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Place of Study: University of Helsinki, Finland

Currency: Euros

Travel Plans:

- **Travel to Exchange University:** Flight from Manchester Airport; Airport Taxi from Helsinki to Hostel for overnight stay. Flight from London Gatwick or London Heathrow to Helsinki-Vantaa Airport.
- **Price of Air Fare:** Depends on who you fly with. Finnair/BA are quite expensive, probably about £100 each way. If flying to Manchester or London Gatwick, you can get Easyjet flights from about £20 each way, depending on when you book. Generally, Easyjet are around £50 each way. Prices start from around £74 each way with BA from London Heathrow.

First Week:

My first week in Helsinki was quite hectic. The first night was spent in a youth hostel as I arrived on the 31st August. The housing office does not grant keys for apartments until the 1st September. After picking up keys and travelling to my accommodation, I settled in with my housemates on the 1st. Orientation started on the 2nd. You attend many lectures which provide much information for living in Helsinki and we are split into tutor groups and given a group leader (a Finnish student). There are generally a lot of things that need to be done in the first week, such as registering at the police station. Your group leader will take you to all these. There are a number of Student Union events which will be put on by the University at night, which again you will be taken to by your group leader. After three days of orientation, lectures started and you begin to get stuck into the learning part of your exchange, as well as the social aspect.

Before coming to Helsinki I was slightly worried about the start of the year as I knew little about what would happen except there would be an orientation course, however upon arrival I found myself diving headfirst into student life. I arrived on September the 1st and paid a taxi to take me to my accommodation office to collect my keys, I then spent the first day getting to know my flatmates and contacting my tutor who was already making plans for the first day of the Orientation Course. The course was mostly lectures on life in Helsinki and the University but to be honest the time spent with your tutor will be far more interesting and useful. Our tutor showed us all the essentials needed at the University within the first few days (enrolment, library access, computers etc.) and he also showed us some of the more important things you will need outside of the University (directions, travel card, Finnish sim-card etc.). However the most important thing to take from the first week is the social experience involved as the time was spent getting to know my tutor group and becoming friends with them. Our tutor invited us to various events throughout the first week including a party at the law student organisation Pykala, a friendly visit to another tutors house, a big international student party run by ESN and a trip to local military island Suomenlinna (which is customary for new arrivals to Helsinki). This gave us a fantastic opportunity to get to know each other and we soon became good friends.

My first week in Helsinki was very packed. The first night I spent in a youth hostel as the keys to my apartment would not be ready until the following morning (a fact I was aware of before electing to stay in a hostel). I moved into my apartment the next day and went for a city tour and then sampled the nightlife with some of the other exchange students in my building.

The next day, we began orientation. This involved attending a lecture with some general introductions and then meeting with your assigned tutor, whose job it was to guide you through the orientation process and help you attain the things necessary for living in Finland and for attending the university. This involved picking up the public transport travel card amongst many other things. Your tutor will also, generally, help you gain your bearings in the city by showing you around in addition to providing information on the events occurring.

After the official two days of orientation and the first weekend, it was straight into lectures.

Contact:

- **Main Contact at the Host University:** International Affairs Co-Ordinator Teija Isotalo. However, for information about individual modules, you are better getting in touch with the lecturer who runs that module. It must be noted though that a lot of lecturers will not regularly (or at all) answer their email and so constant emailing may be required, or actually going and finding them in them during their office hours.
- **Personal Tutor:** You are given a group leader/personal tutor during orientation and usually they will continue to help you afterwards if you have any questions. However, my group leader went on an ERASMUS placement herself after orientation ended, so I don't have one anymore. Do not worry if this happens. Everyone is perfectly willing to help wherever you are. I was very lucky with my personal tutor allocation as he went far beyond what we all expected of him and we became good friends. He always invites us to various events held in the city (bar tours, parties etc.) and has invited us to personal events too including a trip to a local town Porvoo, a weekend at his cabin (sauna and party), Ice hole swimming and sledging. My tutor has stuck with the group and has continued to attend events with us, guide us through the Finnish customs, and inform us about any other events.

Lectures and Seminars:

- **How Many Hours Are You Expected to Study:** There are no specified times really. It depends on which modules you have taken and how long they run for. Some modules will require much more reading and work than others. Most subjects don't require that much work however.
- **Differences Compared to Warwick:** You are expected to be much more independent than at Warwick, in finding information etc. One problem you may face is that some lecturers have problems with expressing themselves in English. They obviously know their subjects and have good language skills but they can sometimes struggle when delivering it to the class. This requires you to do more independent research.

There are differences in choosing modules, as it is done online and as you go along. You can change and drop module choices throughout the semesters. You arrange your own timetable and must make sure that no lectures clash yourself as this will not be done for you. As long as you have 60 credits in total at the end you will be ok. I had a lot more free time than I do at Warwick although do not expect long holidays as term finishing just before Christmas and starts again shortly after, there is no Easter holiday either. This did not bother me as I was having such a good time I did not need long holiday breaks.

Exams:

- **When:** Exams take place throughout the year. Once you have finished the module you generally sit the exam afterwards. It depends on which module as to how long you are given between finishing the module to taking the exam. You can take the exam the day after the last lecture of the module, for example. Other times, you will sit exams during general exam days with other students from different courses. You will always get the chance to re-sit an exam. Exams can be quite badly organized compared to Warwick but this will not be detrimental to you as they are very relaxed about timings (for example I had a 4 hour exam and everyone left within 2 hours).
- **Assessment Methods:** Again, depends on the module. Some are open book exams, others are closed book and others just have an essay to assess the course. You may be given a choice of assessment method in some modules. I found that lecturers tend to mark more favourably towards those students who write in good English. You might find this an easy way of gaining extra marks. ;-) Essay limits are far more relaxed than at Warwick although they are usually longer (5-15 pages is a common range of limit) and they are not bothered about references unless they specify they want it but it can be a great way of gaining extra marks ;-)

Accommodation:

- **Provided By:** Accommodation is provided by HOAS, which is not really part of the university. There is a form you must fill in online in May. Be wary that it is first come first serve and accommodation is not guaranteed, even for exchange students. They will email you if you have been given accommodation on details of what to do then. Do not miss the deadline for housing applications otherwise you may have severe problems finding accommodation

Climate: It is cold. From about late October onwards, it can become freezing and snow fell for the first time in mid-October. It will properly start to snow in November and can reach to -20 degrees in December. Wrap up warm. It also goes dark early in winter, about 3pm. However, it is certainly bearable; for instance, there are many passages in, under, and around the city, which means that often you will not have to be outside for very long.

Clothing: Warm clothing. Scarf, gloves and a hat are essential. Thermal socks and vests are a good idea. Jeans and normal everyday clothing will be ok as long as you have a thick coat and shoes with a good sole. I bought my coat in Helsinki. Most shops in Kamppi sell reasonably priced, sensible coats to help get you through the winter.

Socialising:

- **Types of Entertainment:** There are a number of bars and clubs in Helsinki, so there is really no shortage of places to go. They can be fairly expensive however for drinks, so look out for special nights. Otherwise you can spend about 6 Euros for a cider. The Law Society, Pykala, organises some socials and events throughout the year, which can be fun (and cheaper) than standard nights out. All parties begin with a pre-party at someone's flat as the drinks in clubs are ridiculously expensive, some clubs do offer special price drinks (an example is The Tiger which people tend to go to on a Sunday) but these are quite uncommon and the price in drinks might be offset by an excessive cloakroom fee or watered down beer. Additionally, the Erasmus Student Network (ESN) arranges weekly parties with discounts on the alcohol.
- **Orientation:** Orientation takes place for three days at the start of term. You are split into groups and this generally forms the basis of your friend group while there. There are usually about 10 people in an orientation group and they are all exchange students. Please note that a lot of friends you meet will only be there for one semester (they will leave at Christmas). It is more difficult to make friends with the new students who arrive after Christmas as they have their own orientation course. However, you will certainly find no difficulties in finding new ones as almost everyone is extremely friendly and willing.

Transport: Most public transport is good in Helsinki. The buses, metro, trains and trams all run on time and are easy to work out. Depending on where you live will decide what transport you will have to use to get to University. There is a good website to help you plan your journeys: <http://www.hsl.fi>

The buses are usually far more reliable than those in the UK and the same can be said of the trains although this year there was severe problems with the trains during parts of the winter with snow and ice causing long delays and cancellations. In the city, trams and the metro work almost perfectly on time.

Health Care:

- **Health Insurance:** Not required, but you do need a valid European Health Insurance Card. I took out personal travel insurance as well though. Endsleigh do a special 'Study Abroad' insurance which might be of some benefit.
- **Joining a Dental Practice/Doctors Surgery:** No, the University has a student health care system that you can use. This is explained in more detail during orientation.

What Did You Gain From the Experience:

My experience has been amazing! I've got to do so many things that I never thought I would have the chance to do, such as Huskey sledging in Lapland and visiting Estonia. I got to meet so many different people from all over the world and have develop very strong friendships as a result. It has made me more independent and confident. You will have a brilliant time and everyone is so nice that you'll gain some life-long friends. The university

courses are good as well, offering a much wider selection than at Warwick so you can expand your knowledge and interest.

I had an amazing time and have met and made friends with people from all around the world, the courses were quite interesting too.

Information You Wish You Knew Before You Left:

- How expensive everything is. Even food is dear. You will spend a lot in supermarkets and not even buy that much. Do not be shocked when you get to the checkout. However, with careful spending, you won't find too much of a problem with you become attuned to life here. Moreover, there are many Unicafés around the city, who sell a full meal for just 2.50e!
- That your flat will almost certainly have cooking utensils and cutlery despite saying otherwise
- Alcohol is VERY expensive if you want any spirits I would buy them at the duty-free on the way to Finland as this will save you a lot of money.
- The majority of students are taking this year as an extra so their results do not count unlike ours, this can make planning social activities more difficult and finding the right balance with studying hard.
- Finns love sparkling water so if you buy a bottle which looks like water at a shop chances are it will be sparkling.
- English is unofficially the second language of Finland nearly everyone (especially young people) speaks it and even if a Finnish person is completely drunk they will often still somehow be able to talk to you in English.

