



UNIVERSITY OF AMSTERDAM



Digital
magazine for
exchange
students

UvA Study Abroad

Exchange Express

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We are 

INTRODUCTION

This Exchange Express is meant for everyone who is considering going on exchange, whether coming to Amsterdam or leaving for another destination in Europe or worldwide. It was put together by a team of twenty passionate students from the Ambassador Programme. We all went on exchange ourselves, and had an amazing experience. Because we want you to have the same opportunity, we strongly encourage you to go on exchange. It will certainly help you grow as a person and as a student, and once you are back you will never be the same!

However, most importantly, we want you to be well-prepared for your time abroad. Therefore, this magazine will not only focus on the fun side, it will also show potential difficulties you might encounter, and how to tackle them. Of course, there will also be all necessary information and fun facts about Amsterdam for the incoming students!

We hope this guide will prepare you well and help you make the right decisions, so that your exchange experience will be everything you imagine it to be and more!



*Remember that fear is only temporary.
Regrets last forever!*

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TESTIMONIAL



Going abroad to study may seem like a difficult process not worth considering, but I can assure you that after your period in a foreign country you will see it as one of the best decisions you've ever taken in your life. When I wanted to study a semester at the University of Florence, I was worried about a lot of things. Would I find friends? Would the language barrier prohibit me from making contact with locals? Will I be able to have free time to discover the country next to following my courses?

Eventually, all of these worries faded away and I had the best time of my life. I recommend joining an organization for international students right away: because of this, I made friends the first week I was in the city and was able to join trips, dinners and other fun events which introduced me to the Erasmus lifestyle. Meeting locals was difficult for me but gaining confidence to sit next to an Italian student in the classroom was definitely worth it. It allows you to discuss cultural differences you will definitely experience, learn the language in a quick and fun way and discover the city in a different way.



Easily finding accommodation obviously depends on the city where you're going, but don't forget to start on time looking for something! Preparing everything as early as possible is very important, as you won't miss any deadlines and you're sure everything is prepared before you start your Erasmus period.

One last thing I would like to highlight is to have a lot of fun! Try to enjoy your time abroad as much as possible by discovering unusual spots in the city, travel around in the region and meet up with your new friends to spend time together.

ROSA

TESTIMONIAL



Exchange is fun and a little bit scary at the same time. You experience living a new place and get to meet new people while trying to get your head around studying at a different university. I had no idea what to expect from my exchange, but took the plunge anyway because I knew it would help me develop as a person.

I started studying at University College Dublin in September last year and was already packing my bags in July (yes, I was very excited). Dublin is quite a popular exchange destination, which is understandable because the nightlife is amazing.

I mainly wanted to study in Dublin, because UCD offered loads of incredible modules which I really wanted to take. I realised quite early on that most exchange students had come to Dublin for other reasons. This made making friends in the beginning quite difficult, because I did not want to go out and party every night.

However, by going to Freshers' Week at the start of the semester and joining several student societies I met other international students who I became friends with. Funnily enough, some of these students were also taking the same modules which meant I got to hang out with them during the lectures as well! Meeting local student was harder and I think a lot of exchange students experience this.

When the semester came to an end in December I just got used to living in Dublin. I had found a routine for myself, met loads of people from

different parts of the world and had built a life in Ireland.

I really miss it, but luckily Ireland is only a short flight from Amsterdam so I can visit when I want to!



STELLA

TESTIMONIAL



Hello everyone! I'm Özgenur, I'm on exchange at University of Amsterdam coming from Sabanci University and my hometown is Istanbul, Turkey. What made me prefer Amsterdam for my exchange is the previous time I've been here that made me fall in love with the city. I was impressed by how the city itself was full of life and easeful all in one. The city offers anything you want from crazy parties and festivals to most relaxing spots where you can simply enjoy the moment.

Besides these, there has been a few things I found challenging here. To start with, the weather of Amsterdam is rainy and windy which might make you a little bit uncomfortable when being outside. However, since it changes quickly, an umbrella is a simple solution. Another problem I faced when I arrived here was the use of credit cards. Most of the places do not accept credit cards, but rather use Dutch debit cards. Cash is also not accepted everywhere, but you can easily apply for a Dutch bank account which is free for students and you can get the debit card within a few days. In addition to these, I have never had a language barrier experience, because every single person speaks English. , I have never had a language barrier experience, because every single person speaks English. However, interestingly, in supermarkets, everything is in Dutch and packages do not have ingredients written in English. That's why make sure you have your translator with you, because sometimes you might end up buying something different then you wanted :).



I would have to say, however, all the challenges aside, Amsterdam is a perfect city to be on exchange, hosting so many splendid experiences for everybody! Sometimes it is the joy of biking alongside the canals, sometimes it is cheerful talks shared with new friends, and sometimes it is the parties with different genres of music included all at the same time...



ÖZGENUR

IMPORTANT INFORMATION ABOUT AMSTERDAM

HOW TO GET AROUND

- Get a bike!!! It is often faster and easier to get around the city by bike than the public transport. You can buy one second hand or there are other companies which hire out bikes for a monthly rate. Swapfiets is a good rental company used by many students. Then just practice biking around to become more familiar with the city. The more you bike the more you will become familiar and comfortable with getting around that way.
- Get an OV chipkaart to use public transport - when you get a student card you get discounts on off-peak hours on trains only. The metro, trams and buses are all very useful.

HOW TO FIND ACCOMODATION

- Although there is a small fee to pay, applying through the university is probably the best option to find accommodation. Accommodation can be hard to find in Amsterdam so it's best to apply through the university.
- The main student housing companies are Dekey and DUWO.

WHERE TO STUDY

- Almost all UvA buildings have an area to study. This can either be a library, or just study areas like the ones on the Roeterseiland campuses.
- The main University Library on Singel opens very early in the morning and usually shuts just before midnight.
- The Stadsarchief city archive building is also a nice place to study outside of the university. It even has a free museum that you can visit for study breaks.
- My favourite is the cafe in P.C. Hoofthuis, it is very peaceful towards the afternoon/evening.
- Alternatively, if you would like to get some reading done and the weather is nice, Amsterdam has some lovely parks with quiet spots such as Westerpark and Oosterpark.



TIPS AND TRICKS

- Connect with your ISN introduction group! There are many ISN events and trips planned throughout the year.
- Check out Facebook events to see what's going on in the city. There's all sorts of free events, music concerts and community activities so if you are looking for things to do there is a good way to start.
- Get a good secure bike lock and always lock your bike. There are some areas where you can't park your bike so make sure you check the signs before leaving your bike on the street.

FUN FACTS ABOUT AMSTERDAM AND THE NETHERLANDS

1. You won't really find "Dutch" Restaurants in Amsterdam. Most restaurants are international, very popular are Asian or Mediterranean cuisines.
2. There are more bikes than inhabitants in Amsterdam: 881,000 bikes and 799,400 inhabitants.
3. Amsterdam is the capital of the Netherlands, yet the government of the Netherlands is not seated in Amsterdam, but in The Hague.
4. On the Dutch island Texel live 13,000 people and 9000 sheep. Each spring around 17,000 lambs are born and thus temporarily more sheep than people inhabit the island.
5. Everyone seems like a giant: Dutch men in average measure 1.83 meters and women are 1.71 meters tall in average.
6. People don't like curtains: You will notice that you can watch inside your neighbour's room - walking along the canals you will see people eating dinner or watching TV.
7. Two thirds of the Netherlands are below sea water, but the dikes are protecting the country from being flooded.
8. If you connected all bike lanes from the Netherlands, you would have a distance of 35,000 km – that is almost one round around the equator.

TONGUE TWISTERS:

Do you believe this sentences actually makes sense and is grammatically correct?

Als achter vliegen vliegen vliegen, vliegen vliegen vliegen achterna.

(When flies fly behind flies, flies fly after flies.)

Or, try to pronounce this sentence. Can you find a local that can say the sentence?

Zeven Schotse scheve schaatsers schaatsen scheef.

(Seven crooked Scottish skaters skate in a crooked way.)

JOKE:

Crossing the street in Amsterdam:

Look left

look right

look left

look right

look up

look down

look left on more time

look into the 4th, 5th and 6th dimensions

look into the past and the future

look into the souls of your unborn children

cross

still get hit by a bike.

If you have never been to Amsterdam:

Be aware, Amsterdammers can be very direct, and not all jokes are meant to be rude!

CAFE'S:

MUST-GO PLACES IN AMSTERDAM

If you love matcha and are a supporter of its rising trend, *The matcha bar* and *Matcha mafia* are the perfect places for you!

What's better than staying for a drink next to the canal you ask? Actually staying on it! *Amstelhaven* is the perfect place for this, where you can enjoy great food and drinks in the sun.



Coffee & Coconuts

What is more entertaining than drinking out of a coconut in a former cinema built in the roaring 20's?

Bulls and dogs

Bulls and dogs captures the American food culture in De Pijp neighbourhood. Its specialities are funky hot dogs, milkshakes and fries!



Plek: This restaurant in Noord has a spacious terrace near the water, good drinks & food, and a wonderful atmosphere!



The avocado show offers the most creative and extravagant avocado dishes! If you're an avocado lover, you cannot live Amsterdam without trying this place.

Café de Pijp: don't let the name fool you! The cocktails are great and the food is even greater!

Vlaams Friteshuis: This place has the best fries in Amsterdam, make sure to try the joppiesaus!

Vegan Junk Food Bar: Incredible plant-based food that even a meat lover will enjoy. They have plenty of options, multiple locations across the city (my personal favourite is in De Pijp!), and beautifully decorated with graffiti. In general, there are lots of options for vegan and vegetarian food in Amsterdam.

MUSEUMS:

Tip: If you plan on visiting many museums during your exchange, we definitely recommend *the museum card*. For 64 Euros you get access to over 400 museums in the Netherlands for a full year!

(Please note that not all museums mentioned in the following section are accessible with the museum card)

MUST-GO PLACES IN AMSTERDAM



Ripley's Believe It or Not!

Full of interesting things around the world, this is no ordinary museum: it has all sorts of curiosities and illusions that will definitely entertain you for a couple hours!



Micropia:

This highly interactive museum allows you to see microbes invisible to the naked eye! A must-see for all those interested in science.

Hortus Botanicus Amsterdam:

This botanical garden is actually one of the oldest in the world (nearly 400 years old!). It is also within walking distance from the UvA and has a beautiful café; the perfect study break.



Moco Museum: A must-see for any lover of street-art, this museum even features a Banksy exhibit.

Electric Ladyland: A fluorescent art museum in the city centre!

EASY DAY TRIP FROM AMSTERDAM!

MUST-GO PLACES IN AMSTERDAM

Zaanse-Schans: A great chance to see beautiful windmills and experience an 18th C Dutch Village! Make sure to go taste some cheese at Catharina Hoeve Cheese Farm and check out the free clog museum.

Zandvoort & Scheveningen: If you feel like having a relaxing day at the beach, these two areas are a great option.

Parks: Although being in the city centre is a lot of fun, it is nice to sometimes get away to relax a bit. If this is something you want to do, Amsterdam has many great parks! These places are great to go have a picnic with friends or even just read a good book out in the sun.



Vondelpark:

Perfect for picnics and for admiring the trees changing into vivid colors in the fall!



Kersenbloesempark:

Especially beautiful in the spring, as the cherry blossoms bloom.

Amsterdamse Bos:

This park is home to many peaceful attractions, such as a lake (with the option to canoe!) and outdoor artwork. There are also many events held here throughout the year!

*EASY DAY TRIP
FROM AMSTERDAM!*

MUST-GO PLACES IN AMSTERDAM



Check out the street art in NDSM:

Wandering around Noord, you are guaranteed to find some incredible street art and beautiful sceneries. Not to mention, the free ferry ride to get there is also quite enjoyable!

IJ-Hallen Flea Market (only open once a month!): One of the biggest flea markets in Europe



The Catboat:

Missing your pets back home? Make sure to check out the only floating animal shelter in the world!

A'DAM Lookout:

Seeing the whole Amsterdam, while swinging "on top of the world"!



Q&A ABOUT EXCHANGE EXPERIENCES

Q&A WITH MARTINE

Q: Hey, where did you go abroad?

A: Hey! I went to Bologna, Italy.

Q: Ah perfect so you eat a lot of nice food?

A: Yes, the Bolognese food is amazing, especially the Tagliatelle al Ragu, or as most people call it Pasta Bolognese.

Q: What else did you enjoy about the city?

A: I love the way the Italian people are living, taking the time for each other and for enjoying the weather and of course again the food. Besides, Bologna is a small city so you can walk everywhere what results in taking time for surroundings and details.

Q: How was the student life?

A: Bologna is the oldest university of the Western world, so the city attracts a lot of (inter)national students. Many bars are especially focussed on students what makes it very easy to engage yourself in a big international network. There are a lot of student associations that you can get in touch with very easily. They also organize great trips to other Italian cities.

Q: What kind of difficulties did you experience?

A: The fact that not everything is well organized at some of the official institutions, such as the general practice centre or plumbing companies, made me sometimes a bit stressed. On the one hand it feels relaxed to not care about everything, but sometimes you really need to fix important business for school, for your house or for your health. In The Netherlands we have a very bureaucratic system and a lot of things are really good organized. When finding out that this is not normal in every country it can be very frustrating.

Q: Were there any cultural shocks regarding the university life?

A: Yes, for me it was really uncomfortable to not be updated about the planning of my courses. Sometimes my teachers made up that you had to deliver a paper at the end of the course, and then in the end they changed it to an oral presentation. Also the time-table system of faculty, arts and sciences, was new for me. I am used to an 8/8/4 week kind of system at the UvA, but at my department the courses had their own time-table. So some of the courses lasted 10 weeks, some only 6, what made it difficult to plan and learn for your exams.

Q&A ABOUT EXCHANGE EXPERIENCES

Q&A WITH VICTORIA

Q: Where did you study abroad?

A: I am currently on exchange at the University of Amsterdam.

Q: How did you prepare yourself before arriving in Amsterdam?

A: I came into this exchange having already studied abroad once before for a year in France when I was 16. I knew that the exchanges would be different, but I also knew I had to learn from the mistakes I had made four years ago. One thing I focused on before coming to Amsterdam was to avoid creating expectations. I of course read up on Amsterdam and the Netherlands, but I tried not to paint a picture of the culture and the city before I actually arrived. Experiences like this are complex and your emotions are constantly heightened. It is easy to feel disappointed, especially if your expectations are not met. I guess a way of preparing myself for Amsterdam was in a way avoiding any non-essential preparation.

Q: What were you most afraid of and excited for before arriving?

A: I was definitely most scared about not meeting people I would connect with. And, I was most excited about just living in Amsterdam.

Q: What was your initial reaction towards Amsterdam?

A: The architecture immediately caught my eye; Amsterdam just does not have the ugly architecture from the 60s. At first I had this feeling that the city was super busy and congested because of all the bikes. The bikes for sure made me feel overwhelmed. Yet, just within a couple days Amsterdam honestly did not feel like a city to me anymore. I would go on walks in the afternoon, and it felt like I was walking through my garden.

Q&A ABOUT EXCHANGE EXPERIENCES

Q&A WITH VICTORIA

Q: Did you have any sort of culture shock upon arriving?

A: I think when I first arrived I was too excited to have any culture shock. Of course I was able to see clear cultural differences, but I was excited about it. I was excited about getting on a bike and excited about learning from a different teaching style. But, after a month or so some of the cultural differences started to get under my skin. I guess I haven't had so much of a culture shock but more of a cultural 'annoyance'.

Q: How have you overcome any cultural differences?

A: No matter where you are in the world, if you come across a cultural difference the most important thing to do is to maintain an open mind. It is so easy to quickly judge a culture that is different from your own. I find that asking questions is the best way to approach these kinds of situations in a constructive manner. And, I always try to live a life of gratitude, which definitely helps when encountering different cultures. Like, I might not like how Dutch people come sometimes come off as closed off, but I am grateful that I am even able to experience that.

ISTANBUL



Partnered universities (as of 2019)

- Istanbul Teknik Universitesi
- Bogazici University
- Yeditepe University
- Sabanci University

Istanbul is a cultural and historic center in Turkey, being the bridge between Europe and Asia. There are lots of historical monuments and places to visit in Istanbul such as Hagia Sophia, Topkapı and Dolmabahçe Palace and Galata Tower. Go there and be amazed by the history and the architecture of the buildings. There are also popular marketplaces like Grand Bazaar and Spice Bazaar – of which you will never get bored. But the city is also a modern metropolitan with great bars, restaurants and clubs. The reason why Özgenur, one exchange student here in Amsterdam, fell in love with the city was the amazing view of Bosphorus.

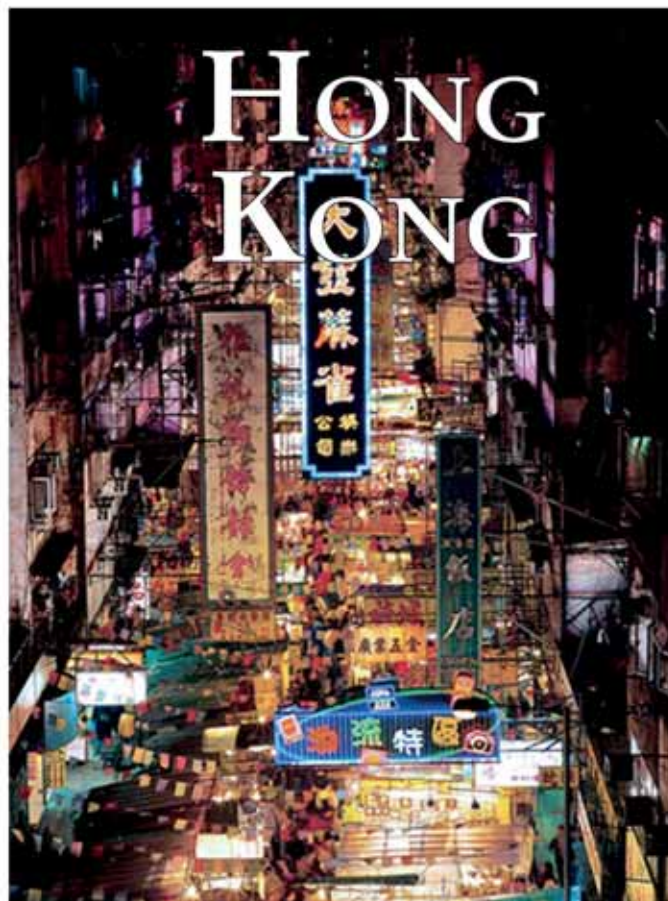
There are also bohemian places such as Kadıköy or Taksim square, where Turkish youth hang out. Turkish people are very kind and welcoming, especially eager to talk to foreigners and sometimes love to host for them as well. Turkey is not a individualistic society as other parts of Europe can be but instead open-minded and friendly to everyone.



Partnered universities (as of 2019)
- Lunds Universitet

If you are a bit tired of living in a big city and want to explore the best student life, your next destination is Lund. It is also one of the oldest and highest ranked universities in Sweden. The city is quite small, and it is mostly focused on the university. Outside your university studies there is a wide range of associations and sororities or frat houses you can get involved in, there is something for everyone!

There is more to Lund than just the student life, you have a beautiful nature to explore around the city, such as Dalby Söderskog. Even though it is not so big, Lund has great bars and restaurants: maybe you dare to taste Skåne's take on sushi at Råepok. Moreover, you have Malmö and Copenhagen just a short trip away if you want to visit a big city. ISN usually organizes trips to the northern part of Sweden where you can see the northern lights and meet the indigenous people Sámi.



If you are the type of student who doesn't like to take things too comfortably and want to go all-out in a city that never blinks, Hong Kong might be the city for you to go on an exchange. Hong Kong, a former British colony with 7.5 million inhabitants, is considered one of the major financial and cultural centres in the world. The city is a unique place where East meets West, establishing their own cultural identity which can be recognized in their architecture, food, and arts.

Unlike Amsterdam, student life is mostly focused around dormitories. From there you can participate in different activities, such as cultural exchange events and sports competitions competing with other dorms. The city environment is what some would call an urban jungle, as it's very easy to get yourself lost among the skyscrapers. To give you a little perspective: district Mong Kok has a population density of 130.000/km²! Visiting Victoria Harbour to view the famed skyline is a must for starters. But there's always something for anyone. Do you like food? Hong Kong has many options for varying prices from dim sum and 'cha chaan tengs' to modern fusion restaurants. Having a break and want to see some nature? Why not treat yourself on a hiking trip to Tai Long Wan or on Lamma Island. Up for some drinks to spend the evening? Then go to Lan Kwai Fong or Tsim Tsa Tsui. As mentioned before, it is a city of which you will not get bored.



Partnered universities (as of 2019)

- Chinese University of Hong Kong
- City University of Hong Kong
- Hong Kong University of Science and Technology
- University of Hong Kong
- Hong Kong Baptist University

LISBON



Partnered universities (as of 2019)

- ISCTE Lisboa
- Universidade de Lisboa
- Universidade de Lisboa: Instituto Superior Técnico
- Universidade Nova de Lisboa

You don't need a large budget to be able to go on an exchange and it shows when you look at developed countries like Portugal, where costs of living are much lower than its neighbours in North-Western Europe.

The country has (unsurprisingly) a rich cultural history, as Portugal is one of the oldest existing states in Europe going all the way back to the 7th century. Its capital alone offers four universities in the city centre, making it ideal for adventurous students to explore their new home after a day of lectures. Rick, a student who studies there, agrees on this notion. If you end up doing your exchange in Lisbon, he would highly recommend you visiting the São Jorge castle in Alfama, the oldest district of the capital, or Belém, which houses ancient monuments. Expand your horizon a bit further and you will discover Sintra that boasts lots of Romanticist architecture. If not, you can also spend some time at the beach just thirty minutes from your residence. Lisbon is one great place to start your intercultural journey.

SHANGHAI



Partnered universities (as of 2019)

- Fudan University
- Shanghai Jiao Tong University
- Soochow University

If you want to explore a unique Oriental charm as well as enjoy a modern metropolis life, then Shanghai would be your choice. This is a place with mixture of Western and Eastern culture.

Shanghai used to have a lot of foreign concessions before 1949. At that time, Shanghai was known as the “paradise of foreign adventures”. Many foreigners, mostly Europeans, came to try their luck here to build a future. That’s why you can see buildings of different architectural styles here: Spanish, Greek, Roman and Russian. One of the exciting stuffs about exchange in Shanghai is the local cuisine. Chinese food has a lot of different styles and if you like eating something sweet and savory, Shanghainese food is your best choice! If you prefer hot and spicy food, you must try Sichuan cuisines! All in all, you are guaranteed to find something satisfying.

KIEV



Ukraine is one of the largest countries in Europe, with more than a thousand years of history and tradition originated in ancient times. There are 42 million people living here, and more than 13 million foreigners come to Ukraine every year. Kiev is the capital of Ukraine and it is the center of economics, culture and education.

Ukraine is a warm and hospitable country. When it comes to the characteristics of Ukraine, it must be the beauties in this country! Another major feature of Ukraine is vodka, which is their favorite drink; almost every family has it. Whether you are climbing a mountain or having a party, vodka is everywhere. The rule of drinking vodka is to drink it with a bit of orange juice. If you are lucky enough to have the chance having exchange there, please remember to try!

CONCLUSION

Thank you for taking the time to read the Exchange Express.

We hope it was helpful and fun, but more importantly, we hope you could understand the importance of going on exchange, with all its difficulties and its qualities.

Studying abroad is challenging, and you could face hard times, however, every problem comes with a solution and we are happy to have shared with you our experiences and our personal advice to overcome them. In the process, you will gain valuable life skills you may take home with you to further your goals and aspirations.

If you stick to your comfort zone, you will never know how amazing you can be! So be brave and enjoy every opportunity, it's a big world out there, it would be a shame not to experience it!

“The real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking new landscapes, but in having new eyes.”
- Marcel Proust

