

AALTO UNIVERSITY, FINLAND

Spring 2022 - Exchange Report



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Monthly Activity Log

January

I arrived in Helsinki on 2nd January, yet the key-picking day was on 3rd January, therefore we had to stay in airbnb for one night. It was exciting to see the snow everywhere and I still remember the ice cream we ate under the snow! The next day, I moved into my dormitory.

The school orientation was organized on 5th & 7th January. Due to COVID-19, both orientation and lectures in Period III were moved to online mode completely. Nevertheless, our student tutor organized a campus tour on 5th January, so we got a chance to meet other exchange students in person and together explored every corner of our university. Although it takes 30 minutes to travel from my dormitory to campus, the scenery along the way is stunning.

On 6th January, my student tutor arranged a trip to Suomenlinna, a sea fortress near the city center of Helsinki. The freezing weather (around -7 degree celsius) and the burning sunset formed a striking contrast. It was a remarkable trip to kickstart my exchange journey!

Besides online learning, I spent the rest of the month exploring Helsinki such as Puu Vallila, Design Museum, Helsinki Art Museum. We also visited Cafe Regatta, a famous outdoor cafe in a red cottage by the sea, not to mention outdoor ice-skating! You must try it out before the ice melts (it closes in late-March)!

On 31st January, we celebrated the Lunar New Year's Eve with some Asian friends. We had hotpot as a reunion dinner and some Taiwanese made bubble tea for us! It was such a pleasure to have reunion dinner overseas with new friends.



February

In early February, I traveled to Lapland, the largest and northernmost region of Finland. We went to Rovaniemi, Santa Claus village, Levi and Inari. It was the most unforgettable trip among all as it was a road trip and we enjoyed many new and exciting experiences during this trip like skiing and husky-riding. Unfortunately, we were not able to see the aurora at that time due to cloudy weather.

Apart from the Lapland trip, I joined some school activities such as sledding. We went to a hill nearby and it was so exciting to sled down a steep slope covered with snow. Besides, I got my COVID booster dose at the campus that they offered for students for free. Approaching the end of February, I was busy dealing with coursework and preparing for the finals. After finals, I went on another trip to Turku, the former capital of Finland. It is charming and I recommend you to visit the castle there! I also joined sitsit at the end of the month. Sitsit is a traditional student party organized in Finland and it included a three-course dinner party with a lot of singing and drinking. It was such a unique and fun experience. You should definitely join one!



March

A new period starts in the beginning of March and teaching is fully carried out on campus. After the new period started, I went to Estonia and Latvia. It only takes two hours of sailing to get there! One accident happened when we missed the cruise back to Helsinki so we had to stay an extra night without accommodation. So remember to arrive at the harbor half hour before departure! I also traveled to Iceland. It was breathtaking to see all those waterfalls, glaciers, lagoon etc. I was grateful that we finally saw the northern light this time!



April

While the period ended in Mid-April, I got more time to travel. This month, I traveled to Norway, Netherlands, Belgium and Poland! Besides traveling, what I enjoy the most is the sauna! Sauna is a crucial cornerstone in the Finnish culture. I booked the sauna twice while you can reserve up to five times a month. Each building has its own sauna room so it is so convenient. You can enjoy the sauna on your own or invite your friends to join it.



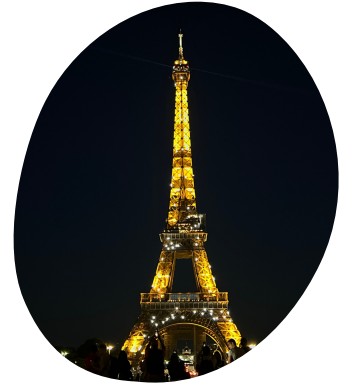
May

I spent half of the time traveling this month, including Italy, Sweden and Spain. Knowing the fact that I'm leaving soon, I spent another half of the time exploring Finland. I went hiking in Nuuksio National park in Espoo which was so refreshing. Afterward, I went to a public sauna called Sompasauna. It is wood-burning and self-service that was built and maintained by volunteers. Be aware that you may see some naked people around. After enjoying the sauna, you can feel free to jump into the sea and swim. It was really a local and unique experience that you should try out! We also visited Roihuvuori Cherry Tree Park and enjoyed the viewing of cherry trees blossoming. It felt like you were in Japan! As the International Ice Hockey Federation 2022 was held in Finland this year, we were lucky to watch one of the games in Helsinki. It was really exciting especially when you saw the crowds cheering for their home team. In the end, Finland won the competition and I was really proud of them as an exchange student here.



June

We also visited Aalto House, a home museum of Alvar Aalto. You may not know, Aalto university is named in honor of Alvar Aalto who is a Finnish architect and designer. It was such a pleasure to visit his home and appreciated every little design detail. I only travel to France this month. The glamorous Eiffel Tower marks the end of my exchange journey. Unfortunately, my return flight got canceled due to flight suspension towards the Turkish Airline (DO NOT CHOOSE THIS AIRLINE!!). To be honest, it was really stressful to rearrange the flight and the designated quarantine hotel. Lesson learnt: Accidents might happen even if you are well-prepared, knowing the fact that you can't avoid them, just live in the present;)



General Exchange Information

Visa Procedures

You are able to apply for the Finnish Residence permit after receiving the acceptance email from Aalto University School of Business. You need to apply for insurance proof for visa application. After submitting your application for a Residence permit through EnterFinland, you need to book an appointment with the Consulate General of Finland for further processing. It took 10 days for me to receive the card after the appointment.

Orientation Activities

Due to the worsened corona situation in Finland the orientation events on 5 and 7 January were moved to online mode completely. They would go through Services and Wellbeing, Code of Conduct and KY presentation. KY is the Association for Aalto Business students while KY-SUB is the Association especially for international Aalto Business students. It is not compulsory to attend and you are also able to access the slides through MyCourses afterward. The school prepared an envelope for us including some important papers (HSL form to get a student discount from public transportation + KELA meal subsidy card in order to get student-priced meals from university restaurants). Each of us will be placed in a tutor group. You can feel free to ask any question and the student tutor is willing to help! The student tutor may also organize other group activities. For my group, my student tutor arranged a campus tour, a small trip to Suomenlinna and ice-skating.

International Services & Activities

I joined an international church which is Munksnäs kyrka. They hold a weekly gathering for international young professionals on Friday evening. It is called I-koti where 'I' stands for international and 'koti' means home in Finnish. I also participated in their Sunday services at 3pm. After worship and message, light refreshments will be available at the back of the hall where you can enjoy your tea and cake while chatting with other brothers and sisters.



Accommodations

I applied for a house through HOAS which I recommend you to apply for as well as HOAS offers furnished apartments and affordable rental prices. Please be reminded to apply it as early as possible in order to get a better location and do not miss the deadline! I applied for housing together with another UST friend, so we received the same apartment offer which is in Kitarakuja. I highly recommend you to choose Kitarakuja in the first place since the location is absolutely convenient. It is only 3 minutes walking distance from Kannelmaki train station, and you are able to access the campus, the city center and the airport in less than half an hour by train or bus. The monthly housing rent is 395 euros which is reasonable. Every HOAS apartment provides a sauna which I highly recommend you to try out, you will fall in love with it!

Courses Registration

The spring semester is divided into three periods

Period III and evaluation week: 10 Jan 2022 – 25 Feb 2022

Period IV and evaluation week: 28 Feb – 14 Apr 2022

Period V and evaluation week: 19 Apr – 3 Jun 2022

I have studied five courses in total:

Period III

Urban Economics (31C02100)

Digital Markets (ECON-C5100)

Survival Finnish 1 (LC-7004)

Period IV

Global Logistics and Distribution Networks (35C04000)

Entrepreneurship and Innovation Management (25C00100)



There was an online session in Zoom in mid-December with information on studies and course registration. Unless UST, you can drop the course anytime even after the registration period. If the course you want to take is not included in the credit transfer database, remember to apply for the credit transfer once you receive the course information as the procedure takes around one month.

Teaching & Assessment Methods

Aalto applies absolute grading, meaning that you have to get 50% or more of the course grade in order to pass. For the courses that consist of a final exam, you have to pass the final exam in order to pass the course. If you have studied the lecture slides, it's not difficult to pass or even obtain a decent grade. Apart from the final exam, writing a weekly learning journey is a common practice of Finnish universities that you are required to sum up and reflect on the lecture that you have attended.

Sports & Recreation Facilities

You can join as a member of Uni-Sport and then you are able to access six locations: the City Center, Kumpula, Meilahti, Otaniemi (inside campus) and Töölö. They provide sport and exercise facilities. You can enjoy a sauna after doing sports. I also recommend you go ice-skating in Tapiola. Enjoying outdoor ice-skating under the snow is definitely a great experience. It is free entrance and the shoe rent is 5 euros per hour. As mentioned above, you should try a sauna! Aside from the one offered by HOAS, you can visit public saunas such as Sompasauna and Loyly. They are both located by the sea! Sompasauna is free of charge while Loyly costs 21 euros that includes a two-hour booking for the sauna, a towel, seat cover as well as soap and shampoo.

Finance & Banking

The official currency of Finland is Euro. All you need is just a credit or debit card. Some of the businesses only accept credit card payment. But do prepare a small amount of cash, for example, KY-sub only accepts cash for the purchase of overall which costs you 20 euros. For the rental payment, I use Wise for transactions with a low transaction cost.

Social Clubs & Networking Opportunities

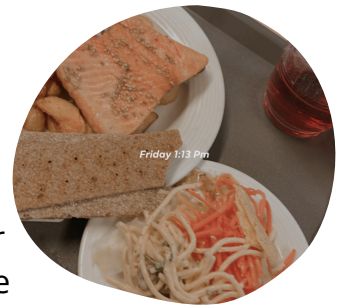
You can join activities, parties and trips held by AYY(Student Union of Aalto University), KY (Association for Aalto Business students), KY-SUB (the Association especially for international Aalto Business students) or other clubs that you find interesting. You are required to pay 33 euros in order to be a member of AYY, so that you can be verified as a student in the Frank app and enjoy different student discounts. For KY and KY-SUB, you will become their members automatically without any membership fee. It is highly recommended to join their Telegram group in order to receive the latest updates and event promotion. For example, I joined the sledding activity as I saw the promotion of A!dventures club in Telegram.

Health & Safety

Finland is one of the safest countries in the world. Especially during the summertime, the sky is still bright even at 10pm, so it is safe to get back home late. During wintertime, the sky turns dark at 5pm, therefore it's required to wear a reflector that reflects light so as to help drivers to see pedestrians in the dark. Besides, it is safe to drink tap water in Finland and Finland has the highest quality of tap water among all the European countries in my opinion!

Food

The living expenses of Finland is relatively high and it is expensive to dine out which usually costs 13-18 euros. Therefore, I always cook with my flatmate in order to save money. For grocery shopping, you can visit Prisma, Lidl, Alepa or S-market which offer a cheaper price than K-market. Another option would be Uni-cafe. It only costs you 2.8 euros and that can be cheaper than cooking on your own. Personally, I love having lunch at Taffa or Dipoli at school :) If you want to enjoy a good meal outside, I recommend you to have a sushi buffet which costs around 14euros. You can enjoy a variety of sushi until you have filled up your stomach. Occasionally, there are 10 euros campaigns where some restaurants serve delicious 10 euros dishes for two weeks.



Transportation

The transportation system in Helsinki is convenient under the operation of HSL. Helsinki is divided into four zones(A, B, C, D). I usually travel between zone A (city center) and zone B (campus), or zone C if I have to go to the airport. Therefore, I would purchase a seasonal ticket with zone A and zone B. You are able to get your public transportation travel card with a student discount at the temporary HSL pop up service point at campus during the orientation period. Seasonal ticket (30 days) costs 35.9 euros for zone A and B and it enables you to access all the transportation including bus, train, metro, tram and ferry. You can also purchase a one-time ticket on their app if you would like to travel to zone C which will valid for 80 minutes. When the snow melts, you can also try to ride a bicycle or scooter. Riding a scooter is a new technique I acquired during the exchange. It is convenient, fast and fun to ride! We rode scooters to travel around Helsinki and back to school in May.



Climate

It is interesting to see the season changing throughout the exchange. From January to April, the weather is freezing and there is snow everywhere.



The temperature ranges from -10°C to 5°C and the daylight is from 9am to 5pm. The secret to a warm winter is to dress like an onion. It's all about the layers! When the snow starts to melt, my nightmare starts as the ground could be so slippery that I fell several times and it really hurted :(So do prepare yourself a pair of water-proof shoes! The time change from winter time to daylight savings time happened on March 27 this year. The clock jumped forward one hour. From May to June, you can have a taste of the spring and summer in Finland. I really enjoyed the weather in May and June where the temperature is around 12°C and the daylight is from 4am to 10pm. It's delightful to see leaves suddenly grow green in Helsinki.

Communication

All Finnish can speak fluent English. However, you may need to use google translation when doing grocery shopping as there are only Finnish and Swedish on the label.

Cautionary measures

Wear water-proof shoes to walk on the slippery floor. Wear your reflector during winter time! Remember to bring your key when you go out as it costs you 30 euros to ask HOAS to open the door for you. In the worst case, if you lose the key, HOAS will charge you 50 euros.

Other notes

Enjoy your exchange!! It's really a once-in-a-lifetime experience and an unforgettable journey.

Items to Bring

- credit card
- router
- adaptor
- scarf
- hat
- gloves
- heat-tech
- swimsuit (for public sauna!)
- medicine
- water-proof shoes
- summer clothes (when you travel to warmer countries)

Useful Links and Contacts

- <https://www.myhelsinki.fi/> - Exploration of Helsinki
- <https://enterfinland.fi/eServices/info/residencepermit> - Application of Finnish Residence permit
- <https://finlandabroad.fi/web/hkg/frontpage> - Consulate General, Hong Kong
- <https://hoas.fi/en/> - HOAS
- <https://mycourses.aalto.fi/> - MyCourses