

# EXCHANGE REPORT

## Aalto University, Finland

Spring, 2019

Me walking up the snowy hill to go to school

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## Monthly Activity Log

### January

The orientation for Aalto University was on 3<sup>rd</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup> January, I wanted to explore Helsinki before the school begins so I arrived Finland early on 31<sup>st</sup> December and celebrated the new year of 2019 in Helsinki. The first month of my exchange period was mostly to settle down, getting use to the cold weather and attending classes in campus.

For travelling, I went to St. Petersburg for four days with my UST friend who is also my flat mate. It is super affordable to go by bus from Helsinki to St. Petersburg since these two cities are super close by. Out of all the cities/countries I have visited during this exchange, I would say St. Petersburg is the prettiest and most memorable out of all.



### February

February is mostly for attending lectures and exams. I went to the Chinese New Year Festival and went ice skating in central Helsinki with my friends. After finishing all exams, I went to Estonia with my flat mates. Tallinn (Estonia) is only 2 hours cruise journey away from Helsinki, it is a really nice city to spend the weekend. My flat mates and I also hosted gathering and played Majong to celebrate all of us finishing our exams in that period.

### March

March is the start of period 4 (second period of the spring semester). I only had one online course for this period so I started doing more travelling. I went to Santa Claus Village in Rovaniemi and saw northern lights. I also went to Estonia (again), Germany, Poland, Denmark and Sweden with my friend in Denmark and flat mates.



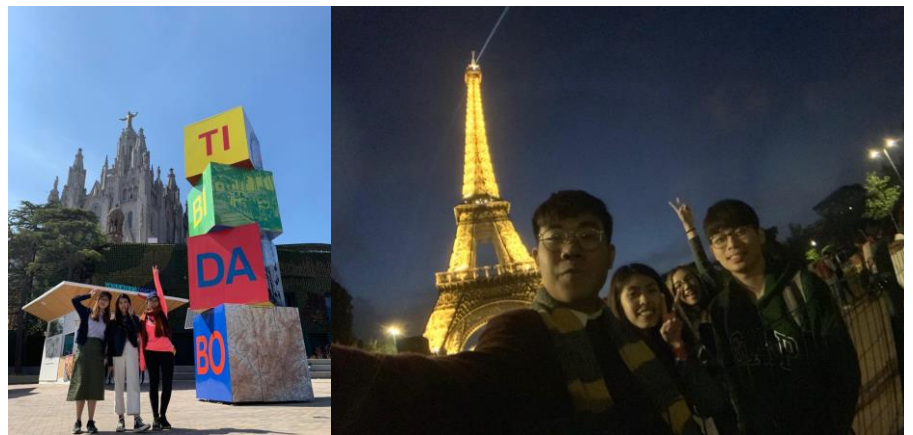


## April

I finished the assignments and exams of the only course I got this period and my parents came to visit me so we did some travelling together. We went to Austria, Slovakia, Hungary and Czech. We also visited Porvoo which is a gorgeous city with an hour bus ride away from Helsinki. After I came back from the trip, me and my flat mates went to the amusement park in Helsinki and also organized some gatherings in our apartment.

## May

I originally planned to end my exchange on the last day of April but I couldn't resist exploring more European countries so changed my flight to the end of May. Some of my friends in Hong Kong came and we went to France, Belgium and Spain. I visited the national park in Espoo which is a perfect way to end my exchange experience.



## General Exchange Information

### 1) Visa procedures

Hong Kong passport already allows you to stay in Finland for a certain number of days. But if you plan to stay in Finland for more than 3 months, it is required for you to apply for a resident permit. The price for one is around \$2xxx. They might require you to submit required documents such as your bank statement (proving that you have enough money for your stay in Finland), insurance documents (you can submit the insurance that UST offered to you) and your University offer letter (Aalto university should have sent to you by email).

I applied mine online on 11<sup>th</sup> Dec and got my resident permit on 27<sup>th</sup> Dec. I would say I applied quite late since I got it three days before my flight. It is best if you apply one month ahead to make sure you get it before your exchange starts. Just a warm reminder, do not lose your resident permit otherwise it will cost you 100 euro to get it back.

## 2) Orientation activities

Before the exchange starts, you should have received email from Aalto University asking about your flight detail to Finland and whether you want a tutor to pick you up from the airport. If you are on your own and carry two luggage, it is best if you request for pick up, since the tutor can help bring you to your hall or accommodation (it's quite difficult to find the way to your place while pulling two luggage in heavy snow).

You also should have received email on the dates of the orientation activities, for me, it was on 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Jan. On the first day, it was just for business students and we were shown around the Toolo campus in Helsinki which is mostly for non-bachelor business classes (the campus moved back to Otaniemi by the end of my exchange). You will be given a meal card which you can then eat in campus for only 2.6 euro a meal and tutors will also bring you to make your HSL student card. You will get the chance to mingle with other business exchange students since you will be assign to groups. On the second day, it was mainly a talk about the basic info of the school for all exchange students in the Otaniemi campus. The tutors will also show you around the campus.

## 3) International services and activities

The Student Association of Business School (KY Sub) often organizes lots of activities. During my exchange period, they have hold Cottage trip, trip to Lapland, St. Petersburg and also some events in campus. The trips are great if you want to meet new friends and don't want to plan for travelling since they will arrange transportation and activities for you. You will be given more info on orientation day from KY Sub.

## 4) Accommodations

You can apply for accommodation from both HOAS and AYY. For me, since AYY mostly offer unfurnished apartment, I applied mine through HOAS. I live in a 8 people apartment on Kirjanpitajankuja which is in the center of Espoo. I paid a rent of 260 euro per month. There are a total of 4 rooms in the apartment, I shared a room and a bathroom with my friend and shared the living room and kitchen with 6 other people.

One of the problem that you would face while applying for apartment through HOAS is that you can't choose where you want to live, but will only be asked for your preference in finding apartments (e.g. price, shared or private apartment). It took me around 50 minutes to get to Otaniemi campus from my apartment. Even though my apartment is quite far away, I enjoy the train ride to school a lot. And if you are lucky enough, you might be given apartments super close to campus.

Also, you might not be able to get the keys to your apartment earlier than your tenant agreement starts so make sure to find a temporary place to stay in if you arrive Helsinki early. For me, I arrived Helsinki on 31<sup>st</sup> Dec and need to wait till 2<sup>nd</sup> Jan to get the key to my apartment so I stayed two nights in Airbnb.

## 5) Courses registration

You can find all the courses available on Aalto's website before your exchange starts. For Spring semester, it is divided into three period (period 3, 4, 5). You can register for courses on WebOodi before the period starts, there is detailed information of each course listed on the website for you to plan your study and travel ahead of time.

One of the pros of studying in Aalto is that exams are register separately and most courses have more than one date for exam. If you fail the exam in the third period, you can register and retake it again in fourth period. Also, if there is time clash for the courses you want to take, you can still register them. You can also drop courses anytime in the period if you cannot handle the course. When I registered for courses in Aalto, even though there is a maximum quota for each course, it's not as intense as registering courses in UST, I managed to register into all the courses I plan to take.

## 6) Teaching and assessment methods

For spring semester, it is divided into three periods (period 3, 4, 5). And usually, courses finish within that certain period. It is quite intensive to study the whole course in just 5-6 weeks (1 period) so I would say 3 courses in a period is already maximum. Some courses might only require online learning/ book exam/ online exam, so make sure to check out the details of each course to see which one suit you and your travel schedule!

The courses I took:

### Period 3

- 25C00100 Business and Society (6cr)  
*The workload is quite high, you need to submit a weekly report of the things you learn in that week's lecture.*
- 31E13000 Industrial Organization (Micro III) (6cr)  
*Master course, but I think it's not as difficult as it seems. I learnt some of the topics before in UST.*
- LC-7004 Survival Finnish 1 (1cr)  
*A fun course to learn a bit of Finnish, nothing intensive, just some simple assignments.*

### Period 4

- 21C10000 Entrepreneurship and Innovation Management (6cr)  
*Mostly online learning together with two online exams, it will be a perfect course to take if you want time for traveling.*

I was quite stressed out about failing the courses before the exchange. But even though courses are graded in absolute grading, the exams, projects and assignments for the courses I took are not as difficult as it seems.

## **7) Sports & Recreation Facilities**

There is a gym in the Otaniemi campus, I didn't really try it out since it requires membership fee. Also, in the building I was living in, there's yoga mat and table tennis available for us to use in the recreation room.

## **8) Finance and banking**

The only currency accepted in Finland is Euro. It is totally fine to use credit card everywhere in Finland. But when you go travelling, credit card might not be a common payment method in some countries so it's always safe to bring a bit of cash with you (All the European countries I visited tend to accept credit card in most of their stores, even Russia). I brought around 500 euros in cash with me for five months. I didn't open a bank account in Finland and relied solely on my credit card and cash I brought from Hong Kong.

The cost of living in Finland is higher than Hong Kong and most European countries. But there's always ways to save money, eg. Buying clothes from second hand shops (UFF), cooking instead of eating out, buying necessities from Ikea, Flying Tiger, Tokmanni, LIDL...

Half or even more of the expense during exchange is travel expenses. Leaving Finland to go to other countries is quite expensive since Finland is far away from other European countries. One good way to save money will be to do long trips and travel to more countries in one go, leaving Finland by plane is expensive but going from one country to another by bus is easy and cheap in most of Europe. Another suggestion is to visit Estonia and Russia, both of them are near Finland and cheap to travel to, you can also buy daily necessities back to Finland, the cost of living is cheaper in both of these countries (I once bought back loads of vegs and fruits from Estonia XD).

## **9) Social clubs & networking opportunities**

As mentioned above, The Student Association of Business School (KY Sub) offers lots of activities for exchange students to join. There is also other social clubs that you can join in Aalto, you can find information on that on your orientation day.

## **10) Health & safety**

Tap water in Finland is clean and safe to drink. It is best if you bring some personal medicine with you in case you get sick. Also, you can bring some warm pad (not too many though, my friend brought 80 warm pads but end up using only 20 XD). HOAS apartments have heater installed in rooms and it's always warm indoor, it is also not that cold if you are just going outdoor for half to one hour in Helsinki. However, warm pads will come in handy if you want to visit Rovaniemi (Santa Claus village) or other places up north.

Finland is one of the safest countries in the world, I feel safe even when going outside late at night. However, be careful of your personal belongings when traveling to other European countries!!



## 11) Food

Eating out is super expensive, usually over 10 euro for a meal. I usually cook in the apartment to save money. I didn't have any cooking experience before the exchange but I picked up how to cook quickly with the help of videos on Youtube. The price for groceries is quite reasonable in supermarkets, some food are even cheaper than Hong Kong. However, there is not a lot of variety of vegetables during winter (not sure about other days of the year though). FYI, there is rice sold in most supermarkets, but remember to bring rice cooker to cook rice. There are also Asian markets in Helsinki which you can buy Chinese seasonings, all sorts of Chinese vegetables... but the price of their products is generally quite high as compared to Hong Kong.

Aalto will give you a student meal card on your orientation day, with this card, you will be able to eat lunch in school's canteens with 2.6 euro. However, these canteens open only during the day, not at night. One recommendation for going out for dinner is the Asian buffet on the lowest floor of Forum shopping mall, the price is 8 euro and there is unlimited refill of food and drinks.

## 12) Transportation

The transportation in Helsinki and Espoo is convenient. You can purchase a one-time ticket which allows you to travel in any types of public transportation within certain zones in 80 minutes. There is also a multi-day (monthly) plan that is available in half price using the HSL student card, the tutor will bring you to make the card on the orientation day. A tip on the multi-day plan is that the more days you purchase at once, the cheaper the average price each day will be, so if you plan on using the public transportation for every day of the 5 months exchange, you can purchase a 5 month plan straight ahead and load it into your HSL card. Also, you can travel to other parts of Finland on bus, train or plane if you want a quick getaway from Helsinki.

## 13) Climate

I went to Finland during winter and spring. When I first reached Helsinki, it's the coldest month of the year (December) and the temperature is around -10°C. It didn't take me long to get use to the weather and I enjoy the Finnish winter quite a lot. I feel like once it drops below 0°C, there's not much of a difference anyway. The temperature stays around -15°C - 0°C for December to March and gets warmer after April. The daylight is super short during the Winter, there is only daylight from 10am to 4pm in January which I took quite long time to get used to.

For clothing, I usually wear a "super warm Heat-tech", a hoody and a down jacket during the winter time with around -10°C. I think boots with fussy fur will be also essential if you don't want your toes to freeze.

## 14) Communication

Most Fins can speak fluent English so don't worry too much about communication issues. However, since Finnish and Swedish is their official language, the labels in supermarket are in Finnish and Google Translate will come in handy.

### 15) Cautionary measures

Remember to keep an eye on your bags and important belongings when traveling to other European countries.

## Items to bring

1. Bed sheets (*can also purchase in Ikea*)
2. Warm clothes (*Heat-tech is quite useful in my opinion*)
3. Warm water proof furry boots
4. Gloves
5. Summer clothes (*for traveling to warmer countries*)
6. Full suit (*in case of online interviews or presentations*)
7. Router (*it's quite expensive to buy in Finland*)
8. Rice cooker
9. Personal IDs
10. HKUST student card (*since Aalto only gave me a student letter instead of a student card, I can use UST student card if I want to have student discount when visiting museums while traveling*)
11. Data card that can be use in all European countries (*optional for if you want to travel, I think it easier to buy a European country data card in Sham Shui Po than in Europe. You can't buy data card for all European countries in Finland, most data card can only be used in Finland and Baltic countries.*)

## Useful links and contacts

1. Visa application -website: <https://enterfinland.fi/eServices/info/residencepermit>
2. Aalto University -website: <https://www.aalto.fi/en/school-of-business>
3. WebOodi (*course registration*) -website: <https://oodi.aalto.fi/a/etusivu.html>
4. MyCourse (*similar to Canvas*) –website: <https://mycourses.aalto.fi/>
5. HOAS (accommodation) –website: <https://www.hoas.fi/en/>
6. AYY (accommodation) –website: <https://domo.ayy.fi/en>
7. KY Sub (Business Student Association) –website: <https://www.facebook.com/KYSub/>

If more information is needed, get my contact from SBM Exchange Team by emailing at [bmugexch@ust.hk](mailto:bmugexch@ust.hk).