



AALTO UNIVERSITY, FINLAND

EXCHANGE REPORT

Spring 2023 // NG CHO KI

MONTHLY ACTIVITY LOG

DECEMBER

On December 29th, 2022, I arrived in Helsinki. The city greeted me with cold temperatures and darkness that persisted until 9 or 10 in the morning. Fortunately, my friend's tutor kindly met us at the airport and guided us to the city centre. For the first few days, we stayed in an Airbnb as we awaited the dormitory keys from HOAS, which we would receive on January 2nd, 2023. During this time, we explored the city and had the opportunity to visit Kiasma, a contemporary art museum. On New Year's Eve, we participated in the countdown event organized by the city government. Despite our limited knowledge of Finnish, the festive atmosphere was enjoyable and uplifting. So, we were able to immerse ourselves in the celebratory spirit of the occasion.

JANUARY

On January 1st, I had the pleasure of visiting the Suomenlinna, a sea fortress located outside the city centre of Helsinki. Despite the windy conditions, the sunset view was breathtaking. Additionally, the fortress is home to several museums, among which the toy museum was my favourite. The museum houses a collection of vintage toys and their accompanying stories. The second week marked the beginning of the spring semester, which followed some orientation activities. I took the opportunity to explore other places of interest such as the National Museum, the Design Museum, and Tampere. I also had a heartwarming reunion dinner with other exchange students from Hong Kong.

FEBRUARY

In February, I had the opportunity to visit the Baltics, which was a convenient trip as the ferry ride from Helsinki to Tallinn takes two hours. During my time there, I highly recommend visiting the Kiek in de K  k Fortification Museum, where you can climb up the towers and walk along a stone passage that was once used for national defence. Additionally, I joined the ESN tour to Lapland, where I had the chance to stay in a cottage for the first time. The cottage was like a house for ten people, complete with a large kitchen and sauna. I cherished the quality time spent with my new friends in the sauna, although we were, unfortunately, unable to see the aurora during our stay. Nevertheless, the Arctic adventure was an enjoyable experience.

In addition to travelling, I was diligent in my studies at Aalto. My favourite course out of the five I took was Quality and Performance Management. The lecturer invited two corporation representatives to share their company backgrounds and introduce the assignment topic. This was followed by ten days of preparation for a presentation. It was a fruitful experience to tackle actual operational challenges.

Personal note:

I found that Oodi, the central library, was a great place for study apart from Aalto's Business Study Hub.





MARCH

As the snow began to melt, the sunlight finally started to last longer. During this time, I visited Iceland, which is without a doubt one of the most memorable countries I have ever been to. It was a touching and surprising experience to witness the waterfalls, ice caves, and aurora with my own eyes instead of just watching them in documentaries. I also have to agree that the sunlight in Iceland is generous, as the sky only starts to turn dark around 9 p.m. In late March, I had the opportunity to join a firm visit to PwC's office in Helsinki and visit the Finnish Science Museum. It was a fun experience that I thoroughly enjoyed.

APRIL

During my Easter break, I travelled to Ireland with a fellow major's batchmate. We spent a week exploring Belfast, Galway, and Dublin, the country's capital. The scenery was breathtaking, and we took a bus to visit the landmark Cliff of Moher. I highly recommend spending at least three hours there to walk along the coastline and visit the exhibitions. Upon returning from the Ireland trip, finals week began. I had two essay-based finals, which turned out great.

After my exams, I had the chance encounter of meeting a donkey in the open area outside the examination hall. The day after finals, I spent a week in Copenhagen and Berlin with a friend. In Copenhagen, we joined the Sakura festival and had a blast at Tivoli, a theme park with exciting rides and games. In Berlin, we visited places such as the Federal Government Building, the Museum Island, and historical sites like part of the Berlin Wall and Checkpoint Charlie. Upon returning from Berlin, it was almost time for Vappu, the day Finns celebrate May Day. I was surprised by the Vappu traditions, where representatives get lifted, clean the statue known as Havis Amanda, and help Amanda wear the creamy white student cap.

MAY

As the final period began, the school organized a Farewell event where we went through transcript downloading and dormitory cleaning materials. After that, I embarked on a long journey with my friend. We travelled to several amazing places, including Amsterdam in the Netherlands, Antwerp and Brussels in Belgium, Paris, Marseille, and Nice in France, Monte Carlo in Monaco, Barcelona, Madrid in Spain, and Lisbon in Portugal.

One of the highlights of the trip was visiting Keukenhof's garden in the Netherlands, where we were stunned by the beauty of the blooming tulips that were still flourishing towards the end of the blooming season. Another unforgettable moment was seeing the Eiffel Tower in Paris, which left me in awe to the point of tears. Everything felt surreal, and the experience was incredibly moving. Finally, I had the pleasure of meeting sea otters at The Lisbon Oceanarium, which was a delightful experience. They were incredibly cute and brought a smile to my face.

JUNE

As my time in Helsinki drew to a close in early June, I decided to spend my remaining days in Finland. One of my favourite places in the city was Amos Rex, an art museum located in the city centre. The landscape design of the museum is impressive, as it seamlessly connects the public space with the shopping mall and the museum. The concrete skylights add a playful touch to the public space, making it an enjoyable place to relax. I was also amazed by how the designers revitalized the cinema auditorium and connected it to the new sites. The interior design of the auditorium gave me a nostalgic feeling of the 80s and 90s. Overall, I am grateful for the people I met and the experiences I had during my five months in Finland. It was truly a great time, and I will always cherish the memories I made.



VISA PROCEDURES

If you are not a citizen of an EU Member State, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, or Switzerland, it is compulsory to apply for a residence permit.

Required documents for the student residence permit:

- A copy of the valid passport
- A copy of the address proof
- A copy of clarification on income
- A copy of the health insurance certificate
- A copy of the Exchange school (Aalto) admission letter

Application process:

- Create an application account at enterfinland.fi
- Fill in the application and upload the required documents
- Pick a service point to meet the consular services coordinator
- Pay the processing fee (350 Euros)
- Submit the application
- Email the service point to schedule a visit
- Take a passport photo before the visit
- Visit the service point and prove your identity
- Check the application status
- Upload additional documents if required
- Email the service point to schedule permit collection

ORIENTATION ACTIVITIES

On January 4th and 5th, 2023, we had two physical orientations at Aalto University. The first day was held in the business school lecture hall, where we received important information about studying at Aalto University, practicalities in Finland, and a brief introduction to KY-Sub (The Association for International Aalto Business Students). Following the orientation, we had a lunch meetup and a tour of Helsinki's city center with our tutor group, who provided us with a meal subsidy card for discounted meals at the university canteens.

The second orientation was for all exchange students and focused on Aalto's services and a campus tour with our assigned tutor groups. Overall, the orientations were informative and helped us settle into our new environment at Aalto University. We were grateful for the support and guidance provided by the tutors, which made our transition to studying abroad smoother.

INTERNATIONAL SERVICES & ACTIVITIES

Prior to the start of the semester, my assigned tutor reached out to me and assisted me in picking up my dormitory key. The tutors at Aalto University are typically master's degree students from the business school who are incredibly kind and helpful. They go above and beyond to ensure that we feel welcome and supported during our time abroad.

In many ways, they act as big brothers and sisters to us, providing us with guidance and advice as we navigate our new environment. I am grateful for their assistance, which has been invaluable in helping me adjust to life in Finland.

ACCOMMODATIONS

HOAS (The Foundation for Student Housing in the Helsinki Region) provides rental, construction, and maintenance of student housing. You can visit their website and fill out an application. The application allows you to specify your preferred room type, whether it be a studio for personal space or a shared apartment for the opportunity to meet new friends. You can also indicate your budget and even request to live with specific friends by typing in their names.

HOAS provides a range of affordable housing options that cater to the needs of students. Their housing facilities are located in different areas around Helsinki, making it easier for students to choose a location that suits their needs. Overall, HOAS is an excellent resource for students who are looking for safe, comfortable, and affordable housing while studying at Aalto University.

Fortunately, I was offered an apartment in Junailijankuja, located right next to the Pasila or Böle railway station. The location is convenient as it is only 10 minutes away from the city centre, 25 minutes away from the university, and 40 minutes away from Helsinki Airport. I adore this dormitory, as the people are friendly, and there always seems to be a party going on.

Additionally, the location is perfect as it is situated near the Mall of Tripla, the largest and best shopping centre in the Nordics. I often find myself tempted to go shopping after school due to its proximity. The rent for the apartment was approximately 440 Euros per month, which included furniture, internet, water, electricity, and laundry charges.



COURSES REGISTRATION

Before the semester begins, the exchange coordinator will send you an email about the instructions for course registration. You had to submit your study plan a month before the first registration on Sisu. In Aalto, the spring semester divides into three periods (Period III, Period IV, and Period V). So, you need to do the registration three times if you have course(s) in each period. However, the coordinator is super nice. She sent us an email as a reminder when it was almost time for the registration. And there is no official add/drop period. Therefore, you can always withdraw from the course(s) if you are no longer interested in it/ them. And the course name will not show up on your transcript.

You can read the course information (Syllabus, lecture time, and location) in MyCourses.

Courses taken during the spring semester:

Period III

LC-7004 - Survival Finnish

35E00500 - Quality and Performance Management

Period IV

35C04000 - Global Logistics and Distribution Networks

51E00100 - Business Ethics

Period V

27E01000 - Decision Making and Choice Behaviour
(One-month intensive course)





TEACHING & ASSESSMENT METHODS

The teaching and assessment format at Aalto University varies depending on the lecturer's preferences. For instance, I had online lectures for Business Ethics, hybrid teaching for Decision Making and Choice Behavior, and physical lectures for the rest of my courses. With the exception of Survival Finnish, attendance is optional, although attending more than 80% of the classes may earn you bonus points towards your final grade.

The grading components for the courses typically include individual assignments, group projects, online quizzes, and a final exam. All courses are graded on an absolute grading scale, with a score of 5 awarded for obtaining 90/100 or above, and a score of 4 given for scores above 80/100.

Class sizes can vary significantly, depending on the course. For instance, Global Logistics and Distribution Networks, a popular course from the ISM department (Information and Service Management), had so many students that some had to stand at the back of the lecture hall during the first lecture due to a shortage of seats.

FINANCE & BANKING

The currency used in Finland is the Euro, which makes it easy for travellers as there is no need to exchange currencies. Cashless payment is highly advanced in Finland and the Nordic countries, far more so than in Hong Kong. During my stay in Finland, I prepared some Euros in cash but found that I mostly paid via credit card or Apple Pay.

However, if you plan to travel to the middle part of Europe, cash payments may be necessary. If you are staying in Finland for less than a year, I would recommend avoiding setting up a local bank account as the requirements are often strict. Banks may require address and income proof, which can be difficult for overseas students to obtain.

CLIMATE

Finland is renowned for its four distinct seasons. From January to mid-April, you can enjoy snowy days, while May brings a generous amount of sunlight. In Finland, there is a Mid-Summer festival to celebrate the summer solstice and the Midnight Sun, which refers to nightless nights.

The temperature in Finland ranges from -10°C to 25°C throughout the year, with February being the coldest month. While this may sound chilly, you will eventually get used to it. Additionally, the weather in Finland is dry, which is something I personally love about the climate here.

HEALTH & SAFETY

Finland is widely regarded as one of the safest countries in the world, with a very low crime rate. I felt safe walking on the streets at night, whether I was going to parties, catching a night flight, or simply studying till I was tired and sleepy at Aalto University.

However, it is still important to take precautions with your belongings. During my first week in Helsinki, I accidentally dropped my wallet and unfortunately, I was unable to recover it. So while Finland is a safe country, it's always wise to be careful and mindful of your belongings, especially when out in public.



FOOD

The cost of living in Helsinki is generally slightly lower than in Hong Kong, especially if you rarely eat out. To save money on food, I would recommend buying uncooked pasta, which costs around 10 HKD per bag and is enough for 8 to 10 meals. Eating out typically costs anywhere from 10 to 20 Euros per meal, with kebab and pizza being the more affordable options.

Fancier restaurants that offer a starter, main course, and a drink or dessert can cost more than 30 Euros per meal. However, for students looking for affordable meal options, the school canteen offers meals priced from 2.95 Euros to 5.9 Euros. Additionally, at Aalto University, you can purchase a footlong Subway sandwich for 5.9 Euros, which is a great option for a quick and satisfying meal on the go.

TRANSPORTATION

The public transport system in Helsinki is operated by the Helsinki Regional Transport Authority (HSL), which manages the train, metro, bus, and tram lines throughout the Helsinki region. The region is divided into four zones, with Zone A covering the city center, Zone B covering Espoo (where Aalto University is located), Zone C covering Vantaa (where the international airport is located), and Zone D.

You can purchase different types of tickets depending on your needs, such as a single ticket which is valid for 90 minutes only, a day ticket, a multiple-day ticket, and a season ticket that is valid for 30 days. Typically, I would purchase a season ticket for zones A to B, which costs around 40 Euros, and buy an extension ticket for zones B to C when travelling to the airport or other locations outside of Espoo.

For Intercity trains, I usually purchase tickets from the VR Matkalla app, which allows you to attach your debit or credit card for added convenience.

COMMUNICATION

As Finnish and Swedish are the official languages in Finland, having an instant translation app can be a lifesaver for international students who may struggle with the language barrier. However, many Finns are fluent in English, and you can often find English translations in public transportation and some shops, such as restaurants and supermarkets.

When leaving home for an extended period, it's common to experience feelings of homesickness and miss your family. To stay connected with my family during my stay in Finland, I purchased a SIM card from DNA, one of the Finnish telecommunications operators, at an R-kiosk convenience store. The SIM card cost me around 25 Euros per month and included unlimited mobile data within Finland and limited data roaming within the EU regions.

SPORTS & RECREATION FACILITIES

UniSport is a fantastic resource for students who want to engage in sports and fitness activities during their stay in Helsinki. UniSport offers flexible membership options, including 1, 4, and 12-month memberships, all of which are priced affordably for students.

With a UniSport training card, you can access its five gyms, attend weekly group training classes, and enjoy online classes and videos. UniSport has various accessible sites throughout Helsinki, including one in Otaniemi, which is conveniently located for Aalto University students.

SOCIAL CLUBS & NETWORKING OPPORTUNITIES

If you are interested in networking activities, becoming a student member of AYY (Student Union of Aalto University) is highly recommended. For a fee of 33 Euros, you will gain access to a plethora of resources and opportunities, including membership in KY (Association for Aalto Business Students) and KY-SUB (the Association specifically for foreign Aalto Business Students).

Upon becoming a member, you will receive a digital student ID through the Frank app, which will grant you access to various events and activities.

CAUTIONARY MEASURES

Remember to wear reflectors when you are outside at night. It is required by law.



ITEMS TO BRING

- Travel Adapter
- Ethernet Cable or Router
- Internet Card (14 Days Plan)
- Cash (~300 Euros), ATM cards, and Credit Cards
- Medicines and Vitamins
- Masks
- 1L Zip bags
- Travel-sized containers
- Copies of Passport, IDs
- Copies of Residence Permit, and Admission Letter
- Travel Backpack and Crossbody Bag (For Travelling)
- Hats (Woollen the best)
- Scarf
- HEATTECH (Thermals)
- Touchscreen Gloves
- Woollen Socks
- Snow Boots
- Water-proof Boots
- Down Jackets
- Swimsuit (For Public Saunas)
- Swimming Goggles



USEFUL LINKS & CONTACTS



Useful Links

EnterFinland Home Page:
<https://enterfinland.fi/eServices>

How to activate your Aalto student account:
<https://www.aalto.fi/en/services/how-to-activate-your-user-id-without-strong-authentication>

How to change password for Aalto student account:
<https://www.aalto.fi/en/services/how-to-change-the-password#1-vdi-aalto-fi-windows-workstation>

How to use Aalto virtual desktop:
<https://www.aalto.fi/en/services/vdiaaltofi-how-to-use-aalto-virtual-desktop-infrastructure>

Aalto MyCourses (Study Materials and Assignment Submissions):
<https://mycourses.aalto.fi>

Aalto SISU (Courses Registration, Timetable and Grade Checking):
<https://sisu.aalto.fi/student/login>

HOAS Exchange Student Apartment Application:
<https://exchange-student-application.hoas.fi>

HOAS Booking Website:
<https://booking-hoas.tampuuri.fi>

HOAS Deposit Refund:
<https://living.hoas.fi/asetukset/tilitiedot>

Useful Contacts

Aalto Service Desk:
servicedesk@aalto.fi

Aalto Incoming Exchange Program Officer:
incoming-biz@aalto.fi

HOAS Apartment Contact:
exchangestudents@hoas.fi