

2022 Spring Exchange Report



Sweden - Stockholm School of Economics (SSE)
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Monthly Activity Log

January

I arrived in Stockholm on 10 Jan and had to stay at a hotel for a night and check in to my dorm the next day morning during office hours since I arrived late.

I stayed in Sweden for the entire January to get use to the weather here and the totally new environment and culture. It was cold as expected in during January, but still manageable since Stockholm is a busy city and snow on the road melted the next day most of the time, only parks are covered by snow.

School started one week after I arrived. The student union (SASSE) exchange committee organized events for us exchange students and I joined their orientation day with a campus tour introducing different parts of the campus and a tour to the Royal Palace. I had 2 courses in the first period of the semester (Jan - Mar) but course work was not that intensive in January as the semester has just started.

I also went to Uppsala, another city in Sweden, around 30 minutes train from Stockholm, for a weekend trip with other Hong Kong exchange students there in late Jan. We had dinner together in celebration of the Lunar New Year.

Jan Stockholm Checklist:

- ✓ Biggest Ikea in Sweden
- ✓ Vasa Museum
- ✓ Royal Palace
- ✓ Metro stations - World famous underground art
- ✓ Quality Outlet Stockholm
- ✓ Gamla Stan - Old Town



February

February was still a cold month and I started to explore more both within Stockholm and outside Sweden after settling down.

In early Feb, I went on my first trip during exchange to the Finnish Lapland. I spent a day in Helsinki, visiting several major spots there, and went to north Finland the next day. We spent 5 days in 2 towns, Rovaniemi, Levi and Inari. It was a roadtrip as we had a big group and walking is difficult under the snowy weather. We were not lucky enough to catch the northern lights as it was too cloudy the 4 nights, but still, it was a very memorable journey where I've got my first husky ride, first ski, and first -21 degrees in my life.

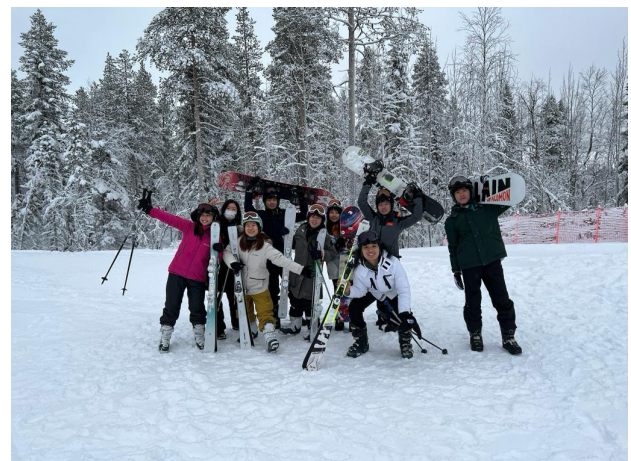
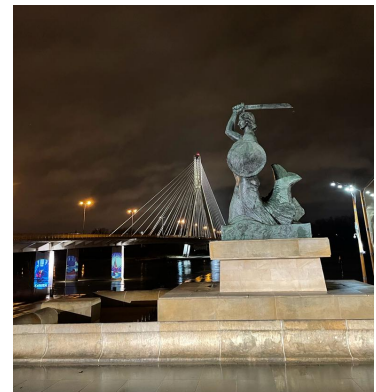
Coming back to Stockholm, I had my third dose of COVID vaccine injected, and rested for a few days due to the side effects.

I had another short weekend trip to Warsaw, Poland, in February as well. It is a worth-visiting place if you are interested in the history of WWII and the Soviet Union. It was, however, a very short trip, which I would like to spend more time there and visit more cities in Poland such as Gdansk, and Krakow, where you could visit the concentration camp there.

At the end of February, I had friends exchanging in other European countries visiting Stockholm and I spent my time exploring Stockholm with them. I spent a day in Vasteras, another Swedish city near Stockholm with my friend and enjoyed the calm and peaceful vibe there.

Feb Stockholm Checklist:

- ✓ Skiing in Stockholm - Hammarbybacken
- ✓ Skyview - World's largest spherical building, Avicii Arena



March

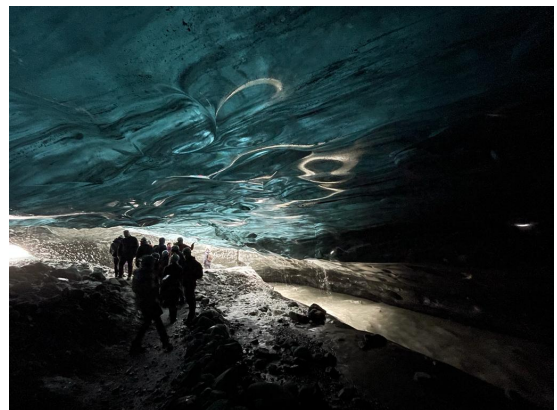
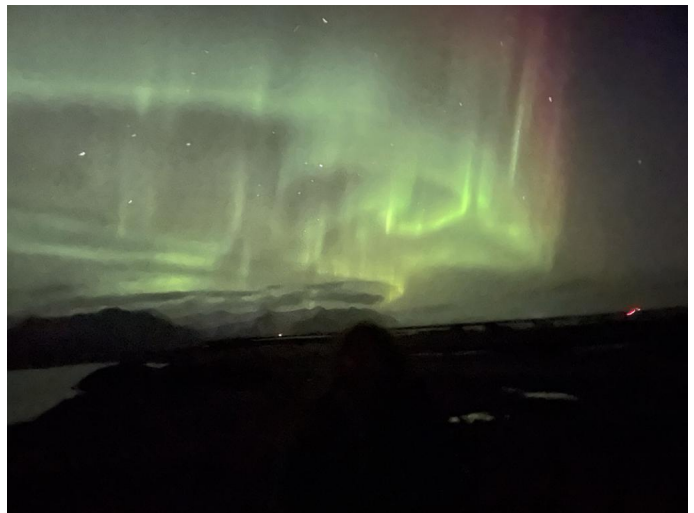
I spent the first half of March in Stockholm, mostly working on my academics as the end of period 1 was approaching. Both of my courses had final exams and one of them has a group project to complete in addition. They allowed cheatsheets in both of the exams so it was not that difficult.

After my exam, I got a week of semester break and spent 6 days in Iceland. It was an extremely nice trip and the scenery was super stunning. We visited waterfalls, glaciers, the geysir, the black beach, the diamond beach, the blue lagoon and so much more places. We were also able to see the wonderful aurora dance one of the nights as well. Not only was the natural landscape nice, the city center in Reykjavik, the capital of Iceland, was also energetic. (Food in Iceland was also amazing.)

Returning from Iceland, the next period has started. I only took one course in this period, and I met my coursemates from the previous course so it was quite nice.

Mar Stockholm Checklist:

✓ Mariaberget - Observation deck seeing the city view of Stockholm



April

The weather was getting better in April and it was finally no longer freezing. Daytime was getting longer and longer and the snow had melted.

I went to a 4-day trip to Oslo, Norway, in early April. It is a peaceful city, but may be boring in some sense if you expect a lot of impactful experience. I would recommend visiting Bergen as well if you plan to visit Norway. But still, we were a big group so still enjoyable and had a lot of fun there.

Returning from Oslo, I had a day trip to Gothenburg, another Swedish city 3-hour train from Stockholm. It is an interesting city to visit, but due to the rainy weather and limited time, it was not as what I have expected.

And then I spent a the week on my coursework (mid-term exam and group assignments), and also UST-related stuff.

During Easter, I had a 6-day trip to the Netherlands and Belgium. I stayed at my friend's accommodation at the Hague, and went to Rotterdam, Amsterdam, Leiden, and the Keukenhof Tulip garden. And then we took the FlixBus to Brussels, Belgium, for waffles, mussels, and chocolate. We also spent a day in Bruges, another town in Belgium, around an hour of train from Brussels, which I enjoyed much more than Brussels. Highly recommend a daytrip there if you are planning to visit Belgium.

In late April, there is cherry blossom in Stockholm, which was totally unexpected. In fact, it is rather common in Europe and you can see cherry blossom in many European countries. But do expect it to be super crowded, even during weekdays.

The night of 30 April was called the Walpurgis Night, it is a traditional festival celebrated in northern Europe and Scandinavia. I went to join their celebration with bonfire, choral singing and a speech given in Swedish which I understood nothing. But a very unique experience and a traditional festival to enjoy the Swedish vibe.

Apr Stockholm Checklist:

- ✓ Swedish History Museum
- ✓ Nobel Prize Museum
- ✓ Fotografiska - Photo Museum
- ✓ Kungsträdgården - Cherry Blossom
- ✓ Nordiska Museum - History of Northern Europe
- ✓ Skansen - Walpurgis Night



May

My exchange was approaching the end so I grasped every single chance to enjoy the city and the relaxing exchange life here in Europe.

I made a 4-day trip to Copenhagen in Denmark in early May. I had a great time with my friends enjoying the danish vibe and wandering around the city.

In the next week, my friends exchanging in Finland came to Stockholm and we spent the week exploring the city and went to Gotland, an island 3-hour ship from Stockholm, for a night. It was a peaceful island with beautiful houses and scenery, definitely worth visiting if you have plenty of time in Stockholm. Make sure you pick a sunny day for the best experience though.

I then went on a trip to Italy for a week, visiting Venice, Rome and the Vatican City through Milan. However, my connecting flight to Milan from Germany (Eurowings) got cancelled due to bad weather, and the airline had no arrangement, I had to figure out the way on my own. I ended up taking the overnight FlixBus to get to Italy, which brought me through Switzerland unexpectedly. Italy was nice and I enjoyed their Gelato a lot. However, Rome was a bit too hot for me (especially after the cold winter in northern Europe), but still enjoyable and worthy.

Returning from Italy, I started to prepare for my final exam in early June, which was a closed-book test, so I had to memorize and understand everything.

May Stockholm Checklist:

- ✓ Skinnarviksberget - Nice sunset view
- ✓ Grona Lund - Theme park (Must go if you enjoy thrilling experiences)
- ✓ City Museum
- ✓ Skansen - Open-air museum
- ✓ Drottningholm Palace
- ✓ Sigtuna - a small town to the north of Stockholm
- ✓ Hagaparken



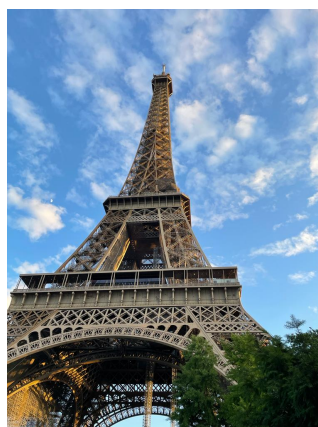
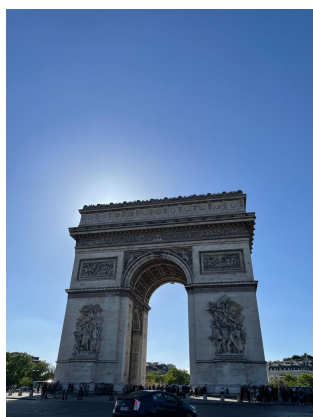
June

It is time to say bye to Sweden and my lovely exchange life.

I had my exam in early June and had some farewell meals with my friends in Stockholm. I then started packing my things and went to Helsinki, Finland, to meet up with my friend as my dorm ends on 12 June but I was returning Hong Kong after that.

After spending a day in Helsinki, we set off to Paris for a 6-day trip. I highly recommend visiting Paris during exchange since they offer free entry for Europe students in most museums, which you would definitely want to visit. It was another iconic city and I enjoyed the trip a lot as well.

However, my flight back to Hong Kong is banned by the government due to the flight suspension mechanism. I was unable to change the flight date due to the very limited supply of quarantine hotels. I ended up taking another flight from Finland to Singapore, and returning to Hong Kong the next day, which was the original designated arrival date so that I can arrive at my quarantine hotel in time.



Useful Information

Visa Procedures

I started the visa application process right after I receive the official acceptance letter from SSE in October 2021.

Simply submit all the information through their online application system and wait for their update. They asked for my proof of insurance so I had to email the school for that.

After approval of the residence permit, I went to the Swedish Consulate in Central to get the decision letter and explanatory letter in mid-December.

Since they have closed the Swedish migrant office in Hong Kong, after arriving in Stockholm, I had to book an appointment at the migrant office in Stockholm for the photo-taking and finger-print collection to make the residence permit in early Feb. After around 2 weeks, I got my residence permit mailed to me through postnord (the local post office).

The whole process is simple yet time-consuming, so starting as early as possible.

Orientation Activities

The exchange committee under the student association SASSE at SSE offers a wide range of orientation activities. I joined their info day with a campus tour and the Royal Palace museum tour in Jan, and also an orientation talk organized by the school. I purchased my access card (100 SEK) on the orientation day at school, which allowed me access to the School's front door and other facilities.

Other events include bowling, pub crawling and a welcome banquet. Most events are full soon after they open for application, so be quick if you would like to join them. I wanted to join their welcome banquet but I was unfortunately not in Stockholm that night, so couldn't attend that.

They had a buddy program as well, but I have never seen my buddy so do not rely on them, but make friends on your own if you wish to.

International Services & Activities

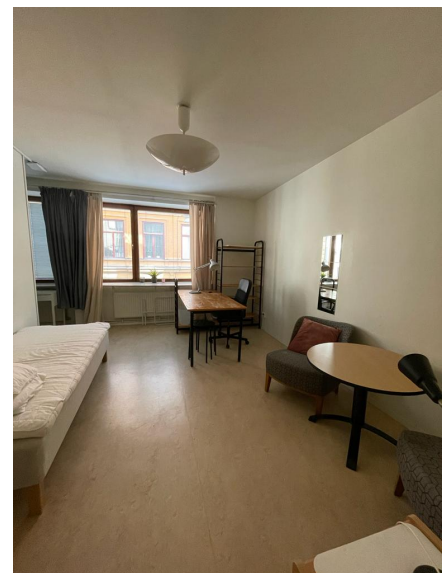
There are many committees under SASSE and you may join them if you'd like to. Many are sports-related, but I am not a sports person so I did not attempt to join any of them.

Accommodations

There are two major accommodations offered by SSE, Saltis and Lappis. Saltis offers both single and shared room, it is the ideal dormitory of most exchange students since it is only 1 minute walk from the campus and is 20 minutes walk from the central station. Lappis is around 20 minutes of bus from the campus and it offers only single room.

The school sent us an email in October and I simply had to arrange the three choices according to my preference (Saltis - Single, Saltis - Shared, Lappis - Single). I could also choose my roommate as I applied for the shared room at Saltis, so the two of us exchanged from UST shared a room together, which we enjoyed a lot. It costed 4900SEK per person per month. You can enjoy your private kitchen (though with only one slow hotplate) and your own toilet at Saltis. For Lappis, you will have your private toilet, but a shared kitchen. For Laundry at Saltis, there are only 2 washing machine for the entire block so make sure you book it around a week before. Another point to note is that Saltis is for exchange students at SSE only, but Lappis is a much bigger accommodation area so you can meet exchange students at other universities such as Stockholm University and KTH.

I also learnt from other Singaporean exchange students that there are other accommodation options offered by the school, apart from Saltis and Lappis, but are also within 30 minutes of public transport from the school.



Courses Registration

Course registration was in early Jan, and is done through the school portal. Simply follow the instructions in the email sent by the school and register for the courses you would like to study.

There are 2 periods in the Spring semester and you can register up to 2 courses per semester. For me, I had 2 courses in the first period and 1 in the second.

Teaching & Assessment Methods

The teaching and assessment methods are more or less similar to that in Hong Kong, but students are much proactive in class and enjoy discussions a lot. They use Canvas (same as UST) to release course materials and grades so it was easy to handle as a UST student.

For the 3 courses I took:

764 Digitalization in Finance

- Class size: 33
- Teaching mode: face-to-face
- Assessment method: 1 individual problem set, 1 group assignment (presentation + written report), written final report (A4 cheatsheet allowed), participation (earned from answering questions and voluntary class presentations)
- Comments: Highly recommend this course if you are interested in latest FinTech trend and have only very basic knowledge in the field. The instructor explains concepts well and clearly in an interesting way.

BE452 Advanced Investment

- Class size: 150
- Teaching mode: online via Zoom
- Assessment method: 1 group project (or you can do it on your own), 2 problem sets, 1 case discussion, written final exam (A4 cheatsheet allowed), participation (earned from participation in seminars), 1 referee report (optional)
- Comments: Since the course was online due to big class size during COVID, there was not much interactions and the instructor is rather strict.

737 Macroeconomic Policy Analysis

- Class size: 16
- Teaching mode: face-to-face
- Assessment method: 4 group assignments, 1 written mid-term exam (closed book), 1 final exam (closed book), mandatory attendance (notify the professor beforehand if you have to skip class)
- Comments: The professor was really nice and knowledgeable introducing macro views on economic problems in class. Discussion is encouraged and students are attentive in class. Unlike UST economic courses which includes tonnes of calculations, this course is all about concepts and explanation, assignments and exams requires you to understand the economic concepts and apply them into real-life issues. It is challenging yet rewarding.

Sports & Recreation Facilities

Since the school campus is really small, with a size of approximately 2-3 LSK buildings, so do not expect any sports & recreation facilities within the campus. If you are looking for a lot of campus life, what turns out may be very different from your expectations.

However, since the school is situated in the city center of Stockholm, you can find different gym rooms near the school and can register as members for their facilities.

Finance & Banking (including currency / expenses)

Sweden has its own currency, Swedish Krona (SEK), with the exchange rate at around 1 SEK ~ 0.79-0.88 HKD over my entire exchange period.

Sweden is a cashless nation and all of the places I visited accept by card so I have not used a single cent of SEK in the past 6 months. Some places even do not accept cash, so make sure you get yourself a VISA or Master Card. I used my Hang Seng Credit Card for all the expense in Europe which require 2% of service charge per transaction, but the rebates offered could cover the service charge so it was fine.

Some of my friends used a debit card by HSBC which do not charges anything, it is also convenient as well.

It is also nice to bring some Euros (cash) with you for travelling since different countries have different levels of digitalization.

Social Clubs & Networking Opportunities

There are many clubs under the student union SASSE at SSE and you may like to join those you are interested in.

Apart from the school, I met people through attending a church near the school (5 mins walk). There I met local Swedish and also people from other places where we had great time together.

Health & Safety

I only brought Panadol with me from Hong Kong and I just had Panadol whenever I was sick.

For insurance, I did not purchase extra insurance for the exchange other than that offered by the school. You may want to purchase one more on your own especially for trips outside Stockholm, so that if you are unlucky like me, you can claim the loss.

Food

There is a large variety of restaurants in Stockholm.

For local Swedish food, most are costly and I am not really a fan of it. I have tried several high-rated local restaurants but only 1-2 of them were good. In fact, you may want to try the Asian food in Stockholm as plenty of them are nice, and some are westernized which are quite unique.

Fika, which basically means having a coffee or cake break, and enjoy the moment, is also a must in Sweden. I enjoy the pastry, the cakes and the coffee in Stockholm and there are many nice coffee shop in city center. It is always fun to explore the neighbourhood.

However, dining out in Stockholm is really costly when compared to Hong Kong (but still cheaper than the neighbouring countries). A lunch costs at least 100 SEK, so I do my cooking at my private kitchen 50% of the time. There is a supermarket (*Lidl*) right downstairs of Saltis, which offer you products at good prices, and you can also find wider variety of grocery at *Coop* (5 mins walk from Saltis) and *ICA* (10 mins walk from Saltis).

Transportation

The public transportation network is very accessible in Stockholm, the metro, buses, trams and ferries are all under the company SL. You can simply download the SL app and purchase a single journey ticket at 26 SEK (reduced price) for 75 minutes unlimited entries for all the public transportation. I did not purchase any green SL card.

Some exchange students would purchase the monthly pass which allows you access to all public transport within Stockholm for 30 days, but I did not get it since I live right next to the school.

Stockholm is in fact a very walkable city and I access 60% of the places on foot. For instance, walking from Saltis to the central station takes about 20 minutes, and walking to Gamla Stan (the old town) takes you around 30 minutes. So I did a lot of walking in Stockholm and explored many places on foot (to save my transportation fee at the meantime).

Moreover, I used the scooters in Stockholm as well. You can download the apps and unlock any scooters on the street, ride through the cycletracks along the road, and get to your destination. There are many suppliers and you may compare their prices and their discounts. Purchasing a daypass or a monthpass is always cheaper. I really recommend riding the scooters as you cannot find them in Hong Kong and it is a fun experience.

If you would like to visit other cities in Sweden, the SJ train is a good option. You can purchase a ticket online through their official website or their app. The train takes you to all Swedish cities you would like to visit (e.g. Uppsala, Gothenburg, Malmo, etc.) and even nearby countries such as Norway (Oslo) and Denmark (Copenhagen).

For travelling by air, you would definitely enjoy Ryanair which gives you the best prices especially on backpack trips. I used skyscanner to find the best flights for my trips and it is very easy to navigate.

There are 2 airports in Stockholm, Arlanda and Bromma (which I have never been to). The Arlanda airport is the biggest airport in Sweden and the fastest way to get there is by Arlanda Express which takes you 18 minutes from the Central station to the airport, which costs 149 sek per trip. The cheapest way is to take the metro (SL) to Marsta station and change the bus to the airport, the entire journey costs you only 26 sek and takes you to the airport in around an hour.

Another point to note about transportation is that I booked my flight back Hong Kong through Finnair in February along with my quarantine hotel. However, they cancelled the flight in early May due to restrictions in Hong Kong. So I booked another flight through Turkish Airlines. Yet, it got banned by the government and they offer no compensation. I had to book another flight at a very high price in a rush so that I could get back to Hong Kong in time. Or else, I would not have any quarantine hotel and have to wait until July or even August. So always be prepared (mentally and financially) for the worst case scenario.

Climate

When I arrived in Jan, the winter was tough. Sunrise at 9am and sunset at 3pm makes it even more difficult. The temperature was around 0 degrees most of the time. It was difficult but is definitely an unforgettable experience living in such a cold place with white snow in parks nearby.

As spring approached, the weather got better in March and seldom got below 0 degrees anymore and daytime was getting longer. Most of the days were sunny and the sky was always pink at dawn. It was really pretty.

In May and June, it was almost the summer in stockholm. The weather is nice and ranges around 8-15 degrees. Locals started wearing short sleeves but I still have to wear my jacket in outdoors.

Stockholm is really dry throughout the year, so it was important to have handcream and body lotion to keep myself moisturized as I was used to the humidity in Hong Kong. There are many shops in Stockholm so you can get them there. I enjoy shopping at Normal which is somewhat like Mannings or Watsons in Hong Kong, they offer good prices.

Communication

The major language in Sweden is Swedish, but most people speaks English well so there is no problem communicating in English. In some Asian restaurants, the owners may speak mandarin as well. Also, WhatsApp is not that common in Sweden, in fact, they use Facebook Messenger to chat and communicate.

Google translate is also essential and you can understand 90% of the signs. Stockholm is easy to navigate as long as you have Google translate with you.

In terms of telecommunication, I bought a Vodafone SIM card in Hong Kong, which I had to top-up every month online. It was easy to use and I could use it in all of the European countries I visited, so it was really convenient. However, since it is an UK company, you will get an UK phone number instead of a Swedish one and they seems to be changing their service terms so do check out the latest terms and conditions before purchasing one.

Cautionary measures

Sweden is very safe in my opinion and there are not much cautionary measures in Stockholm. Just be aware and stay alert at night as you never know what would happen.

In general, for places I have visited, northern Europe (Sweden, Finland, Denmark, Norway, and Iceland) is very safe to travel to. For other European countries, we have encountered

pick pockets on public transport and it is better to stay away from certain zones in some cities. Take good care of your self belongings and be attentive.

Items to Bring

- Down jacket
- Water-proof jacket
- Boots for snow
- Gloves (Best if you can use your phone with it)
- Heattech
- Body lotion for dry skin
- Plug adaptors and extensions
- Hair Dryer
- Passport
- Cash for travelling (Euro)

** You can basically buy everything there so spare more room in your luggage for yourself to bring souvenirs back.

Other Notes

- Mecenat Card: SSE do not offer you any student card, so to be eligible to different student discounts, register the Mecenat Card, which is a Swedish student card. Upload your acceptance letter and they will approve your application in a few days. It is an e-card so as long as you have their app and internet access, you can use it.
- Your own diary: I really recommend writing your own diary during exchange as every day is very precious and fruitful. Jotting down what happened every day and your feelings help you to consolidate much better. It would also be a precious memory and souvenir for yourself.

Useful Links & Contacts

- Visa Application: <https://www.migrationsverket.se/English/Private-individuals.html>
- SSE: <https://www.hhs.se/en/>
- Mecenat Card: <https://help.mecenat.com/hc/en-gb>
- SL: <https://sl.se/en/in-english/>
- SJ: <https://www.sj.se/en/>
- Flixbus: <https://global.flixbus.com/>
- Ryanair: <https://www.ryanair.com/gb/en>

Wish you a fruitful and enjoyable exchange journey!