

Aalto University, Finland

Spring 2020

Exchange Report



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MARK & MGMT
Year 3

1. Monthly Activity Log

January 2020

I arrived Helsinki with my friend on 30th December of 2019. My friends and I decided to celebrate the New Year in Finland as it would definitely be a whole new experience for all of us. The temperature in Finland was in January was between 3°C to -6°C. The duration of sunlight is very short in winter, ranging from 6-7 hours a day. The sunrise was around 9 am and 4 pm for the sunset. The street turned quiet and you could barely see any pedestrians after 6 pm, which was very different from Hong Kong.

The orientation was on 2nd January and the official spring semester kicked off on 3rd January. The hub of Helsinki was so much crowded than I thought. There were many shopping malls along the coast and the sea view was magnificent. I had also visited different churches, such as the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland and Chapel of Silence, which had opera singing performance.

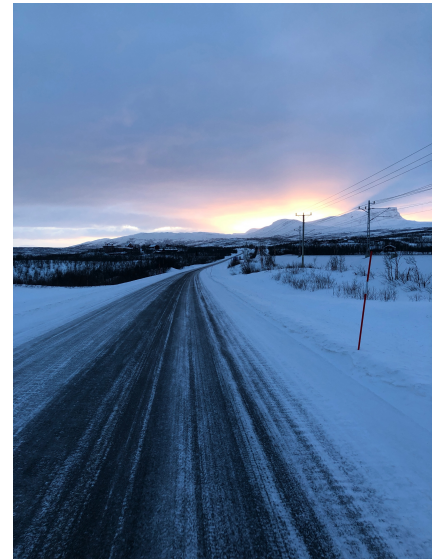


In late January, I had travelled to France (Bordeaux) for 6 days and met up with my friends who were having an exchange there. There was an interesting story in this journey. After wine tasting at wine vineyard, we discovered that we were running out of time to catch the train back to the city hub. We met a pair of Portuguese couple in the vineyard and plucked up courage to ask if they could drive us to the nearest train station to catch the train. To our surprise, they accepted our request and even drove us back to the city centre. We were so thankful and this incident made this France trip even more memorable.

This year was also my first time celebrating Chinese New Year outside Hong Kong. We had a home party with other exchange students from different universities in Hong Kong. It was nice to know new people and enjoyed the time together as well.

February 2020

Aalto has an interesting academic arrangement. Courses are only 5-8 weeks long so the lectures were quite rush the assignment dues were very fast. Therefore, February was packed with assignments, examination and project presentations. In February, the weather was getting colder. Sometimes, I might even see snow outside my room after a night. People in Hong Kong love seeing snow, but trust me, you will not want to see snow in Finland every day. Imagine you have to walk on those snowy and slippery roads, with strong



wind ahead, it will not be romantic but very messy.



My last course ended on 14 February, so I had plenty of time to travel. I travelled to Sweden (Stockholm, Abisko and Kiruna) with my friends to see northern lights. Stockholm was very well developed and full of people everywhere. I was energized as the sense of loneliness in Finland disappeared in Sweden. We took a 17 hours train from Stockholm to Abisko, which is located at the Arctic Circle. The temperature in Abisko was around -10°C to -20°C and it was surrounded by mountains and snow, but nothing else. We joined a northern light photo-taking tour, but unfortunately, that night was very cloudy and the northern light was invisible. After spending 3 days in Abisko, we went to Kiruna to join the husky ride. The ride was 2 hours long and we could feed the huskies afterwards. If you are a husky lover, you have to go there once.



After the trip, I had visited a national park located at Espoo. There were lots of national parks in Finland, you can spend a whole day there. My friends loved going to the national parks and had some hikes there.



March 2020

In March, I had travelled to Denmark (Copenhagen) and Sweden (Lund). The Copenhagen trip was also my first solo trip ever that elated me a lot! Copenhagen is a city of bikes as you can see bikes everywhere. I love this city because of its balance in combining modern and historical elements in daily life. Most importantly, it is very accessible to walk from one place to another. I chose to walk for most of the time in order to discover different surprises and enjoy freedom. Nyhavn is definitely one of the popular tourist spots of all time as there are lots of colourful houses along the canal. I could not deny that the scenery was marvelous.



After 5 days, I went to Lund to visit my friend. However, I decided to return back to Hong Kong during the trip as the epidemic of COVID-19 was extremely serious in Europe. I even cancelled my U.K. trip on April and headed back to Finland as soon as possible to pack my luggage. It was such a pity that I could not continue my travel plan, yet, safety always comes first.

April and May 2020

Not much information can be provided due to COVID-19.

2. General Information

Visa Procedures

For those who stay in Finland for more than 90 days are required to apply for Resident Permit. The whole application process lasts for around a month. Please do schedule your time or else you may not be able to get your Permit before your departure. Fortunately, Hong Kong passport holders do not require any visa to enter Finland. You can still pass the immigration process and ask your parents to deliver the Permit to you afterwards. For the Permit application, you have to do an online application with documents such as passport, acceptance letter from Aalto, banking

statement, travel insurance provided. After the submission, you have to schedule an appointment with the Consulate General of Finland, Hong Kong, or else, they will not handle your application.

Orientation Activities

The orientation started from around 10 am and ended at 4 pm at Aalto University. In the orientation, we met all exchange students from different parts of the world. The lecture hall was full of people which was pretty spectacular. We attended a number of sessions introducing the university, courses and miscellaneous. We all had our own tutor group and tutors brought us to walk around the school campus.

International Services & Activities

Upon your arrival, you can request tutors to pick you up at the airport and they will guide you to your accommodation. There were quite a lot of student societies in Aalto such as KY-Sub (a business student society in Aalto) and AYY. Exchange students were welcomed to join different societies as they organized different cheap trips throughout the semester, such as Lapland trip and St. Petersburg trip. You can find the trip and other activities information on Facebook and WhatsApp group.

Accommodations

You can apply for housing through, HOAS and AYY. Accommodations from HOAS are furnished but AYY are not. Therefore, students prefer using HOAS than AYY. However, HOAS is an accommodation system for all universities in Finland and AYY is only for Aalto. You may not be able to get your desired room type and locations if you apply on HOAS. To play safe, you can apply to both systems and increase the chance of receiving a better housing. Personally, I applied on HOAS only. I applied it with my friend together so we chose shared room, shared apartment. My accommodation was in Kirjanpitäjänkuja 4 B, Espoo. There were 4 rooms in my apartment. We had our private toilet and shared the kitchen with other 6 flatmates. There were 3 supermarkets near my house. However, there was no metro station in Espoo. Instead, there are trains and buses only. Since Aalto is far away from my house (around 35-60 minutes of travelling time). I went to school by bus and transited to metro. Although the travelling time was long, the rent was relatively cheaper than the apartment near Aalto and Helsinki. My monthly housing rent was 261 euros, while apartments in Helsinki city centre cost 400 to 500 euros per month.

Course Registration

There are 5 periods in an academic year. Period 1 and Period 2 will be regarded as Fall semester and Periods 3 to 5 are Spring semester. You can choose your courses on different periods and the registration deadline of each period is different, so beware of that. In fact, you can still email the professor if you want to add or drop the classes after the deadline. Each period lasts for around 5-8 weeks which is very different from UST. To check the course descriptions, course date and venue, you can go to WebOodi (similar to SIS) and MyCourses (similar to Canvas) to check information. Remember to check the UST credit transfer database before choosing courses you are going to take. Registration will be done in WebOodi and MyCourses for course details. Aalto recommends exchange students to take not more than 30 credits per semester (most courses are 6 credits). There are 5 types of courses and exchange students mostly study courses with C (Bachelor-level) and E (Master-level) in the course titles. I had studied 6 courses in Aalto (4 in Period 3, 1 in Period 4 and 5). They were 21C10000 Business and Society (6 Cr); 23C550 Services Marketing (6 Cr); 23E24000 Brand Management (6 Cr); 26E00800 Global Marketing Management (6 Cr); 26E03201 (6 Cr) and LC-7004 Survival Finnish 1 (1 Cr).

Teaching & Assessment Methods

Absolute grading was used in Aalto. Different courses have their own grading schemes. For the courses that I attended, they were mostly graded by assignments, some included exam, presentations and reports. The teaching method was more or less the same as UST. There were 2 lectures per week and each lecture lasted for around 2 to 3 hours. Meanwhile, the workload was quite manageable if you separate your courses in different periods. For me, the workload in Period 3 was quite high as the assignment due dates were very close.

Sports & Recreation Facilities

UniSports is a sports centre for all students in Finland. You can use all the gym facilities after the payment. There are quite many centres in different locations, but the one at Aalto seems to be the largest. You can also try ice skating at Tapiola and swimming at Kampi. Ice skating is free of charge, except for the shoe rent. For swimming, 5 euros are charged. However, the number of recreation facilities in Finland is very limited. You may feel bored comparing to Hong Kong.

Finance and banking

In Finland, Euro is the official currency. However, cash is less adopted and credit cards will be a better choice. Some canteens such as A Bloc, they accept credit card only. If you do not have a credit card, you can still use cash as shops, restaurants and grocery stores accept cash. My friend

opened a virtual bank account so that he could transfer euros from HKD in a cheaper exchange rate. Personally I did not open a bank account as I had brought some cash and credit cards which were enough for me to stay for less than half years. The living expenses in Finland are high, so I cooked with my friend most of the time.

Social Clubs & Networking Opportunities

Exchange students can join activities held by KY-sub and AYY. There are quite a lot of networking events to make new friends, especially other exchange students. Sometimes there would be free music in the café. I did go there once with other full-time students studying in Aalto.

Health & Safety

Finland is pretty safe and seldom did I hear any theft happened. Finland is definitely one of the safest countries in Europe. My exchange buddy told me she just put her phone on the table when she left her seat as no one would steal it. However, you may see some suspicious people wandering around the Helsinki Central Railway Station. I had met a suspicious man twice and he kept asking me to help him. He even grabbed my clothes and did not let me go. I was also informed that there were pickpockets in the Helsinki Central Railway Station and Kampi Station. Although Finland is a safe country, please still stay vigilant and be alert to your surroundings.

Food

The food choices in Finland are very limited and it is expensive to dine out. The meals cost around 10 to 20 euros, depends on the types of restaurants. Therefore, it is a wise option cook in your house. There are three major supermarkets in Finland, K-Market is the most expensive, followed by S-Market and Lidl. Lidl is the cheapest supermarket among all. Sometimes, my roommate and I would go to the shopping mall, Iso Omena in Matinkylä. There are lots of restaurants such as Japanese buffet, burger, Thai food, Chinese food etc. For lunch, I usually ate on campus as the lunch costs €2.6 only, with salad, a main, two drinks and bread. However, most of the canteens only offer lunch.

Transportation

The transportation in Finland is quite convenient as all the transportations are all under the same system - HSL. You can use one transportation card to take all kinds of public transport. For Helsinki area, all types of transportation are available, including metro, buses, trains and trams. It is very accessible to go anywhere if you are lucky enough to live in Helsinki area. For those who live far away from Helsinki, such as Espoo, buses and trains are the major transportations as there are no

trams and metro in non-Helsinki area. The HSL app provides the arrival and departure time and suggests travelling routes so that you can plan your time easily.

Climate

The temperatures in winter are usually ranging from -5°C to 5°C. If there is snow or wind, the temperature will be lower, around -7°C. As you may know, the humidity level in Finland is low so you need to buy cream to protect your hands and face. For those who are afraid of coldness, you can bring warm packs to Finland. I had brought some as well, but I did not use them at all as indoor heating is available so the chances you will be exposed to coldness are lowered. It is recommended not to wear white shoes as they will get dirty by mud, rain and snow very easily. Waterproof pants and shoes are highly recommended. If you do not have one, sneakers and trousers are also fine.

Communication

In Finland, Finnish and Swedish are their core languages. But don't worry, the Fins can speak fluent English as well. You can see Finnish and Swedish everywhere. They are widely used in metro, shops and supermarkets. However, there are not many shops that provide English translation. The product tags are written in Finnish. You need to translate the names by yourself which is a bit troublesome.

3. Items to bring

- Hat
- Scarf
- Down coat/Waterproof jackets
- Gloves
- Sneakers/Waterproof boots
- Hand Cream and Skincare products
- Warm Packs
- Swimsuit (for sauna)
- Router and LAN wire
- Medicine
- Adequate Cash and credit cards
- Bed linen and blanket (optional)

4. Useful links

- HOAS - <https://www.hoas.fi/en/>
- AYY - <https://www.ayy.fi/en>
- WebOodi - <https://oodi.aalto.fi/a/etusivu.html>
- MyCourses - <https://mycourses.aalto.fi/>
- Consulate General of Finland, Hong Kong - <https://finlandabroad.fi/web/hkg/frontpage>