

2023 Edition II

Cultural Exchange Ambassadors'

Exchange Express

your journey abroad starts here



Photo by: Yasmin Hatayli



UNIVERSITY OF AMSTERDAM

Equity,
diversity and
inclusion in
student
mobility

Welcome aboard the Exchange Express!

editor-in-chief: Mohamed El-Hirech



Join the Ambassadors as they embark on their journey through the world of international study. Prepare to be transported to different corners around the world, where classrooms become melting pots of cultures and students' biographies are forever rewritten.

This Exchange Express is not your typical magazine: it's a tool to be used for endless inspiration, a vibrant vehicle adorned with stories and pictures that will arouse within you an untamable wanderlust. This magazine is an homage to the brave Ambassadors, and anyone alike, who dares to dive in and explore new horizons, discovering hidden truths and gaining knowledge that transcends cultural borders and ideological biases.

Within these pages, you'll find testimonials from different students and their experiences navigating the realm of international study, as well as stories about their go-to places in Amsterdam. Stories about the Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Festival (EDI) and a

special featured story by an Ambassador from the University of Birmingham will have you yearning to have your own share of the international student experience. All these student-written stories will shed light on what it means to be a student in an ever-changing world, where cultures collide and friendships are forged in the intersection of diversity.

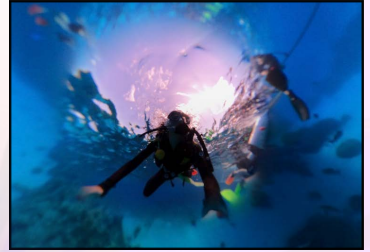
As this magazine's editor-in-chief, I am thrilled to shine a spotlight on the heroes of intercultural connection: the university's Cultural Exchange Ambassadors. In weekly workshop sessions during the second semester of 2022-2023, these ambassadors gained insights on how to transform their international experiences into valuable communication skills and intercultural knowledge. They truly are the living proof that every international experience is an opportunity to bridge gaps and create a shared understanding.

Let the Exchange Express be your compass; happy reading!

These featured stories will inspire you and make
your exchange experience even more fun.
Happy reading!



FAVORITE
PLACES IN
AMSTEDAM



EXCHANGE TESTIMONIALS



ALL ABOUT THE EDI-
FESTIVAL

Overview



PHOTO
CONTEST
WINNERS



- SCHULDHULPMAATJE LEIDEN
- ERASMUS STUDENT NETWORK EVENT
- ACCESSIBLE STUDENT MOBILITY

A night scene of a city street, likely in New York City, featuring a line of yellow taxis. A person in the foreground is taking a photo with a smartphone. The scene is illuminated by streetlights and the headlights of the cars.

YOUR EXPERIENCES ABROAD

seek new horizons

AUSTRALIA IS THE PLACE FOR EXCHANGE!

AUSTRALIA HAS BEEN MY DREAM DESTINATION FOR A VERY LONG TIME AND THE GLOBAL EXCHANGE MADE MY EXPERIENCE UNBELIEVABLY GREAT!

The University of Melbourne has a lot to offer in the fully international environment spread around a huge campus. I study Communication Science and I chose to take Strategic Marketing, Entrepreneurship for sustainability, PR and Advertising and Promotions. But other than the interesting and varied subjects, UniMelb has a great and ancient culture, tons of clubs and committees, events for international students to meet at any point of the exchange (so if you don't find your group at the beginning, you have always a change), and nice sports initiatives like surf camps. Studying abroad in Melbourne doesn't only give a fully new perspective on University landscapes and lifestyles, it also allows you to see yourself from a different point of view. Far away from friends and family, on the opposite side of the world, Australia gave me the chance to fully break out of my comfort zone and get closer to understanding who I am and what I like. Moreover, Australian culture is amazing; generally very social and welcoming that will rarely leave you with no one to talk to.

The Global Exchange Programme really gave me a chance to live like Australians, develop friendships and understanding them at a deeper level; from eating Vegemite in the morning to crazy parties at night!

"An exchange (in Australia) gives you time to focus on whatever you enjoy the most; and for me, that meant travelling."

It felt like I was living in a dream and it certainly became one of the best experiences in my life!

DOLCE VITA

I WENT ON
EXCHANGE
BECAUSE I
WANTED TO TRY
SOMETHING
NEW.

THE ERASMUS
PROGRAMME
ALLOWED ME TO
TAKE A BREAK
AND FOCUS ON
**THE SIMPLE
PLEASURES IN
LIFE.** THE
BEAUTY OF
YOUR
EXPERIENCES
ABROAD LIES IN
THE FACT THAT
ONCE YOU
UNDERGO THEM,
THEY FOLLOW
YOU BACK
HOME, AND
HELP YOU TO
EMBRACE YOUR
'NEW LIFE'



I believe this picturesque photo of Bellagio, a small town at Lake Como, represents the 'Dolce Vita' idea that many of us hold about Italy. I was fortunate enough to experience the Dolce Vita or *Sweet life* way of living first-hand. I am not saying that I spent all 5 months in this pink cloud honeymoon phase, but there were periods when I could internalize this inspiring approach to life. So the phrase refers to a way of living that emphasizes pleasure, enjoyment, and leisure. It can manifest in many ways, like enjoying a cup of coffee on a small-town square, strolling through beautiful alleys, or having an *aperitivo* in Navigli.

Overall, the "Dolce Vita" way of living is a celebration of the good things in life. It's a reminder to slow down, appreciate the moment, and find joy in the everyday.

The Arts: exploring what it means to be human

As an international student from Malaysia, I've grown up in an environment where the arts are considered secondary when it comes to education. However, I do not think so, and I decided to study English literature for my bachelor's degree in my home country, and currently I'm doing my master's degree in English literature and culture in Amsterdam. I am not alone in this endeavour; plenty of Malaysians acknowledge that the arts are a necessary aspect of exploring what it means to be *human*. Studying abroad exposes me to the way other countries promote the arts, and I'm beyond glad I applied to the University of Amsterdam.

The Amsterdam Light Festival, which I experienced with my good friend on a canal tour that included refillable hot chocolate drinks, blew me away by how much the arts and self-expression are embedded within Dutch culture. In turn, the festival attracted people all around the world, whether it was tourists, other artists, scholars, students, and many more. Each of the pieces has a story behind it, but that doesn't mean that people cannot have their own interpretations that shape their experience looking at art. In the end, different people go through different adventures, albeit through the same tour, which is pretty intriguing when the topic of subjectivity is discussed.

THE NAMES
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PICTURE ON
THE LEFT IS
CALLED
BRIDGE 242
BY PETER
FINCH.



It was breathtaking to realise that anything can be a form of art, and in the case of this festival, it was the lights! Not only is it creative, experimenting with lights also promotes the science and technology behind the arts. Thus, the arts can also be innovative, rather than what people imagine to be canvas and acrylic paint, even though that is great too! I was truly amazed! In a sense, I hope there are ways I can encourage Malaysians to partake in art subjects, and I'm happy I learned about how the arts are integrated here in Amsterdam.

"I envision Malaysia as a country balanced between arts and sciences because, at the end of the day, both represent one value we all share, which is humanity in its essence"

Global Exchange in Querétaro, Mexico

From July 2022 until January 2023 I had the opportunity to call Querétaro, México my home. And it really did feel like that. Moving from the safe comforts of The Netherlands to an unknown and less organised environment felt a bit scary at first. However, from the moment I arrived I realised that this is exactly what I was hoping for: understanding more and more to live in this part of the world, and at times completely get left in awe by the diversity and similarities of the people around me, from across the globe. It is admirable and inspirational to see how deep community and inclusivity is rooted in Mexican culture. As a foreigner, I always felt welcome and Mexicans invite you everywhere, even to family Christmas!

Photo and text by: Teun Bastiaans



The courses I chose assisted me in my goal to understand the country better, by taking a Spanish course and courses about the culture and politics of Mexico. I would recommend this, because the open discussions within these classes that follow (especially between Mexicans and exchange students) are so insightful and interesting. Also, do not underestimate the accessibility of meeting new people on your semester abroad. Most people are extremely open, and the time that would otherwise go to friends, family, work and other activities back home, you can invest in new friendships!

Of course not everything is always amazing, and it is important to also prepare for feeling sad, homesick and/or fed up at times. Mexico is not as safe (although I have never felt unsafe) as The Netherlands, it is hard to find healthy food easily and sometimes you should be more wary towards the police and other institutions due to corruption. Yes, this can happen, your semester will most likely still be an unforgettable experience, maybe even partly because some things are harder or less convenient. For me it really helped me in reappreciating aspects of life in The Netherlands.

I would really recommend living in Querétaro! You can always contact me for further questions.

From Shanghai to Amsterdam: a journey of personal discovery

My name is Rachele, I am a 21 years old Italian girl and I have just started my Erasmus in Amsterdam. Even if I am sure that this experience will, hopefully, change myself and my life, it is just too soon to be talking about it. So, I am going to tell about another unique study abroad experience that, in a certain way, has brought me here now.

In 2018 I had the great opportunity to spend two weeks in Shanghai, China, in a Chinese-American College thanks to my Italian high school. At first, I did not even realize how lucky I was and how that journey would leave a mark on me, I was too excited about leaving Europe for the first time in my life. At that point I had only been studying Chinese for three years, I had always heard about China, but I did not know anything about its history and its reality. After a week there, past the initial cultural shock that made me look at everything with amazement, I started focusing on China's real landscapes, which go beyond the wonderful Shanghai skyline, and I started noticing all the controversy and the differences of a culture that it is opposite to mine.

Once back in Italy it was clear to me that my history with China (and the world in general) could not just stop there, and so I decided to enroll at Chinese's studies at the University of Florence, thanks to which I am here in Amsterdam today. I still do not know who am I going to be or what my career will be, but I know that in a way or another, it will give me the possibility to see the differences between cultures and people around the world.



JOYRIDE: exchange in Barcelona

My study abroad experience felt like a rollercoaster, when it was time to leave it felt too soon. It was my first time visiting Barcelona, so I kept learning new things about the culture. The university was a little bit challenging to get used to, so figuring out how things worked was a little annoying (to be brutally honest). Moving to a new place and figuring out my way around the city was easy. It's safe to say that the beginning of my Erasmus was chill. All the admin things aside, *Voluntariat Lingüístic* which was part of the University of Pompeu Fabra made my experience a thousand times better and easier.

I personally found it difficult to socialize with the locals but with the trips organised by *Voluntariat Lingüístic* I had the chance to meet other internationals and learn about Catalan culture. I also had the opportunity to take subsidized Spanish lessons offered by the university which was fun and made my life easier while shopping or ordering something. I really like to move around so the challenges were to be expected of course. Plus, if you want to escape the "amazing Dutch weather, I highly recommend choosing Barcelona. In the background is a sunset picture shot at *Playa de Bogatell* which is an amazing beach to hang out with your friends, go for a swim or just to chill.



YOUR FAVORITE PLACES



AMSTERDAM

Whether you've lived here your whole life or just moved here, the city has a lot to offer. Come explore the Ambassadors' fave places!



'DE PIJP' IS WORTH IT!

*Feel the liveliness and
peace of the
neighborhood*

With the visit of the Birmingham ambassadors, we decided to soak in the sun and explore the lovely area of de Pijp. We had walked from the Roeterseiland campus for the ambassadors to take in the city and the atmosphere (especially when the weather is spectacular, drawing out people to make the most of the day). We walked from stalls and browsed the offerings ranging from jewelry to magnets to food, with some ambassadors enjoying fresh stroopwafels, a delicious drink, or cannolis. With the sun as a mood booster, we went further by walking around and observing the stunning architecture and felt the liveliness and simultaneous peace of the neighborhood, and ended the lovely afternoon by strolling back to campus for the pizza party and social bingo.

Photo and text by: Nimrat Jawandha, Alice Guenther, Aminca Lučkova, Hanshika Karra, Helena Reed, Leah Shear, Nienke Boojj, Norfatini binti Mohamed, Prisha Kumar, Rachele Baini

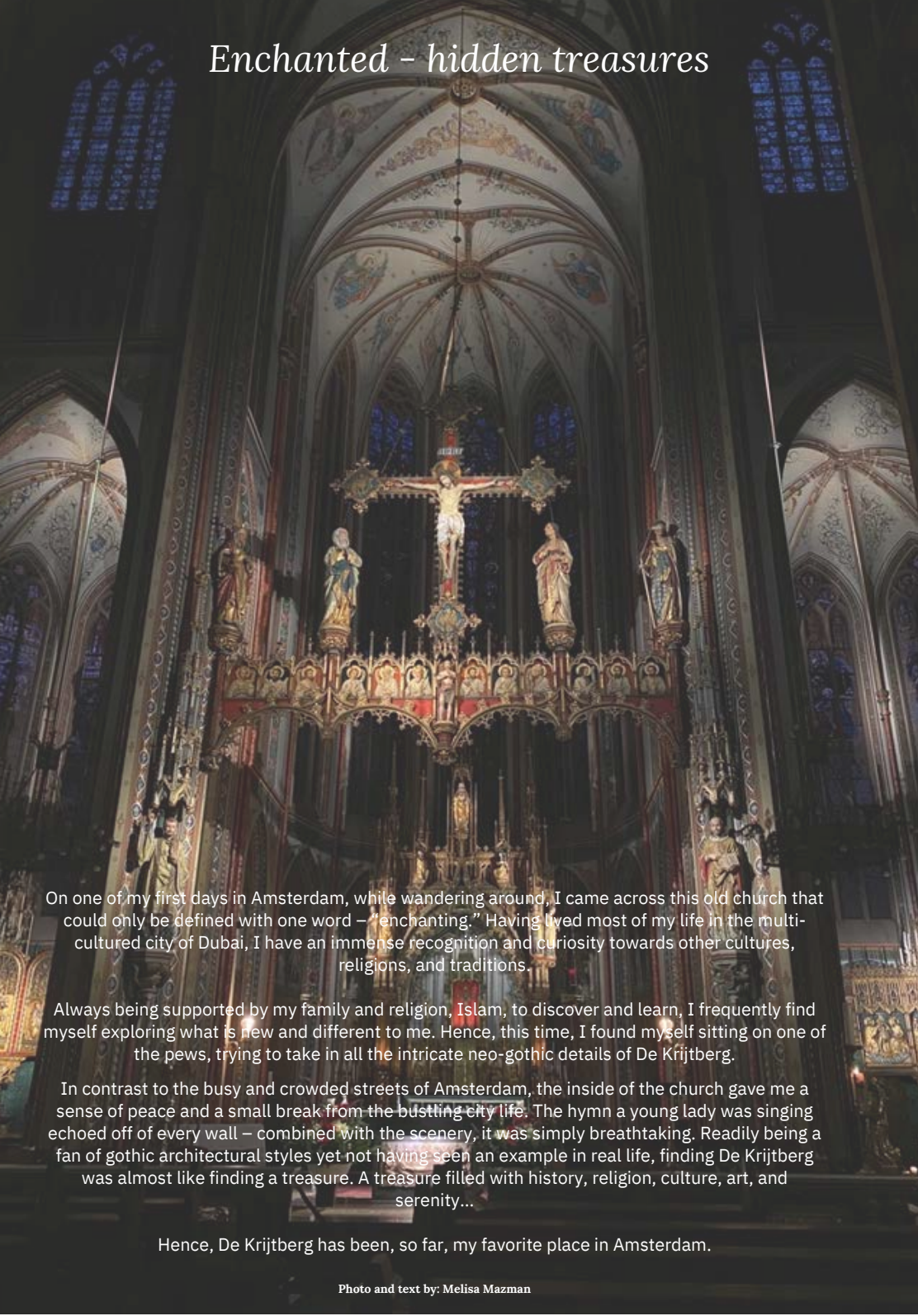
The bumpy road to Personal Independence



Even before arriving in Amsterdam, I knew the Ice Rink on Museumplein would not only be a magnificent sight to see, but also one of my favorite places in Amsterdam. The Ice Rink is rather a small one, yet it has a local and cozy vibe that embraces you like a cabinet in the woods, with a glorious view of the Rijksmuseum. I have only skated a few times and can say that I'm rather inexperienced and struggle a lot on the ice.

When I got on the ice rink, it was a little bumpy, making it a hundred times harder to skate, but that was the best part! It was scary but exciting, risky but fun as I was holding onto the hands of my new friends in this brand-new city, getting to know each other and distracting ourselves from the worry of falling on the watery ice. It also was a reminder to me as a person who is trying to adjust to a new place, people, lifestyle and so much more by taking careful little steps but gaining confidence and courage as I skate further and faster with people like me, experiencing my personal independence.

Enchanted - hidden treasures



On one of my first days in Amsterdam, while wandering around, I came across this old church that could only be defined with one word – “enchanted.” Having lived most of my life in the multi-cultural city of Dubai, I have an immense recognition and curiosity towards other cultures, religions, and traditions.

Always being supported by my family and religion, Islam, to discover and learn, I frequently find myself exploring what is new and different to me. Hence, this time, I found myself sitting on one of the pews, trying to take in all the intricate neo-gothic details of De Krijtberg.

In contrast to the busy and crowded streets of Amsterdam, the inside of the church gave me a sense of peace and a small break from the bustling city life. The hymn a young lady was singing echoed off of every wall – combined with the scenery, it was simply breathtaking. Readily being a fan of gothic architectural styles yet not having seen an example in real life, finding De Krijtberg was almost like finding a treasure. A treasure filled with history, religion, culture, art, and serenity...

Hence, De Krijtberg has been, so far, my favorite place in Amsterdam.

Spark change! Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

To read and watch more about the 2023 EDI-festival and all its activities, scan the QR code below

International accessibility

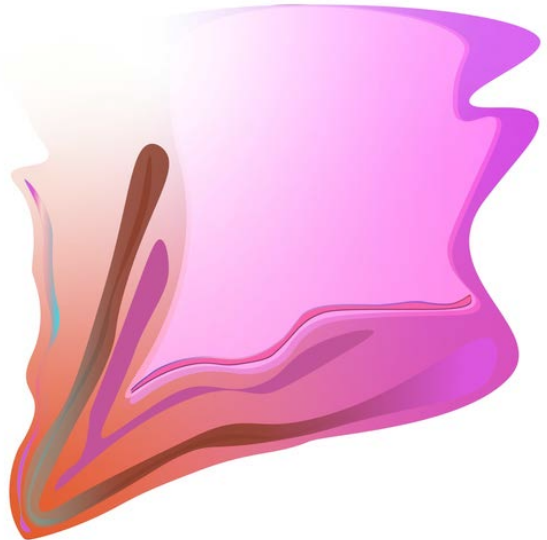
Are you ready to make a positive change in your community?



You, the Urban Changer

Together, we can take a stand and make a difference! Learn about best practices in embedding access for disabled students and be inspired to make a change at your organisation

Welcome to the 2023 edition of the yearly festival in equity, diversity and inclusion, jointly organised by the University of Amsterdam and the University of Birmingham. We are delighted to bring you this festival as part of our renewed and intensified collaboration, aimed at promoting equity, diversity, and inclusion across both universities and beyond.



Birmingham takes on Amsterdam!



In April, the University of Birmingham's team of Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) visited Amsterdam, as part of the UvA and UoB's annual EDI Festival

When friends asked me what we did in Amsterdam, my response was, what *didn't* we do? The trip itself was well organised and packed with so many different activities. We had a tour around the stunning campus; visited museums; attended and delivered workshops on how to further embed EDI into Higher Education ; took a boat ride on the canals and of course, met so many different people from different sides of the world.

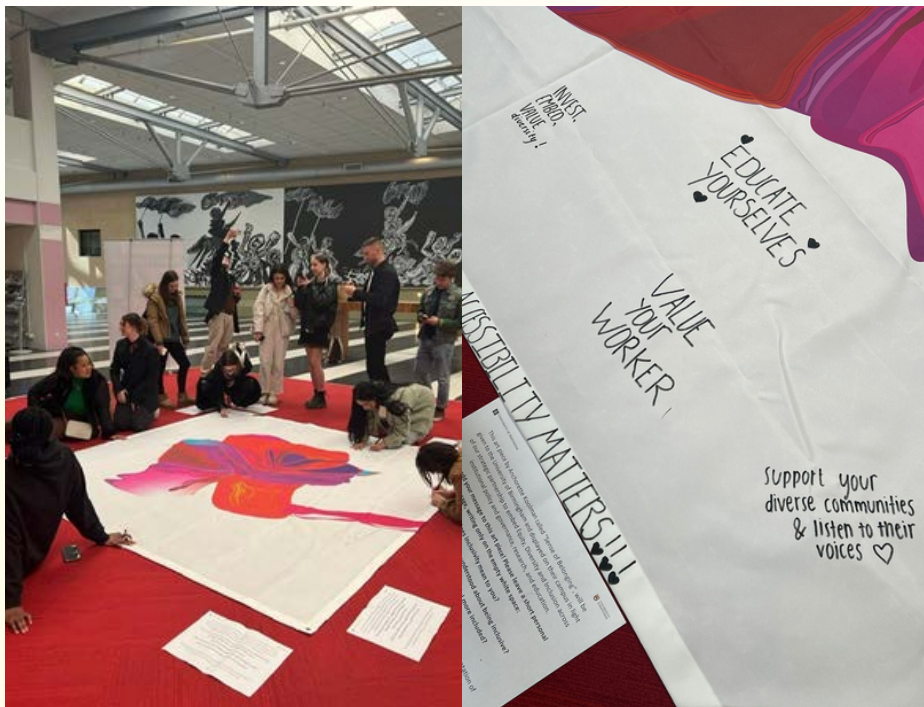
The first day, we met some of UvA's lovely cultural ambassadors, who took us to some of their favourite places in the city. I loved this, as it gave me an insight into the vibrancy of the city. Seeing the tulips at the flower markets, the buildings that looked like gingerbread houses and getting to sample different flavours of cheeses was such a great way to start the trip. I also tried my first stroopwafel, which was exciting - though a bit too sweet for my taste!

One of my favourite events had to be the storytelling night at the Mezrab. As someone who has attended and participated in countless spoken word events in the UK, I found it fascinating to compare the difference between our cultures. In the UK, spoken word nights tend to heavily focus on poetry, with topics leaning towards mental health, trauma, love and relationships. In Amsterdam, we heard spoken stories, some perhaps more true than others. They varied in topics from someone's unlikely friendship with a homeless man called Crack; how one man accidentally became the King of Netherland's bird-watching buddy and someone even incorporated song, dance and poetry into their storytelling set. It was incredible to watch and inspired me to be more inventive in my own creative writing.

Overall, I had a wonderful time. It truly was a highlight of my final year of University. Alongside the countless UvA ambassadors that made our trip so special, I'd also love to thank three unspoken champions: Mohammed, Guido and Evi. Before this trip, I had never thought about visiting Amsterdam and thanks to their brilliant planning, I can't wait to come again!

Sense of Belonging

"Your contribution will help make this art piece an evolving representation of our community's commitment to inclusivity and diversity"



During the EDI week, there was a range of activities, workshops, and panels in which the students could partake. Together with the University of Birmingham's ambassadors, we participated in an interactive art installation. This piece was centered around the question of how higher education institutions, their staff and their students can act as change agents and challenge the 'status quo'.

Featuring Anchorette Koolman's artwork 'Sense of Belonging', we aimed to involve the UvA's students and staff to engage with the piece and sign a thoughtful message about what inclusivity means to them

The personal impact of such initiatives and the overall ambassador program led me to become more open and engaged with the international community, expanded my network and made me more aware of cultural sensitivities. Along with my co-ambassadors, we fostered a mindset sparked in our time abroad and cultivated it through discussions and thought-stimulating activities in our committee sessions. Overall, my key takeaway was regarding being more involved with the university and its initiatives in the final year of my bachelor's degree.

How Morocco, India, and Japan relate to Swedish Meatballs

A REPORT ON AN ESN EVENT IN AMSTERDAM'S IKEA

On April 24, 2023, as Cultural Exchange Program Ambassadors at the University of Amsterdam, we participated in the IKEA Challenge organized by ESN (Erasmus Student Network). The event was designed for participants to create mood boards inspired by different nations, using furniture exhibited at the IKEA store or the company's website. There was expeditious and considerate communication, and the participants were motivated to represent the assigned nation with dignity. At the conclusion of the challenge, participants could receive a small memento in the form of a house cactus or a plastic cup. Overall, the event was interactive and engaging.

Accessibility & Participation

The event was free, making it accessible to everyone regardless of their socioeconomic status. However, overall accessibility had its drawbacks, as the event was held on a weekday and a considerable distance from the city center. This may have been a disadvantage for individuals who could not use public transportation to reach the remote location. Furthermore, the congested environment and time constraints of the challenge may have been overwhelming for individuals with disabilities and neurodiversity. As a solution, organizers could consider holding the event on a weekend and in a more central location to make it more inclusive and accessible. They could also provide accessible vehicles and designate a calm area for attendees who require respite from the environment.

Effective communication is also crucial for ensuring that all participants are adequately prepared for the event. Some participants had an advantage because they brought their laptops and pens. Organizers should provide specific information about the event's purpose, tasks, and location in advance to prevent misunderstandings and ensure that each participant has an equal chance of completing the challenge.

Diversity & Culture

Diversity was another issue, as the mood boards were constructed based on participants' preconceived notions of different nations, rather than being created by nationals of the respective countries. This could lead to biased mood boards that do not accurately represent the cultures. Event coordinators may wish to invite nationals from the countries in question to partake in the event and present their cultural perspectives to ensure that the mood boards authentically depict the country's ethos.

Lastly, as a Swedish company specializing in European furnishings, IKEA does not offer a large selection of multicultural furniture, limiting participants' ability to authentically represent the culture of their selected nation. The organizers could collaborate with other furniture stores that offer a wider variety of authentic furniture options to make the event more inclusive and accurate.

In general, however, the coordinators designed an engaging and interactive event that drew the participants closer together.



Visiting 'Schuldhulpmaatje' in Leiden

Gaining perspectives & building brave spaces

As part of the Cultural Exchange Ambassador program, we had a unique opportunity to go to Leiden and visit Schuldhulpmaatje. This organisation focuses on helping people who are in debt and require financial advice. As a group, we learned about how the organisation operates and how they interact with the people it is serving. One of our main takeaways from this trip to Schuldhulpmaatje was understanding the way they build relationships with the communities and individuals they support. Following the principles of honesty and non-judgment, volunteers in this organisation try to build a bond and help a person in need. Furthermore, as a non-governmental organisation they are able to build and maintain trust that other agencies may be unable to. All of these elements form an effective cooperation that already has helped many people dealing with financial problems.

Our group represented unique perspectives with both exchange and full-time students from within the EU and beyond. The Schuldhulpmaatje team's ability to develop relationships and create safe spaces allowed us to share our own experiences and have an open conversation where we were able to reflect on our own experiences – this included talking about loans and beliefs/practices regarding spending and saving. We were able to critically engage with both the content and presentation style and provide feedback regarding elements that resonated with us and ones that we think could be added to improve engagement and understanding.

While the trip itself might've been short, we gained a long-lasting understanding not only about Schuldhulpmaatje but about our peers as well. We were able to develop a brave space in which we could share without fear of judgement, which allowed us to understand the topic of conversation on a deeper level. It was a discussion that continued even after we left the building, which again emphasises the important nature of such topics and organisations.

Photo and text by: Nimrat Jawandha, Adam Farid Tang Ming Yang, Hanshika Karra, Yasmin Hatayli, Amina Lučkova & Göksu Gürson

Going abroad can be scary, but what if it becomes your second home?



Think Tank international accessibility: increasing student mobility

Studying abroad, especially if it's the student's first time, can be daunting and challenging. Although the experience is often glossed by excitement for its novelty, the obstacles still need to be addressed to make it better for both the inbound and outbound students. It's not a matter of getting used to a different university with a wholly different system and the subjects offered, but also integrating with the locals, learning a new language, being exposed to the culture and even getting used to the weather. Imagine coming from a tropical country during the summer loving the heat and falling into a state of shock during the cold winter! Nothing should be considered small when students are abroad, and it can cause a whole lot of stress.

During the Think Tank session, the exchange students appreciated the university for listening to their Erasmus experience and was also receptive to their suggestions on how to make the program better. They agree that going abroad is a big step for many people, so it becomes crucial to encourage students to take this step, but with the right assistance to assure they will have a good experience along the way. Although the university has restrictions in this area, there is always room to improve. Collectively, the students during the Think Tank session agreed that it would be tremendously helpful to establish a system that allows potential outbound Erasmus students to get in touch with inbound students from their selected destination. Ultimately, they are the ones who have a deeper understanding of the host institution in their respective countries. It sounds difficult to establish a system connecting different people, so it is suggested that the programme could also be more interactive with both outbound and inbound students via active social media accounts to form a community and make the process itself a little bit easier. After a while, perhaps the system itself can be fully established by having an actual platform using a website. For sure a lot of exchange and international students from other countries would be happy to share and make transitioning easier.

Aside from that, it has been pointed out that a Buddy programme would be helpful for inbound exchange students to ease into their new life. A buddy should be either a local student or basically a student from the University of Amsterdam who is glad to show people around. A buddy can be their first point of contact upon arrival, which can help with study abroad anxiety and also forge a path to lifelong friendships. The buddy can introduce the exchange students to the system and how people operate in The Netherlands before they get completely comfortable navigating their exchange experience. In addition, the buddy would have the chance to get to know people from different cultures all over the world, so it is no denying that it is going to be a life-changing experience.

Be the Judge

As for the photo contest, most people would think it's easy to choose the winners. Just pick the best photo and get it done, right? Wrong! It was interesting to see how different people had different ideas in choosing the winners, from both the stories behind the photos and its aesthetic sense. The colours, the representations, the beauty behind the stories—all of them were taken into account when the winners were being chosen. It was intriguing to see how the students decided to vote due to differing opinions and also when the vote became unanimous due to the students convincing each other about the individual values of the photos. Not only it shows how persuasion can be carried out, but the way to have healthy disagreements and come to the same conclusion. Democracy for the win!

The Think Tank session was fun and productive with students from all over the world, ranging from Europe, Latin America and Asia! Therefore it sticks to Equity, Diversity and Inclusion by giving everyone the voice to speak out their thoughts and choose the winning photos from a range of categories!

Photo Contest Winners

NASRUDIN - A SYMBOL OF
RESILIENCE AND SOLIDARITY



Photo and text by: Eric Holmes

The photo portrays Nasrudin standing on the remnants of his earthquake-destroyed home, near Bandung. Despite living in poverty Indonesians have thought me the valuable lesson of being resilient, generous, supportive and friendly. The unwavering kindness and compassion to those in need was mesmerising and something I have never experienced before.

COLORFUL VICTORIAN HOUSES

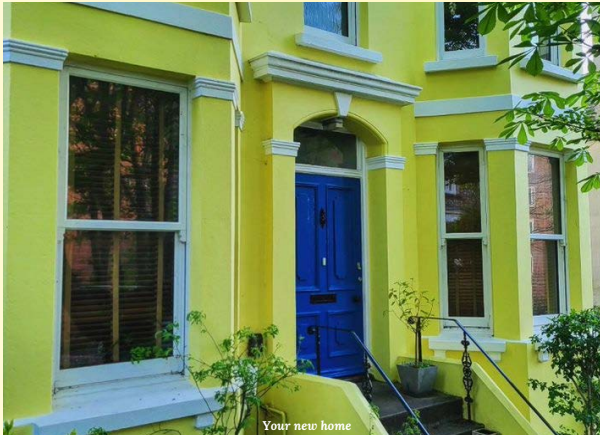


Photo and text by: Gina Cossiga

Unique to Brighton, these classic style houses with vibrant modern colours are one of the reasons that Brighton can cheer me up and make me feel lucky to live here

Your new home

MIDNIGHT ROOFTOP TALKS



The photo was taken on the roof of the house I am staying at. It is an unconventional housing and an experience that I have never had before, as it is part of a large non-profit community whose aim is to provide affordable housing for student. I am very grateful for the opportunity to share such a wonderful space with such wonderful people, which is why this picture represent my favorite place where I get to share meaningful moments with my favorite people.

To properly enjoy Toronto's night skyline, me and my housemates like to climb to the very top of out house. Snuggled in the blankets as winters are long, we contemplate about life under the starry night while eating pizza leftovers and Costco's cake from the CCRT meeting.

Photo and text by: Le Quynh Anh Ha

Favorite place

FAVOURITE PLACE



Midnight Rooftop Talks

NEW HOME



Colourful Victorian Houses - unique to Brighton
and can turn a bad day into a good one.



About the program: reflections

Milla da Cunha

As I look back on my experience as an Exchange Ambassador, I am filled with a sense of gratitude and personal growth. Serving as a bridge between different cultures and fostering understanding among diverse individuals has been a rewarding journey. Through the organization of events like the EDI festival and discussions/workshops where we talked about how to make mobility services more accessible and how to better the Exchange program, I witnessed the power of dialogue in breaking down barriers and building connections and felt involved in the decision-making process from my university. Being an exchange ambassador also allowed me further to develop important skills such as communication, empathy, solidarity, active listening, and respecting different perspectives. This environment provided a safe ground for learning and appreciating different cultures. The topics we covered in our weekly training sessions were extremely pertinent. We learned how to create a safe place where discussions are held without fear of judgement, making room for all voices and perspectives. We were able to dissect our intercultural experience using storytelling and the Hero's journey template. We were encouraged to explore the context and see past the obvious explanation. It was also very rewarding getting to work with ambassadors of Birmingham through this program and the EDI festival. Lastly, I think what I like most is that as ambassadors we got to share our exchange experience (the good and the bad) and helped prepare the university on how to make this challenging but rewarding period better for future outbound students.

Text by: Dona Milla Da Cunha

Yasmin

When I first received the email about the Cultural Exchange Ambassador program, I had no idea what it was about. Though, I was curious to know more about it and applied right away. Since the first session, I didn't have any regrets about joining this program. I met amazing people throughout the trainings and had fun organizing the EDI festival and attending the social events. Now that I come to think about it, it's funny that this program made me learn things I didn't know about the university (on my last year of studies). I thought the only opportunity to go abroad was to go on exchange but then I learnt about other opportunities.

Anyway, the weekly sessions were enjoyable where I felt comfortable sharing my ideas. I think the team (Evi, Guido and Mohamed) was great, it was obvious that they were enjoying what they were doing. I think it had a great effect on the ambassadors. The various activities we did during the session made me learn more about diversity and inclusion. I found the accessibility exercise very interesting as I was so used to seeing the typical illustration just with a wheelchair, but accessibility is more than that. Additionally, the XL assignment and social activities allowed the ambassadors to connect with each other in a different setting which I thought was nice.

Overall, I consider myself lucky that I checked my email and read more about the program. I also think the program helped me get back to reality after my semester abroad. It was lovely to be part of a diverse program where all the members were heard and involved in the decision-making processes such as planning the festival and organizing the Exchange Express magazine.

Text by: Yasmin Hatayli

Listen

INSPIRATION IS EVERYWHERE

We have come to the end of the Exchange Express; what a journey! Thank you for joining us, now, please listen to this collaborative Spotify playlist made by some of the Ambassadors, featuring songs that remind them of their study abroad experience(s).



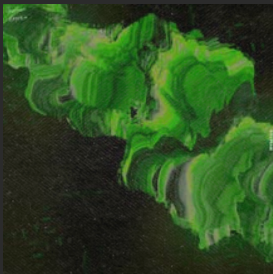
Fedez - La Dolce Vita - 2022



Black Atlas - Dream Awake - 2020



Billie Eilish - No Time To Die - 2020



Icaro (ABSOLUTE Neon Energy Remix) 2022



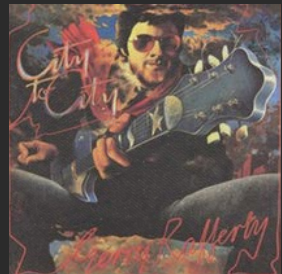
Travis Scott - Goosebumps (Remix) - 2021



Loreen - Heal - 2012



Coldplay - A Head Full of Dreams - 2015



Gerry Rafferty - City to City - 1978