

Exchange Report

Aalto University, Finland



Lee Ka Wing (ECOF Year 3) – Fall 2018

Monthly Log

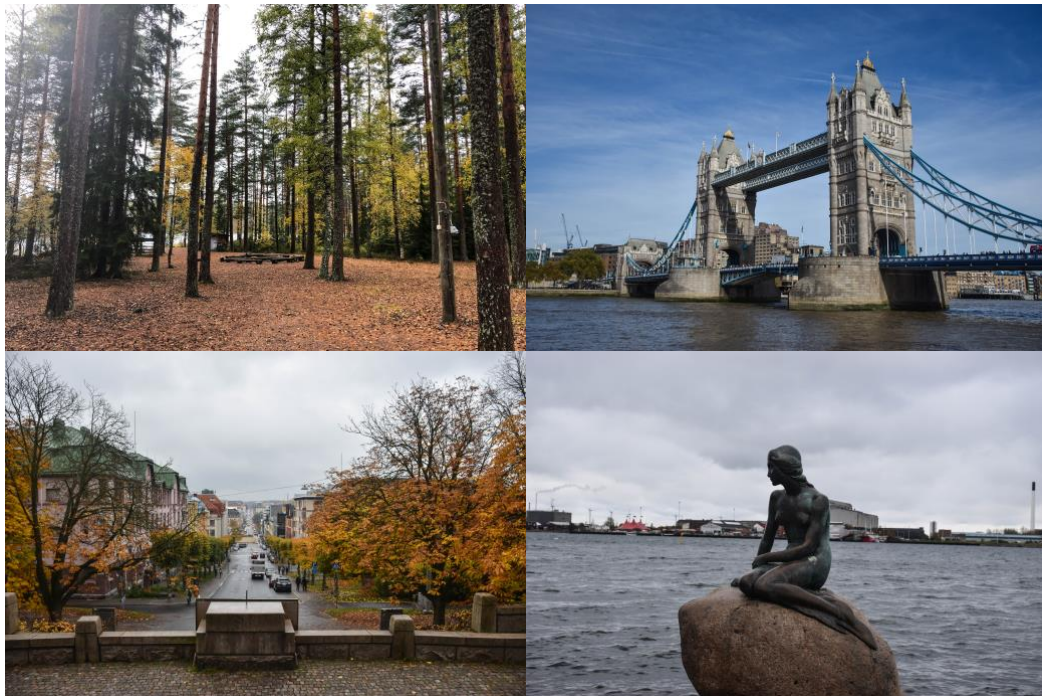
September

I arrived in Helsinki in early September and was picked up by a tutor to my accommodation. The first week was for orientation events. I met my tutor group, walked around the campus and received important information for the upcoming few months. Classes started in the second week. The weather in September is the loveliest and most suitable for travelling. But instead, I spent time touring around the city, visiting the Helsinki Cathedral, Suomenlinna, the National Museum of Finland etc.



October

I joined a cottage trip organized by KY-Sub. The bonfire, sauna and bright stars made it an incredible experience. I travelled to London and Brighton alone for a week. It was the best part of my exchange. Exams in the first period took place shortly after I returned from England. Besides England, I also went to Turku and Copenhagen.



November

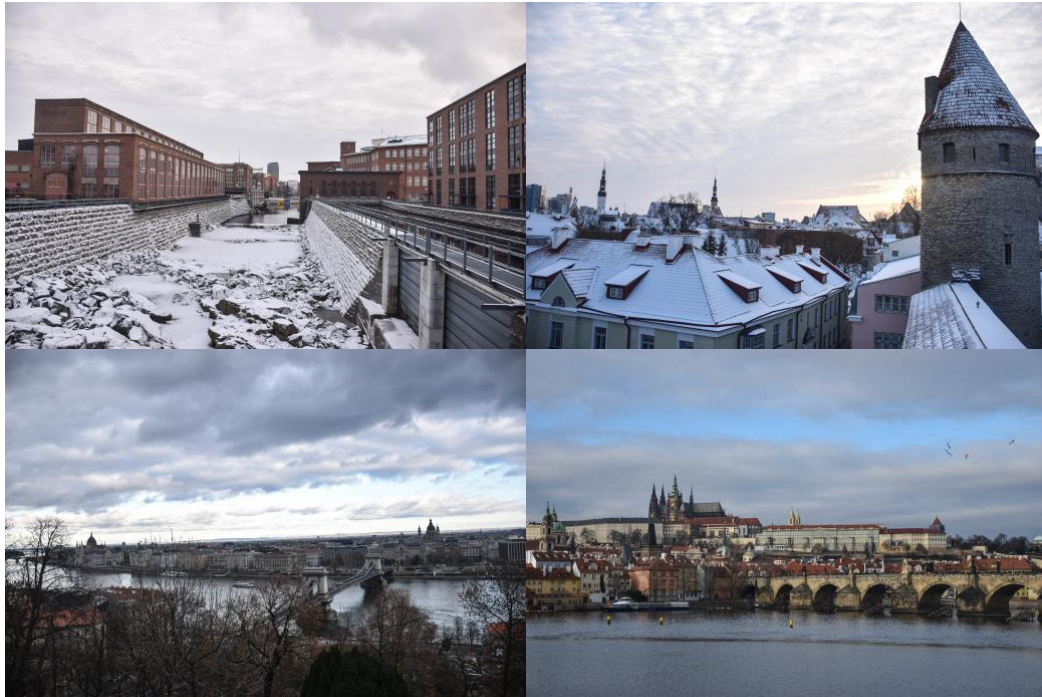
The second period started. It was quite a tough month with a number of deadlines. I watched Helsinki Grand Prix 2018 and was amazed by stunning performances. I made a hike to Nuuksio National Park. The vibe was entirely different from Hong Kong. I went to St. Petersburg and Lapland with KY Sub. The Russian trip was a nice one with ballet show, palace and cathedral visits. But we lacked little luck in Lapland. We failed to see northern lights because of the thick clouds, and barely missed husky ride due to low level of snow. I had my first skiing there.



December

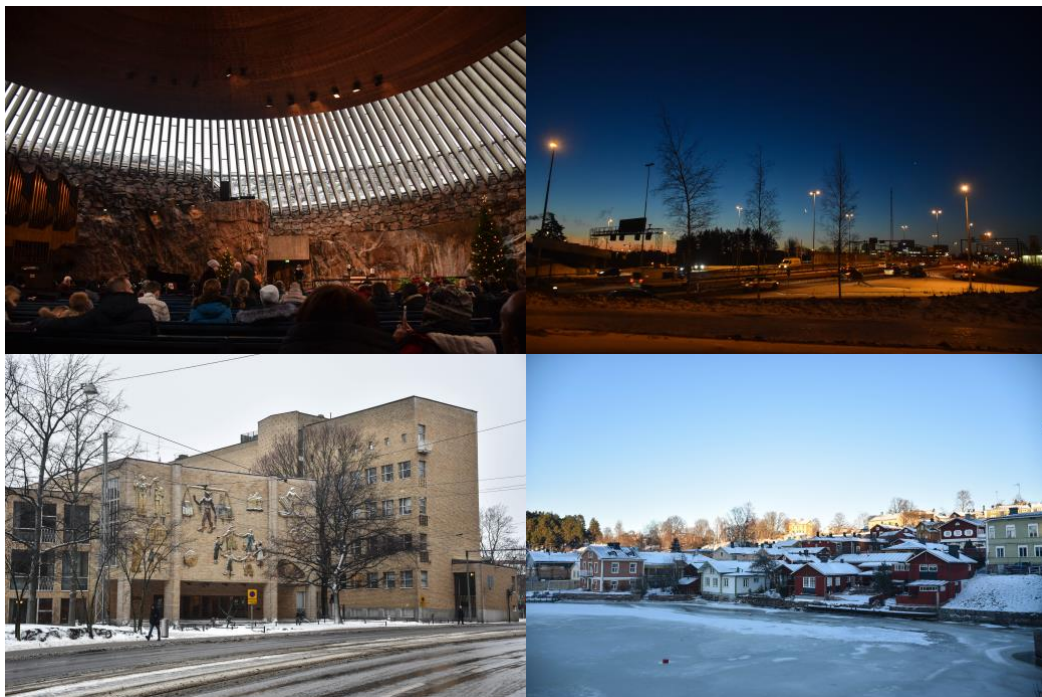
Final assignments and exams in the second period were done. I volunteered at Slush as a member of Sustainability Team. I watched an ice hockey game which was entirely a thrill. I highly recommend it when visiting Finland. We also did skating in a small ice rink next to Rautatieasema. I travelled to Tampere, Porvoo, Tallinn, Budapest and Prague.





January

Finns are allowed to set fireworks only on 1 January. It was interesting to see them up close from my room as new year celebration. I visited Porvoo and some other places in Helsinki before returning to Hong Kong.



General Information

Visa Procedures

HKSAR passport allows visa-free entry in Finland/Schengen area for 90 days. Since the study period is longer than that, a Finnish Resident Permit is required. Aalto will send an information pack approximately 3 months before exchange, enclosing an acceptance letter, guidelines for residence permit and accommodation applications etc.

Orientation Activities

A semester starts with a week of orientation. Before arriving in Finland, you will be reached by two tutors. Most time during the week was spent with the tutor group. The first day of orientation was by school of business, giving out information more on the academics and studies side. Tutors will also bring you to the HSL office applying for student transportation card. The second day was for all new students. It was more about practical details of staying in Finland, e.g. emergency and medical services.

International Services & Activities

KY-Sub welcomes all exchange students and organizes events and trips for knowing each other. I heard that they have parties every weekend at the KY building.

Events/Trips by KY-Sub:

- Welcoming Evening
- Mursulaiva: Trip to Estonia
- Cottage Trip
- Pub Crawl
- Trip to St. Petersburg
- International Sit-sit Party
- Trip to Lapland
- Farewell Evening

Accommodation

Aalto has no student dormitories. Instead, organizations like HOAS (Foundation for Student Housing in the Helsinki Region) and AYY (Aalto student union) provide housing to students. HOAS has furnished flats and AYY does not, but there are furniture-providing companies. The housing problem in Helsinki is tense. It is highly recommended to jot down application start dates and apply for it once open. To increase the chance of receiving a housing offer, it is suggested not to select any regions or criteria.

I accepted a HOAS offer located in Kilonrinne 10 in Espoo. The room itself is private, while spaces like kitchen and toilet are shared with 2 other people. You may have to arrange extra accommodation e.g. in hotels or hostels in case you are going to stay in Helsinki after the tenancy agreement has ended.

Course Registration

Before submitting an exchange application in HKUST, it is better to have an idea of which courses in your curriculum can have credit transfer. Aalto in later months will send out English courses information and availability. They will also ask you to fill out a survey on which courses you are planning to take in Aalto.

During my exchange semester, there were two periods, one from September to October and the other from November to December. Most courses with exam last for one period and very few may run for two periods. Course registration is completed in WebOodi and for one period. Therefore, registration was done twice throughout the semester. Note that each registration includes an exam time slot, additional registration was not needed.

Teaching & Assessment Methods

You may have to register master courses in Aalto for credit transfer of 4000-level courses in HKUST. Though most courses I took were master courses, difficulty and workload had a huge variance. Quite an amount of readings/work outside class were generally expected. Absolute grading was widely used, but exams were manageable.

Sports & Recreation Facilities

UniSport provides gym services and regular sports practices to university students. However, you had to pay AYY membership fee (around 50e) in order to enjoy UniSport. In fact, there are several 24/7 gym outlets in the city with access at a lower price.

Finance and Banking

Finland adopts Euro as its currency. Visa and Mastercard credit and debit cards are widely accepted, barely for UnionPay and American Express. Most banks in Hong Kong offer a UnionPay bank account card, so you cannot use it in Finland. I opened an OP bank account using my passport, Finnish residence permit and Aalto acceptance letter, and mostly used their Visa Electron (debit) card afterwards.

Living costs in Northern Europe are relatively high compared to other European countries. But the total expense for several months greatly depends on how much you eat out and travel.

Social Clubs & Networking Opportunities

Besides KY-Sub, there are also a lot of interest clubs and academic societies. In Finland, the start-up culture has been commonly promoted. Entrepreneurship events like Slush, Dash etc. are wonderful opportunities for networking.

Health & Safety

Finland is very safe. The Finns have high social trust and security. You can find lost items easily, having them stolen is a rare case. However, it is still better to stay alert of the drunk people. Finns drink a lot of alcohol and drunk men appear regardless of time. Luckily people around are helpful and willing to help if you get into some situations.

Food

Cooking is the best way to save food expenses. Eating out is remarkably expensive and prices do not guarantee quality. There are few supermarket labels. Lidl offers food at the cheapest, followed by K-market. Asian food cannot be found in normal supermarkets but in Asian stores located in Hakaniemi.

Upon showing Aalto student proof, meals at school canteens can cost as low as 2.6e. A student meal includes salad, one main dish and two drinks.

Finnish food include lingonberries, reindeer meat, salmon, meatballs etc. Karelian pastries, cinnamon buns, salmiakki and Fazer chocolates are also worth a try. The Finns consume the greatest amount of coffee in the world. You can easily spot coffee shops around.

Caverna provides Asian buffet for 12.9e during lunch time. Konstan Molja is a Finnish buffet restaurant with reindeer meat, smoked salmon and beef etc. at a price of 20e. The soup buffet at Karl Fazer Café costs 10.9e. It has three types of soup, one is always salmon soup with the other two changing daily. For cheap eats, Sky Express at Kamppi has huge pizzas with soft drinks at low prices.

Transportation

Public transportation in the Helsinki region have trains, metro, buses and trams, and covers cities like Espoo and Vantaa. If you travel within Helsinki/Espoo/Vantaa, an internal ticket is required. Otherwise, a regional ticket is needed for travelling from Espoo or Vantaa airport to Helsinki.

There are two types for you to choose on: monthly ticket and top-up plan. For the former, you have to renew your card on a monthly basis. The latter works exactly like the octopus card in Hong Kong. Before taking any transportation, you have to choose the region of your destination and tap your card.

Climate

Finland is known for its coldness. Make sure you have enough clothes for the temperature. It is important to have waterproof jacket and boots for snowing. Unlike Hong Kong, Finland has indoor heating. It is comfortable to wear short sleeves when you are inside.

Communication

Most Finns speak Finnish, Swedish and English fluently. There were no communication issues.

Items to Bring

- Waterproof jackets
- Waterproof boots
- Gloves
- Beanie
- Scarf
- Swimsuit
- Camera
- Router and ethernet cables
- Medicine
- Cash and credit cards
- Bed linen and blanket (provided by HOAS, optional)

Useful Links and Contacts

- HOAS – <https://hoas.fi/en/>
- AYY – <https://ayy.fi/en/housing/>
- WebOodi – <https://oodi.aalto.fi/a/etusivu.html>
- MyCourses – <https://mycourses.aalto.fi/my/>