed since I hadn't found a summer internship at the moment. Therefore, I paused the weekend's travelling routine and worked on assignments as well as internship application. In April I only visited a village in the Netherlands as one-day tour, Luxemburg – Brussels trip for 4 days, and enjoyed The King's Day in Amsterdam with my buddies. The fourth month was quite chilled that I relaxed at my room most of the time.

MAY

Weather was great while sometimes too hot in May. I had more free time as I figured out the course content. I went to Dublin (Ireland) for 4 days with a few friends, followed by enjoying Ariana Grande's concert in Amsterdam. Afterwards, I visited Barcelona (Spain) for 5 days with my UST friends, and Reykjavík (Iceland) for another 5 days with another Taiwanese friend flew from New York. I certainly was physically and financially exhausted in May, while I polished my mind and felt much released after seeing magnificent sceneries and architecture.

JUNE

Hot summer day was unfortunately horrible for me as there was no air-conditioner in my room. I stayed in dorm to prepare for final exams and projects, and I ended up passing every course without reading through most assigned essays. It was extremely difficult to farewell my best friends, my family. We had a barbecue picnic near a lake, where we watched the sunset and recalled the good old times during exchange. Then we hit an Irish live-music bar, dancing and singing along the songs we requested from the band. We hug with one another and said final goodbye under the starry night sky. Eventually, I flew back to Taiwan in mid-June. My exchange thus reached a happy but sad ending, but I am sure these 6 months would always be the most valuable memory in my life.

General Exchange Information

VISA PROCEDURES

The international student office sent an email about VISA, Course, Insurance, accommodation, etc., in late September. However, at this point the most important things is to arrange money transfer for exchange solvency and VISA fee.

In my case, I needed both entry VISA (mvv) and residence permit (see link below). In early October, the office sent an email about submitting some documents since Erasmus University helped students apply VISA. Application was approved by IND via email in late October, which informed me to collect entry VISA in Hong Kong and should pick up residence permit in Rotterdam after arrival, because entry VISA would expire in 90 day. I prepared a birth certificate (need translation) and a ISIC in winter break.

Lastly, University had a one-stop shop in early February for exchange students to register in City Hall (which required birth certificate) and arrange healthcare insurance.

ORIENTATION ACTIVITIES

There are two introduction days as orientation, which required exchange students to pay €50 earlier in December. The first one took place on 2nd of January from 9am to 11am, where staff from international office introduced curriculum and university. I met a bunch of inspiring people after the 2-hour talk by approaching random exchange students on my own. We thus had a long chitchat at campus food court and formed a WhatsApp group right after. The second event was an off-campus trip on Friday in the first week. Each exchange buddy from RSM took several exchange students around Rotterdam city. We got to know every exchange student and had a cozy dinner. It was an amazing night as I saw snow for the first time in my life when I had some shots with my friends.

I started hanging out with the exchange students I met at orientation. Interestingly, we are all from different backgrounds – Taiwanese, Japanese Brazilian, Mexican, Pilipino Canadian, Chinese Canadian, Russian American, Chinese American, American and Vietnamese Australian. We did grocery shopping, went to classes, worked out, hit some bars and clubs together all through the exchange. These people became my best friends and we even grouped up to travel around Europe afterwards.

INTERNATIONAL SERVICES, ACTIVITIES & NETWORKING

A student organization called ESN arranges numerous networking and travelling activities specifically for international students. Sometime, I went drinking at some nice bars and clubbing on weekly “ESN Tuesday” with friends. Personally, I am not a big fan of alcohol and night life, but simply enjoying the music and dancing was fascinating. For travelling activities, ESN holds both domestic and foreign trips around 2 times a month at

competitive prices. These events are good platforms to make new friends and get exposed to new experience.

Apart from that, the international office there is efficient and staff are very friendly. It holds some quality networking activities occasionally as well. Also, it was quite interesting that the office sent an email to all incoming exchange students from Hong Kong (because someone requested), letting us to form a WhatsApp group in advance to arrival.

ACCOMMODATIONS

It is very important to arrange accommodation as early as possible. Most students apply to on-campus F-building's reserved dorms (€530+ monthly rent) at SSH, an external housing organization partnered with Erasmus University. In October, the application system opened while I failed to catch up because all quotas are gone quickly. Therefore, I struggled in finding accommodation via Facebook groups for a month, since every owner required tenants to see the places in person. Fortunately, in November I saw a property listed on SSH at a cheaper price (€430+ monthly rent) and with a satisfactory 15-minute walking distance away from campus. I thus booked the dorm room right after by paying 2-month rent in advance. However, I found it so separated from most exchange students that I didn't have any cooking partner to learn from or share dishes.

A set of brand-new kitchenware and internet cable were ready in my single room upon arrival. A well-equipped kitchen, shower room and toilet were shared between me and another guy. I bought a second-hand Wi-Fi router and a used bike via Facebook group immediately because I felt awfully inconvenient without them.

COURSE REGISTRATION

For Rotterdam School of Management, course registration for second (January to March) and third trimester (April to June) took place in early November. The international office provided a list of courses available to take in various faculties, with a minimum requirement of 15 ECTs and maximum of 30 ECTs each trimester. However, I registered lots of extra courses as I was told that exchange students have two add-drop periods in the beginning of respective two trimesters.

It is noted that exchange students from HKUST are not allowed to take any course in Erasmus School of Economics, the only faculty having finance course. Therefore, I only took the following courses transferrable to IS and common core.

Trimester 2:

BABo8: Applied Business Methods

BAD14: Business Information Management

BAEo6: International Business -The Dutch Way

Trimester 3:

BAD01: Innovation Management

CM2029: Digital Media Analysis

CM2038: Cultural Identities and New Media

FINANCE AND BANKING

Living expenses in Europe are generally expensive, especially in food and accommodation. Dining out could easily cost around €15 for a proper meal, and a fast food set took me around €7 too. Therefore, I always cooked by myself in Rotterdam whenever possible. That said, except for rents, I spent on travelling mostly. Although I took budget airlines and lived in youth hostels, I on the other hand had expensive but authentic local food and enjoyed costly famous landmarks. Expenditure varies extensively depending on how you travel and eat on daily basis, but great amount of expense should be expected.

Dorm Rent (€435*6)	€	2,610
Flight from Taiwan	€	400
Insurance	€	400
Travelling + Living	€	5,560
	€	8,970

Opening a bank account once receiving the residence permit is essential because debit card usage is very common and efficient in Dutch society and Europe. P2P payment and online purchase can both be achieved by debit card across Europe. In addition, a prepaid credit card (top-up base) could be bought from supermarket in case some online vendors accept VISA or MasterCard only.

SPORTS & RECREATION FACILITIES

Exercising is especially popular for university female students in the Netherlands that I saw many girls doing cardio or taking yoga classes. I registered a 6-month gym membership at around €70. Erasmus University's sport center has sufficient indoor courts for various sports, plenty free sport classes where you could exercise with other students, a nice café to enjoy cheap food, and a nice fitness center for cardio and strength training. I liked the life of exchange where I had free time to work out almost every day.

FOOD & GROCERY

I did grocery shopping twice a week because I usually cooked by myself, saving money for travelling. I often bought meat and vegetable from "Albert Heijn" due to the high quality, standardized goods from ALDO because of the cheap prices, and fruit and fish from open market outside Markthal Rotterdam. There's a China Town near central station providing a variety of Asian food as well. Some groceries in the Netherlands are even cheaper than those in Hong Kong despite of the high price level.

DATA PLAN

Never ever use “Lebara” although many people recommended it. Its rate may seem competitive and you may see numerous channels to receive free SIM cards, including at airport and inside ESN package. However, the data is only valid domestically and prices from other companies are greater. I bought Lebara at airport and regretted soon after I saw my friends using “Vodafone” abroad at a cheaper price than mine, while I couldn’t even access the Internet outside the Netherlands. Moreover, there’s no enormous need to use data in the Netherlands as University and public transportation have free Wi-Fi. In short, never be tricked by Lebara’s marketing tactics of high accessibility and bombarding advertisement.

Items to Bring

1. Passport, Visa, birth certificate (with translation) and other relevant documents
2. Water-proof coat (better with secure pockets)
3. Cash (enough for the first 2 weeks before the bank account is opened)
4. Instant noodles (for first few days)
5. Spice (in case homesick)

Useful Links and Contacts

VISA PREPARATION

<https://www.rsm.nl/rsm-for-your-exchange/master-exchange/practical-information-need-to-know/visa-immigration/>

INSURANCE

<https://www.rsm.nl/rsm-for-your-exchange/bachelor-exchange/practical-information-need-to-know/medical-insurance-health-care/>

SECOND-HAND MARKET

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/commoditymarketrotterdam/?ref=bookmarks>