

Exchange Report



Spring 2021-22

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Year 3 – BBA Gbus & Fina



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Weekly Activity Log


Week 0 - Orientation week (February 2022):

I took a 12-hour flight from Hong Kong to Prague with one transfer at Helsinki. My buddy picked me up at the airport at around 10pm. She was very helpful in showing the way and helping answer some general questions. It wasn't too difficult either to find out the route to the dorm yourself (See Transportation).

As soon as I get to the dorm, I met my German roommate and Finnish flatmate who later became one of my best friends! We scheduled most of the orientation activities together. ESN Prague was very active in organizing trips and social activities, which I felt really appreciative. It was the best time to meet 200+ exchange students all over the world!

Had it not been for these events, I would have not met most of my friends or even traveled with them in the following months. Not to mention the events themselves were very fun and well-planned.

There were small tours like visiting Petrin Tower, 500-year old brewery, Museum of Old Legends in Prague. And other activities such as brunch, laser tags, Czech Night, International dinner...

 SEMESTER SCHEDULE							
	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
Orientation Week by ESN	ORIENTATION WEEK ACTIVITIES				ICE BREAKING WEEKEND		
Week 1			DINNER IN THE DARK		MORAVIA TRIP		
Week 2	INTERNATIONAL DINNER						SKIING
Week 3		JOYSTICK BAR	CAT CAFÉ	BOWLING		SOUTH CZECHIA	
Week 4	BOARD GAMES						
Week 5				KRAKOW NIGHT PRAGUE RUN	KRAKOW	KRAKOW	KRAKOW
Week 6	KRAKOW						
Week 7							BOHEMIAN SWITZERLAND
Week 8				PAINTBALL			
Week 9				CZECH EASTER			
Week 10			BEACH VOLLEYBALL			ZOO TRIP	
Week 11				CZECH-OUT TRIP			
Week 12						WALK THE DOGS	ESN SPORTS DAY
Week 13				GOODBYE PICNIC			
Exams							

due to covid situation the programme might change, follow us to stay up to date

Sport events
 Social events
 Trips

@esnvsprague @nation2nationcz
 www.esnvsprague.cz

Semester schedule provided by ESN Prague

On the same weekend, we were brought to a countryside cabins for 2 nights. The ESN students split us up in teams and compete with each other in the ice-breaking games (I'm pretty sure all Taiwanese and Hong Kong students all had good knowledge in these games). Then there were parties for two consecutive nights. It was something wild!



100 of us and the ESN organizers

Week 1 - Rest and plan:

I got COVID on that weekend, so I had to quarantine myself for 5 days at the university hotel. I was glad to rest and prepare for a competition I signed up for in Hong Kong.

To maximize my stay in Europe and utilize the perfect location of Prague, I bought a 2-month Eurail Pass for 370€. The following is my traveling itinerary and individual blogs about all my trips **(Find tips, recommendations, and more in the blogs!)**.

Week 2 - Vienna:

It's my first trip with the exchange students, including people from Switzerland, Finland, Korea, Italy, Turkey and more! It's surprising for me to be able to fit in

such an international group. We all share similar vibes. I felt so lucky to have such great matches (especially Europeans).

<https://medium.com/@justin890905/far-from-home-1-my-eurail-journey-in-vienna-5a20653d279e>

Week 3 - Bohemian Switzerland:

<https://medium.com/@justin890905/bohemian-switzerland-ce0d130a65dc>

Week 4 - Road trip to Bratislava, Ljubljana, Rijeka:

<https://medium.com/@justin890905/first-road-trip-in-life-and-the-last-beef-in-ljubljana-61a592c996d9>

Week 5 - Krakow trip organized by the ESN:

<https://medium.com/@justin890905/esn-krakow-trip-night-market-auschwitz-and-salt-mine-d031c52c3687>



The group in front of the Wawel Cathedral



Me with Singaporeans and Belgium friends

Week 6 - The Netherlands:

<https://medium.com/@justin890905/my-eurail-journey-in-the-dreamland-the-netherlands-1ac93f282199>

Week 7 - Berlin:

<https://medium.com/@justin890905/my-eurail-journey-in-berlin-e5916005ccc1>



Us at the Berlin wall

Week 8 - Copenhagen + Budapest:

<https://medium.com/@justin890905/taiwanese-reunion-in-copenhagen-cdfc617a51af>

Week 9 - Munich:

Week 10 and 11:

I stopped traveling for 2 weeks, to catch up on the studies. Also my 2 month Eurail pass expired.

Week 13 to 15 - Road trip in Italy



Every Tuesday there's a N2N party for students

General Exchange Information

Visa application:

This is all you need to apply to a long term student visa:

1. Confirmation of Study (purpose of stay)
2. Binding Preliminary Agreement on Accommodation
3. Certificate of Non-Criminal Conviction in Hong Kong
4. (Non-criminal record in foreign countries) - Have it translated to Czech
5. Financial Statement - English
6. Two passport-sized photos (45mm x 35mm)
7. Valid passport - Be presented whenever you physically visit Czech Consulate
8. Health insurance (in Czech)

VSE will mail the first two documents to HKUST once you successfully enrolled in the exchange program. Whoever is in charge in the HKUST exchange office will notify you upon the arrival of the documents.

While waiting, make sure you ask Czech Consulate in Hong Kong to issue the letter of non-criminal record application, which usually takes a week. You'll need the letter to apply to Hong Kong Non-criminal record (CNCC), which takes another 3-4 weeks.

The Hong Kong Police Force will send CNCC directly to the Czech Consulate. Upon receiving it, they will send an email to schedule a time for visa application. If you are an international student who also stay in other countries for 3 months in the past 2 or 3 years, you should also ask your parents to apply the foreign Non-criminal record for you. Have the document translated into Czech, certified by some authorities, then send it to you in Hong Kong.

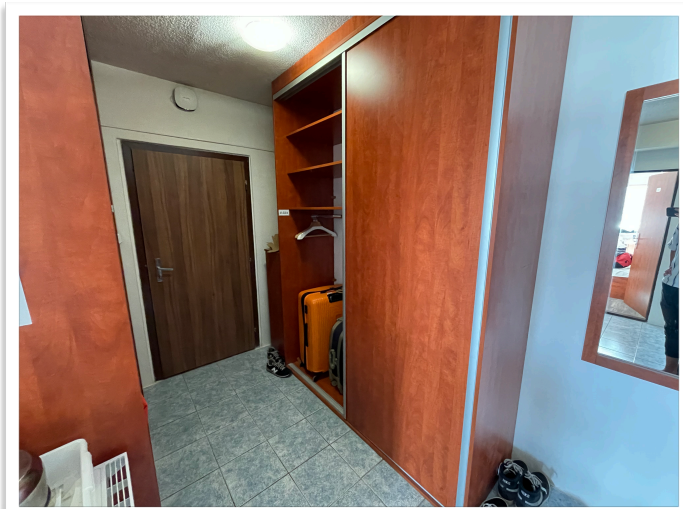
Getting a financial statement will be an individual task. Have it and passport sized photos prepared before Czech Consulate contact you for visa application. Only the health insurance doesn't have to be purchased beforehand. They'll ask you to buy and show them after the Visa's approved.

The whole visa application took me more than 3 months including the waiting for CNCC from Hong Kong Police Force. I strongly suggest you start as soon as you're confirmed with the exchange program.

Accommodation:

There were 200+ exchange students. More than half of us stayed in Eislerova dorm, which is 20 minutes away from the school by tram 9. We are allowed to choose either single or double rooms before we go. We were also able to choose the floor and room number. Technically, you can sign up with your friend in a double room. Each floor has several units, and each of them has 2 double room (4 people in the 1 unit). I strongly suggest to take the double room. The more the merrier.

From my personal experience, the dorm is considered pretty good. It's newly renovated, tidy and not too small.



Closets and common area



Gorgeous view from the balcony

Course registration:

The deadline of the pre-registration was 24th of January. We would have enough time to cross check the credit transfers and schedule study plan since all course information was released over one month before the deadline.

VSE exchange office was extremely helpful in providing the manual of the registration system. They also answer emails promptly. We are eligible to enroll

in Master level courses, just ask for approval first from both HKUST and the lecturer of the course, then send both to the VSE exchange office. They would manually enroll for you.

During the pre-registration, VSE could assess the capacity of each courses. They are flexible in making different arrangement. Thus, the whole process was quite chill. Nothing had to be worried.

Teaching and Assessment Method (Courses I've studied):

Unfortunately, most finance course I need expired exactly in my semester of exchange, which I wasn't aware of. When I reapply again on the credit transfer system, HKUST denied most of them. In the end, these are the courses I took.

Code	Course name	Content	Evaluation
1BP260	Banking and Financial Institutions	An introductory course of the area of finance. Covers investment theories (CAPM), asset classes, trading. You'll know basically everything if you've taken FINA3103.	30% midterm exam 70% final exam
1MT363	Financial regulation and risk management	An introductory course of retail banking reserves, revolving around Basel I, II & III. Only assignments are quantitative, prepare basic concepts for final exam.	50% assignment (4 assignments) 50% final exam
2RO101	Basic French for Economists 1 (A0/A1)	English course only offer in Fall semester. Seeing my passion and dedication of learning French, the lecturer exceptionally allow me to enroll the class.	10% participation 20% assignment 20% presentation 50% final exam
2RO122	French for beginners 2 (A1)	A continuous course of 2RO101. Not recommended for students without any French background. In the end I still passed 2 courses simultaneously.	
3MA645	International Management	A Master level course, but having quite light workload. Some topics were actually fun like the organizational structure. Others cover HR management, world trade, culture theory...	10% participation 20% assignment 20% presentation 20% midterm exam 30% final exam
5IE380	Behavioral Finance	Focus on behaviors of the market participants. Started with biases categorized in phycology, then the lab experiments, to policy making. Quite fun and light workload.	20% lab session attendance 25% presentation 55% final essay

Sports & Recreation Facilities:

There is a gym and a huge common room/ kitchen in the Eislerova dorm. There's also a basketball court, football court, volleyball court, an outdoor gym.

You can easily reserve everything on ISKAM (the website for dorm fee payment and amenities reservation). Some other amenities like indoor table tennis tables are in the school hotel next to the dorm, you can directly approach the lobby and ask for reservation.

In May, there was a Sports Day for exchange students. It was really fun to see everyone enjoying the sun, the competitions, or simply hanging out watching the games.

Finance and Banking:

A local Czech bank account won't be necessary. 95% of the restaurants allow credit card payment. I simply use my HSBC credit card or virtual bank credit card for higher rebate.

My financial expenses (including travels)	
Return flight ticket: HK-Prague (Finnair)	~5,000 hkd
Accommodation (dorm)	~11,000 hkd
Living expense (monthly ~3,400 hkd)	~14,500 hkd
Travel expense (monthly ~6,300 hkd)	~30,000 hkd
Mobile plan (unlimited data, monthly 599 czk)	~1,000 hkd
Insurance (required by Czech government)	~2,500 hkd
Miscellaneous (ESN welcome package & shopping)	~3,500 hkd
Total:	~67,500 hkd

General Prague Information

Transportation:

The major means of transportation will be trams. It's more accessible than metro around the old town area. Also, you'll have to rely on tram 9 from Eislerova dorm to the school. You can purchase an incredibly inexpensive student pass for ~120 hkd (360 czk) for 3 months! It allows you to travel by buses, metro, and trams.

Airport to Eislerova dorm: Bus 119 to the terminal station, change to metro line A and get off at museum station, change to tram 9 to Chleminice) Uber is roughly 200 hkd (600 czk).

Climate:

I arrived Prague in February. It was between 0 to 8°C and usually windy, which felt colder than it was. It lasted until Easter while it could get as hot as 20°C. I'll say the cold weather in Prague was bearable. It wasn't something extreme like the Scandinavian countries. Bring enough warm jackets and perhaps beanies and mittens.

Food:

Traditional Czech food was special but not something I particularly like. Asian especially Vietnamese restaurants are pretty common. Average food price around the dorm was 40-65 hkd (120-200 czk, 6-8€). Restaurants in old town for tourists would be more expensive, usually around 80 hkd (250 czk, 10€). You can't come to Prague without having Czech beer. Beer price would be roughly 16-24 hkd (50-75 czk, 2-3€).

Health and Safety:

Prague is one of the safest cities. You can walk on the street without worrying even at 3 or 4am in the middle of the night.

Communication:

Generally people speak in Czech. There are very little English signs for public transport and some restaurants. Sometimes it can be difficult to navigate. I'll suggest to download Google translate first. The "camera" function can help a lot on Czech menus and signs.

Items to Bring:

1. Passport, HKID
2. Copies of the issued documents
3. Credit card
4. Winter and summer clothes
5. Adaptors
6. A small waist bag (mainly for traveling)
7. Backpacker backpack (recommended for traveling in Europe. You don't want to drag the luggages along the pebble stone streets)

Useful Links and Contact:

School Website: <https://www.vse.cz/english/>

Dormitory: <https://iskam-web.vse.cz/>

For Hotels/ Hostels: <https://www.booking.com/>

Travel: Flixbus, Regiojet

Traveling by train in Europe: <https://www.eurail.com/en>

Last word:

I believe Prague is very underrated. I have the best time of my life during my exchange. There was no days that were repetitive. There were always some sparks in the dynamic group, in between the conversations, during the fun events, and during adventurous exploration. It wasn't necessarily eventful everyday, but I did enjoy the full Europe experience, immersing myself in their lifestyle, their music (German, French, Italian, Spanish...), their diets (chocomilk, Vinea, elderflower, pasta with pesto, variety of dumplings, tons of bread and croissants...), their values as well as mindsets, even where and how Europeans enjoy their vacations (20-day road trip in Italy!). I'm very grateful for being one of the luckiest person in the world to meet these genuine friends.