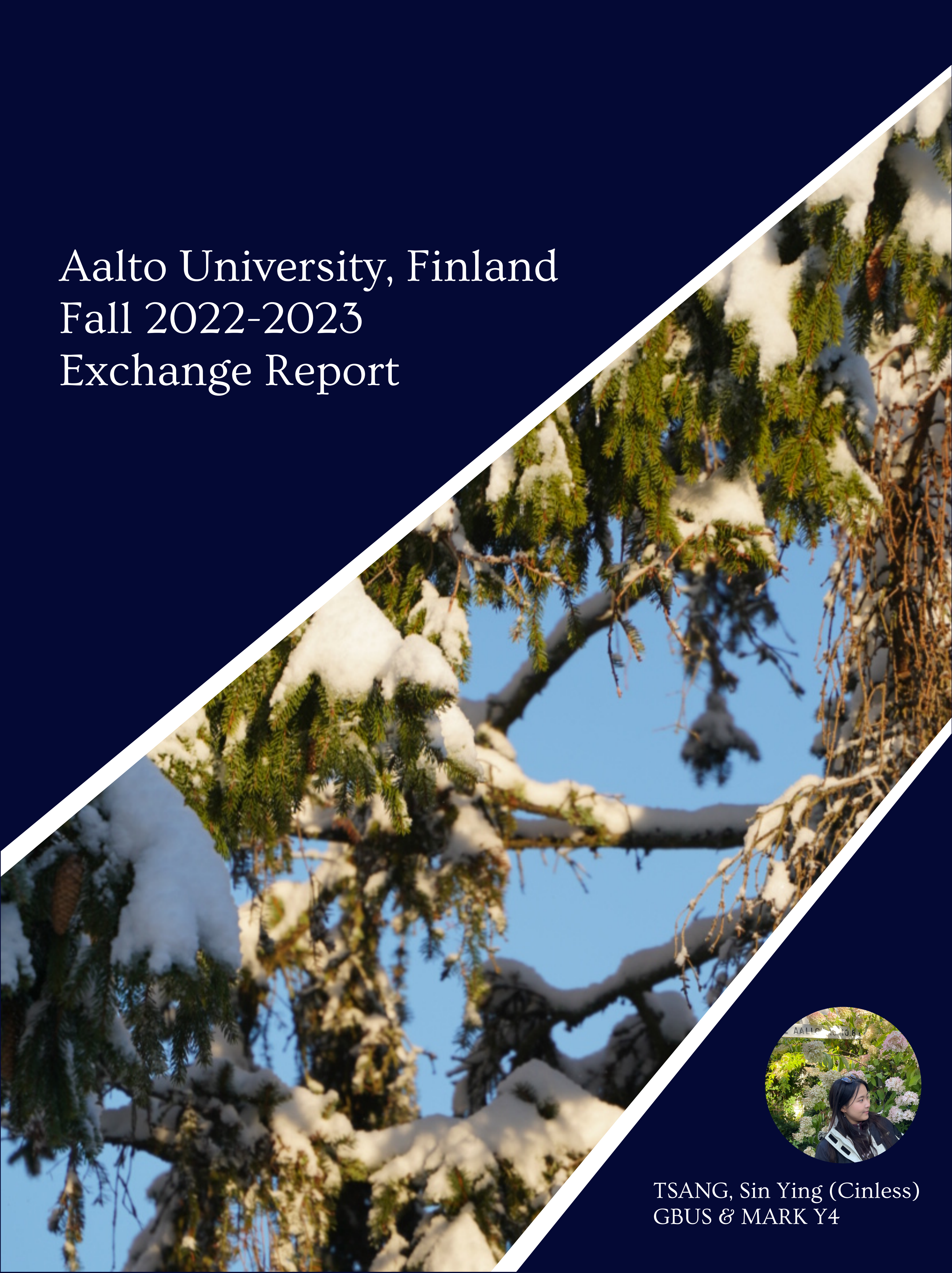


Aalto University, Finland

Fall 2022-2023

Exchange Report



TSANG, Sin Ying (Cinless)
GBUS & MARK Y4

Part I: Monthly Activity Log					
July*	August*	September	October	November	December
Iceland: Reykjavik Scotland: Edinburgh	The UK: London York Liverpool Manchester France: Paris Spain: Barcelona	Finland: Helsinki Espoo	Finland: Rovaniemi Inari Sweden: Stockholm Germany: Munich Königssee Austria: Vienna Czech: Prague	Denmark: Copenhagen Norway: Oslo	Italy: Milan Venice Florence Vatican City France: Strasbourg Colmar Switzerland: Basel Finland: Rovaniemi
		KY-sub Orientation events	KY-sub Stockholm cruise	KY-sub Rovaniemi Trip	Aalto Farewell Event

*Out of exchange period, for reference only

September 2022

To attend the official welcoming event organised from 29.08 to 08.09, I arrived Helsinki on 28 August, 2022 after my solo trips in other parts of Europe. I was informed about the orientation event details in mid-August by my exchange buddies (or they call themselves orientation tutors) in Aalto University. My buddy was kind enough to collect the accommodation key for me in advance, and bring me from Helsinki airport to where I lived.

Upon arrival, I joined the telegram group of my building through scanning the QR code on the notice board. Most of the residents were exchange students from other countries, therefore, they were very helpful in answering my questions regarding facilities around and school events.

I was also added to different second-hand groups by my buddy. Second-hand market was well-developed in Finland, from clothing to furniture and even home appliances. I did not buy any as my apartment was fully-furnished (provided by HOAS), but I learned that other exchange students were not well aware of the channels and had to purchase completely new ones, which were much more expensive (especially in Finland!!).

In September, the temperature in Finland was between 10°C to 22°C. Fall was quite a wet season in the country, so there were cloudy skies and rain some of the time during the orientation events. Yet, in general, Finland's late summer/ early Fall was relaxing and suitable for outdoor and even water activities e.g. kayaking.

The official orientation was to let us get familiar with each other, the available resources on campus and different corners in the city. I learned some Finnish greetings

from my buddies and joined several Telegram groups. The most important one was managed by KY-sub - they were the international student club that organised different activities for us. Most of the exchange students were also active in the group, and would invite each other to join some local festivals.

I participated in some of them, meanwhile, spent time on exploring Espoo. I stayed in that area, which was around one-hour away from city centre or Aalto University. Though it was far away from the hub, there were lots of facilities around: a huge shopping mall, sauna, laundry and gathering rooms provided by HOAS.

October 2022

Aalto had an interesting academic timeline. One academic semester was further split into half, for example, in Fall semester 2022-2023, there were period 1 and period 2. Each course would only take 5-8 weeks. Considering the time frame, the workload was heavier and the entire pace of teaching was also much faster. I was required to submit a summary of 12 interviews within 2 weeks, including qualitative and quantitative analyses.

On the other hand, fully utilizing the study break in each period and time between two periods, I was able to travel around Europe and unlocked lots of attractions. KY-sub arranged a lot of interesting activities. One of them was a cruise trip to Stockholm from Helsinki. Though we could only stay in Stockholm for 6 hours, I had a lot of fun there reuniting with friends, visiting the old town area and trying the local cuisines.

The weather was perfect for travelling around. During the study break, I also went to Munich, Germany to attend the October Festival. To fully immerse ourselves in the environment and embrace the authenticity, my friend and I purchased the traditional clothes. Despite the language barrier, we enjoyed listening to German songs, and we even joined them and stood on the tables holding a cup of beer. Afterwards, we took an overnight bus to Vienna and Prague to experience the arts and cultures there.

November 2022

KY-sub organises a lot of activities for exchange students, Lapland trip is one of the popular ones. To show international friends the locals' favourite activities, the committee had included Santa Claus village visit, husky and reindeer rides, as well as Levi Skiing resort stay in the schedule.

Yet, due to global warming, the amount of snow was significantly less than previous years. A lot of the activities were cancelled or downscaled. For example, husky ride was called off due to safety concerns.

I would highly recommend other outbound exchange students to go to Lapland in December instead. You would have a much better experience.

December 2022

December was definitely my favourite period of time in Finland: with snow, festive vibe, a lot of activities and friends' visits.

It was much warmer than I expected. The temperature was around -1°C to -12°C. Therefore, I could go out with 2-3 layers of clothes, a scarf, a hat and a pair of gloves. I enjoyed going out despite the cold weather – because of snow. I witnessed the first snow during my hike at the national park. We were singing Let It Snow while walking. All of a sudden, there were tiny ice crystals falling down. Soon, the floor was covered in white.

When Christmas was approaching, there were Christmas markets close to the city hall. I brought my friends from HKUST to the booths and tried the special versions of local cuisines: Glögi and Karjalanpiirakka are on the top of the must-have list. My friends and I watched the light show while enjoying the food next to the fire.

Together with other exchange students, I watched the ballet performance, Nutcracker and the Ice Hockey Competition. Finnish might not seem enthusiastic walking on the street, but you would discover another side of them if you join these two events. Remember to dress up and learn some game rules before going in, believe me.

Part II: 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 will last for around one month. You can find contact information for Finnish embassies and consulates worldwide on the Finnish Ministry of Foreign Affairs website: <https://um.fi/embassies-and-consulates-of-finland>. Please schedule as soon as possible, or else you may not be able to get your Permit before your departure. Make sure to provide all the necessary documents for the application such as passport, acceptance letter from the university, proof of financial support, and travel insurance. After the submission, you should schedule an appointment with the Consulate General of Finland, Hong Kong actively. There will not be any follow-up emails or notifications from the organisation.

Orientation Activities

Your exchange tutor will share more information about the activities 2 weeks before your arrival. You can also check on the official website: <https://www.aalto.fi/en/study-at-aalto/orientation-for-new-students>. In the orientation, all exchange students from different parts of the world will be grouped together. There will be sessions, including introduction of university, course registration, local cultures, student benefits etc.

During the orientation, you will be able to meet people from different societies and join their Telegram group for future activities.

International Services & Activities

There were 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. You can find the trip and other activities information on Facebook and Telegram group.

Accommodations

You can apply for housing through HOAS (for all students) and AYY (for Aalto's students only). Accommodations from HOAS are furnished but AYY's are not. Due to limited supply, you may not be able to get your desired room type and locations if you apply on HOAS. To play safe, you can apply on both systems and there are mechanisms to increase the chance of getting an apartment, including applying with friends and joining the student club. I stayed in Maininkitie 4 F, Espoo. There were 3 rooms in my apartment. We had a shared toilet and kitchen. There were a huge shopping mall around. Also, there was a new metro station inside. Therefore, travelling to school was really convenient. If you are looking for apartments with lower rent, you should prioritise Espoo area and those on campus.

If you are unfortunate, you may need to look for flats in the market. Airbnb could be one of the choices as other websites were mainly in Finnish.

Course Registration

There are 5 periods in an academic year in Aalto University. Period 1 and Period 2 in Fall semester; Periods 3 to 5 in Spring semester. Unlike HKUST, the quota in each class is relatively flexible. Professors will try to accommodate everyone's needs and adjust if necessary. As for add/drop, the allocation is not based on first come, first served; and you can drop any courses anytime. To check the course descriptions, course date and venue, you can go to sisu (similar to SIS) and MyCourses (similar to Canvas). Remember to check the UST credit transfer database before choosing courses you are going to take.

Aalto recommends exchange students to take not more than 30 credits per semester (most courses are 6 credits). You can identify the types of courses by their titles: C (Bachelor-level) and E (Master-level). As a GBUS & MARK student, I took five courses: LC-7004 Survival Finnish 1 (1 Cr), 23E570XX: Fashion Marketing, MNGT-E2001: Doing Business in Emerging Markets, 23C59000: Consumer Research and 23E28000: Consumer Culture.

Teaching & Assessment Methods

The grading approaches are similar to HKUST's. Absolute grading was used in Aalto. Different courses have their own grading schemes. You should always refer to the syllabus for more details.

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 is the largest with more facilities. You can get a free trial ticket from orientation booth on campus before paying.

Finance and banking

In Finland, Euro is the official currency and the cashless payment system is well developed. Credit cards are a preferred transaction method. For example, A Bloc, a school canteen, only accepts credit cards. If you do not have a credit card, you can still use cash as shops, restaurants and grocery stores.

Visa and Mastercard are commonly accepted. Personally, I would recommend HSBC Mastercard (debit) as there is no cross-border transaction fee, and you can exchange money easily online with 9 foreign currency accounts. For credit cards, you can consider applying for Citibank's Wise card. No foreign transaction fee would be applied as well.

You can also choose to open a Finland bank account. There will be more information included in the welcoming email sent by your exchange tutor. I did not do that as debit + credit cards are already sufficient for my daily use. A Finnish bank account will be useful if you hope to use the online transfer function in paying student activities (but some of them also accept cash).

Dining out in Finland is extremely expensive. So I usually cooked with my friends. The living expensive level is slightly higher than Hong Kong.

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 with other exchange students.

If you are interested, you should stay tuned and pay attention to messages in Telegram groups. Other exchange students always organise trips and invite people to join.

Health & Safety

Finland is one of the safest countries in Europe. However, you may see some suspicious people wandering around the Helsinki Central Railway Station. That is the most dangerous area: pickpocketing did happen and flashers were observed. Always be careful and pay attention 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 40 euros, depends on the types of restaurants. Therefore, it is a wise option to cook yourself. There are three major supermarkets in Finland, K-Market is the most expensive, followed by S-Market and Lidl (my favourite).

Buffet is a common restaurant offer in Finland. Unlike buffet in Hong Kong, Finland's buffet only limits to one type of food, such as Japanese, Chinese, Thai, Swedish. If you really crave for meat, then buffet can be a good choice (compared to buying meat yourself). For lunch, I usually ate on campus as the lunch costs €3.2 only with subsidy from the government. It comes with salad, meat, carbs, milk and bread. However, most of the canteens only offer lunch and Finnish people have early meals (11-1 for lunch; 5-6 for dinner).

Transportation

The transportation in Finland is quite convenient as all the transportations are all under the same system - HSL. Aalto will help you get the HSL student card and facilitate your first subscription to the monthly student plan. There are A,B,C,D zones in Helsinki. You can choose the plan based on your needs (e.g. AB/ ABC). Unlimited times of travelling will be covered in the same month once your purchase is made. Also, you can use this transportation card for all kinds of public transport - metro, buses, trains and trams.

The transportation system is well developed. You should download the HSL app. It provides the arrival and departure time, as well as suggested travelling routes. However, sometimes Google Map does have better optimization. Make sure to check both when you plan to go out.

Climate

I arrived in Autumn and left in Winter. The temperature changed from 20°C to -12°C. You are highly recommended to bring more clothes as buying clothes in Finland would be really expensive. Also, you can bring warm packs to Finland as they are not available in stores (STRONG LOCALS! THEY DON'T NEED IT). Because it is always snowing, do bring waterproof & layered pants and shoes. My friend did not bring her boots to Helsinki when it was snowing, she could not even stand outside for more than 5 minutes.

The humidity level in Finland is low, make sure to prepare face cream and body lotion to protect your skin. My skin became really sensitive in the beginning when I arrived. You will probably need some time to adapt to the environment as well.

Side note: water in Finland is extremely good. Make sure to drink tap water every day!

Communication

In Finland, Finnish and Swedish are their official languages. You will see both of them on descriptions of products, but not English. Fortunately, the Fins can speak fluent English, even the elderly. You can reach out to them for help, or download Google translation and check one by one yourself.

You can also join the survival Finnish course to learn some basics. There are physical and online ones, available even before your arrival.

Part III: Items to Bring	
3.1 General <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Swimsuit for sauna - Medicine - Rapid test kits - Credit & debit cards (cashless society) - Router & LAN wire*** IMPORTANT - Home appliances (for non-HOAS) - Adapters & converters 	3.2 Winter items <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Beanie - Scarf - Down coat/ waterproof jackets - Skiing gloves - Waterproof pants/ rain pants - Heat-tech layers & socks - Waterproof boots - Ultra-moisturizing hand cream & skincare products (e.g. face oil)

Part IV: Useful Links & Contacts	
4.1 Apps <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Telegram - HSL - Aurora - MyCourses - Hoas - Authenticator - Frank App - Menu 	4.2 Groups <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Second-hand Telegram channels - Free giveaway Telegram channels - WeChat groups for freshmen