

# Hong Kong University of Science and Technology

## Spring 2018 SBM Exchange Program



LAM, Ching Yin  
IS & ECON

## January



On Registration Day, we applied for bank accounts, residence permit cards and IESN membership. We also bought our bikes and tried some local snacks. Here I met my best exchange buddies and flatmates from Singapore.

During TOP week, we were divided into groups and joined the city tour, which brought us to the city's attractions and best restaurants, we tried out different local food. At night activities such as group competitions and pub crawls allowed us to know fellow exchange students better.

We also joined the Winter Cantus. A Cantus is a Dutch traditional activity, where thousands of students gather in a stadium to drink and sing karaoke with a live band at the same time. It is a must try activity given the opportunity.

## February



Since southern provinces of the Netherlands like Tilburg are Catholics, we celebrate the Carnival Week (Mardi Gras) in February. During this week, people wear fancy costumes in orange and green, dance and party with friends.

The biggest celebration, however, is held in Cologne, Germany, which is not far away from Tilburg. We were late to book and all hotels in Cologne are full, so remember to prepare early if you are interested in the activity.

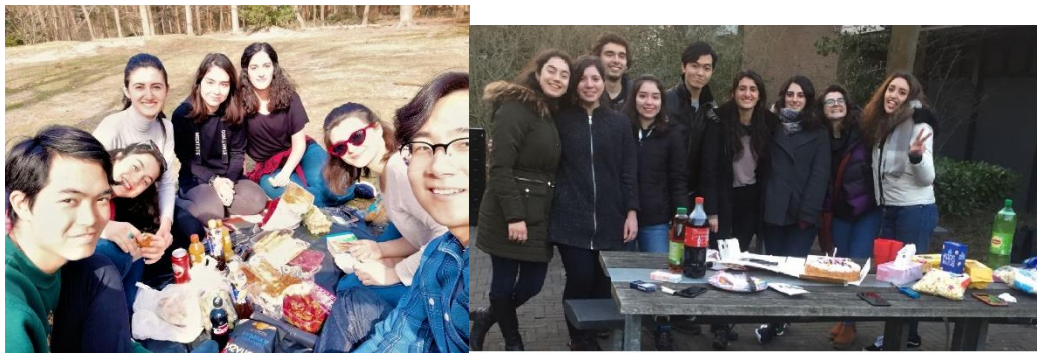


## March



I do not have any midterm examinations, so I had plenty of time for a solo trip during the mid term break. I find this the best time to go to Iceland, as the glaciers and ice caves have not molten, the night is still long enough for auroras and the weather is not too harsh for travelling. (I even managed to join a snorkeling session in a lake at 2 °C!)

## April



As the weather gets warmer, we begin to enjoy more outdoor activities. My friends and I explored the forest behind the university, which is a beautiful, serene site for picnics. We also bought a grill and organized barbecue nights.

## May



Most of the examinations are held in May. My exam schedule was packed and slightly stressful. Since most of my exams end early, my friends and I grabbed our chances and travelled to different attractions in the Netherlands, including Giethoorn and Keukenhof. We also travelled to Italy for a week.

## June



My last exam takes place on 5 June. After returning from my final trip to Switzerland, I checked out from my room, sold my bike and closed my bank account, before heading back to Hong Kong. I sent a form by mail to inform Gemeente Tilburg of my departure.

### i. Visa Procedures

Students who would stay in the Netherlands for more than 90 days apply for a student visa. Instructions to initiate the visa application process will be emailed shortly after the acceptance letter. The university recommends that the immigration fee for Dutch entry visa (MVV) application be submitted within seven days.

The application fee is 317 euros, payable by credit card. The process must be done through the university. An officer from the University immigration office will be assigned to each student. The officer is responsible for providing all required instructions for immigration thereafter.

### ii. Accommodation

While students can rent their own housing within Tilburg, the University does recommend the student housing system – Your Room in Tilburg. Soon after students are accepted they will receive an application ID for the system. The system will be open for application in mid-November, and students are encouraged to apply as soon as possible as competition is fierce.

The system mainly accepts application for rooms in Professor Verbernelaan (near the University) and Talent Square (near the city center). Professor Verbernelaan (a.k.a. Verbs) is highly recommended as it is where most international student activities are hosted in. Rooms there are also spacious, tidy and convenient to access, as it is just 5 minute walk away from the University.

Please note that there are no lifts in the housing units, so second and third floors would be better choices for easy access and quiet nights. Some rooms (such as verbs 50) come with convenient individual bike storerooms (otherwise your bike might to share a shed with everybody else and be tempered by weather). While most of these rooms are on the third floor, I do recommend students to ask the housing agent for information before applying.

### iii. Orientation Activities

Tilburg University organizes an extensive set of orientation activities to ensure that students are well prepared

for the semester.

The exchange programme starts with a mandatory Registration Day, which is normally held on mid to end of January. On that day, students can register for local bank accounts and make appointments with Gemeente Tilburg (the Tilburg Municipality) for application of the residence permit card. They can also buy second hand bikes from the local bike shop and register to be a member of the international student union (I\*ESN)

In the week to follow, the I\*ESN hosts the TOP week (orientation week). During this period of time, students learn all necessary information for survival in town and the university. Through city tours and night time activities, students are introduced to the best restaurants, shopping areas, bars and clubs in town. It is also the week in which students make friends with all other exchange students from around the world. It is good to note that the deadline of the TOP Week is shortly before the Registration Day.

#### iv. Course Registration

While the HKUST credit transfer database shows that many courses are transferable from Tilburg University, it is also important to note that course schedule changes and many of the courses on the list are no longer active. It is therefore necessary to check the schedule and make plans as soon as possible.

Tilburg University requires students to submit their Final Study Plan before the beginning of January, while language courses are open for application from late December. Students interested in language courses are encouraged to apply as soon as possible as quotas are limited.

#### v. Teaching and Assessment Methods

Most courses have two-hour lessons once to twice per week, with tutorials. Some courses take attendances or encourage attendance through pop quizzes. While I wouldn't say Tilburg is a harsh university, the workload is not light either. Passing rates of some demanding courses such as Morality of Commercial Life 30J302 and Econometrics are lower than other subjects. Economics classes here are also more technical than those in HKUST. The courses I took did not have mid term exams, but do include final exams and projects.

#### vi. Social Clubs/networking and International Activities

Students are greatly encouraged to join the IESN membership (Membership fee is 50 Euros). The society caters international students and holds activities for students who study abroad. Apart from the TOP week, IESN also hosts regular themed parties and pub crawls, as well as occasional short trips to other countries such as Poland. It also has its own bar (Carpe Noctem) that sells cheap drinks to members only, and is a good place for having fun with new friends.

#### vii. Sports and Recreation Facilities

The University Sports Center is just next to Verbs. For access, you need to pay 22 euros membership fee per month. It is worth the price, however, as it comes with all kinds of sports classes, such as skating, Zumba, cricket etc. You can also join sports clubs for regular practice.

#### viii. Finance and Banking

On Registration Day, there will be a counter which helps you register for a bank account in ABN Amro, a Dutch bank. Visa Application requires students to submit around 6000 Euros of living expenses to the University, which will be reimbursed when you have a local bank account.

On exchange, the monthly expenditure is expected to be 700 to 1000 euros (excluding travelling.) Most local supermarkets and restaurants support payment by debit card. Dutch bank accounts allow online payments through a system called iDeal.

#### ix. Communication, Health and Safety

While the Dutch do appreciate you learning their language for fun and as a sign of respect, most Dutch speak fluent English. Hence you would find little difficulty in communicating with the local people.

The Netherlands is one of the safest and cleanest cities in Europe. Personally I never encountered any crime or hostility during my stay. Yet I do recommend students to lock their bikes well as has been a small number of cases of bike theft in town.

#### x. Climate

The Dutch climate is mild during the Spring semester. In winter, even when it snows the temperature rarely drops under -5 °C. In summer, temperature goes from 25 to 30 °C. A snow jacket and normal summer and winter wear is enough to encounter the most extreme weathers in the Netherlands.

#### xi. Transportation

Named the country of bikes, the Netherlands has one of the world's most developed cycling lane systems. Cycling lanes are safe and easy to adapt to, especially with workshops provided by the university. I strongly encourage students to buy a bike for daily transportation. On budget, you can get a decent second-hand bike for under 100 Euros. Yet if you are a sporty person who plan to take on intercity cycling trips like I did, I would suggest a slightly larger investment. Since busses are expensive and taxis are seldom seen, bicycles are always the means of short distance transportation. By the end of the semester you can sell your bike and get back a portion (usually 50%) of the money.

Domestic train tickets tend to be expensive in the Netherlands. Yet, with 50 Euros you can buy a yellow personal OV chip, which gives you and 3 companions 60% off during non-peak hours.

#### xii. Food

While not having tasty traditional meals, the Netherlands is home to many delicious local snacks. In the market, it is easy to find the famous stroopwafels (syrup cookies), poffertjes (mini pancakes), harling (preserved raw fish), kibbeling (fried cod) and fries.

With a large number of overseas Chinese in the country, the Netherlands also serves the best Dim Sum in Europe. With easy access to Chinese food in restaurants and Asian stores you can easily find comfort when you are homesick.