

ERASMUS-EXPERIENCE REPORT

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Host University: Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences

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ERASMUS YEAR IN UPPSALA AT THE ULTUNA CAMPUS OF THE SWEDISH UNIVERSITY OF AGRICULTURAL SCIENCES

This text briefly summarizes my experiences from doing an Erasmus exchange in Uppsala, Sweden.

Already prior to starting my Erasmus exchange, I had spent quite a lot of time in Uppsala and felt well-acquainted both with the city and its university system. This gave me a bit of an advantage both in finding accommodation in Uppsala as well as knowing what to expect and making sure that I was ready for the start of the semester. Uppsala is one of Sweden's largest and most international student cities (and also the fourth largest city of the country). Just like any larger city in Europe, affordable accommodation can quite tricky to find in Uppsala; especially around the start of the university semester when thousands of students are moving in at the same time. Shared flats (WGs) are, compared to Vienna, less common and harder to come by in Uppsala and Sweden. Instead, it is more common for students either to sublet a room in someone's apartment, or live in so-called corridors. Corridors are basically a slightly more organized form of a flat-share where everyone has their own private room (and often *en suite* private bathrooms as well) whereas the whole corridor (usually around 6-8 people in total) shares a communal kitchen, eating area and living room. A room in a corridor is usually quite affordable and easy to find, and in my case it was offered as a guaranteed housing option from the university before my Erasmus exchange started. Just like any WG, the ambiance and cleanliness of a corridor depends completely on who lives there, although my experience is that they are usually somewhat less social than a normal WG. This is both because they house more people than a regular WG, that people often have access to their own private bathrooms, and that people do not tend to live very long in corridors, meaning new people are moving in quite often. In my case, I decided to try to find a room in a shared flat in Uppsala instead of accepting the room offered by the university. A popular website for people to advertise rooms for rent is www.blocket.se which is basically the Swedish version of www.willhaben.at. Through there, I was able to find a room in a flat shared with three other persons for 5000 SEK (equivalent to roughly 450 EUR) per month. Generally speaking, prices for accommodation in Uppsala are slightly elevated, but still comparable to prices in Vienna.

Social integration in a city like Uppsala is very easy. Not only because the city is packed with new people every year from all over the world who are looking forward to meeting new friends, but also because events exclusively for students (like dinners, parties, excursions, movie nights, sport activities, language cafés etc. etc.) are organized all the time and are a great way to meet new people. Such events and activities are usually organized through the Student 'nations'. The nations are organized student groups that exist since a long time in Uppsala for promoting activities for the students. Several nations run pubs or cafés in their main buildings in central Uppsala on a daily basis but also organize recurring events such as raves, stand up comedy nights or movie screenings on a weekly or monthly basis. Additionally, many of the nations also own student housing around Uppsala, and joining a nation can be a great way to up your odds in finding a place to live (either rooms in corridors, or student apartments) in Uppsala. All in all, Uppsala has 13 nations of which some are very large with several thousands of members, whereas others are much smaller and they can sometimes require you to have a personal connection to a specific part of Sweden (as the nations are historically tied to different regions of the country) to be allowed to become a member of them.

Thankfully, I did not have to worry about switching phone plans or insurances, or getting a local bank account for my time in Sweden and also did not have to register when arriving in the country, so the organizational things to deal with when I got to Uppsala and Sweden were very minimal. The formal start of the fall semester in Uppsala is around the turn of the month



August-September, and the semester goes on until early January. Though the university and my program also organized a welcome week in the end of August as a chance for new students to meet each other, get some useful information and get a first look at the campus area. The main university of Uppsala (Uppsala University) is located all around the city whereas the Uppsala campus of the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences, which is much smaller, is located a couple of kilometers south of the city. The campus area itself is both calm and beautiful to walk around and although it might be slightly more than walking distance from most of the city, it's very easy to reach both by bike and bus. Uppsala is, generally speaking, a very bike-friendly city. Both because of its size (everything and everywhere in Uppsala can be reached by bike) but also because of its many students which means biking is a very popular means of getting around. Even in the winter, when Uppsala can get quite a lot of snow, a lot of people still choose to bike. Again, www.bloket.se is a great way to find a cheap used bike.

The studies during my Erasmus, and the organization of university studies in general in Sweden was extremely different to my experiences at BOKU. Most courses at SLU are 15 ECTS and they were scheduled as full-time studies during the entirety of half a semester. In other words: Contrary to BOKU were students can take up to 10-15 courses during one semester and courses vary between 1-6 ECTS, and its up to the student itself to choose courses that make up a functional schedule so that he/she can attend all the obligatory parts of the courses; the need for the students to think about the organization and scheduling of the courses was very minimal at SLU. Instead, most students just apply (quite long ahead of the start of the semester) for two courses each semester and those courses are scheduled as full-time studies (usually with several hours of scheduled lectures or seminars per day, five days per week) for either the first or the second half of the semester. Although it allows for far less potential for the students to tailor their own schedule, and find small courses that deal with only very niched topics, it also removes a lot of the organizational struggles for students: There are no overlapping lectures, seminars, excursions or exams (which also means that other students don't interrupt classes by showing up late or leaving early because of overlaps in their schedule), and it also means that there is usually only two exams per semester to worry about (although a course can also contain e.g., reports or presentations in addition to the exam). On the other hand, the exams at SLU tend to be longer (6-hour exams are not uncommon) and more exhaustive (multiple-choice-question exams are on the other hand uncommon ...) than the ones at BOKU. Ultimately, I think it depends on the student whichever of the two organizational system suits him or her best, but personally I really like the Swedish system as it allows you to dig deeper into one subject for a longer period of time.

Uppsala is a city with four distinct seasons and it transforms quite a lot over the course of one year. I moved to Uppsala in August when everything was warm (between 20-30 degrees) green and you see students walking around, having barbeques, picnics and whatnot everywhere. As September and eventually October creeps in, day temperatures above 20 degrees get pretty uncommon, it starts being dark earlier in the nights, leaves are turning and you see that autumn is coming. In the winter, day temperatures were often around zero degrees. Snow comes in every now and then (and sometimes in large quantities!) and stays for a while, and then disappears, and then comes back again. This is also a pretty dark time of the year so people try to spend as much time outdoors as possible in the middle of the day and on the weekends. Eventually, March and April comes around and you realize that the days start getting both brighter and milder. As late April and May come around, people start creeping out on the streets again to soak up as much spring sun as possible and both the flora and fauna gives a big sigh of relief. Finally, in May to July, people are out on the streets, parks and in forests again to enjoy the weather and each other's company before the semester comes to an end and people go on their holiday. All in all, the climate and the annual weather pattern pushes you around quite a lot more in a place like Uppsala than in for example Vienna. The lows (when it's dark and gloomy) are lower, but the highs are still very high.



I had a great time during my two semesters in Uppsala. The university itself is very responsive and accommodating to the students and certainly less hierarchical and bureaucratic than BOKU. It felt very easy to contact either the professors responsible for my courses (students call their professors by first name, and the student-professor hierarchy is completely non-existent in Sweden) or the mobility team at SLU with all of my questions and got great help with each and every one of them. I would recommend for anyone going to Uppsala to get a bike and a tent and explore as much as possible during their time there. For being such a large country, Sweden has a very good and functional networks of trains and buses (although bringing a bike on trains is sadly not possible and tickets can sometimes be quite pricey so if you have access to a car – that's often even better) and there are tons of beautiful places to hike, camp and go exploring in all across the country. As for the studies: My experience is that everything is very well-functional – just don't be afraid to reach out to the university or its professors if ever you have any questions.

I will certainly be back in Uppsala and Sweden.