Report of Experiences – ERASMUS at Lunds Universitet Sweden

Autumn and spring term 2014/2015

Motivation

I had thought about an exchange semester early in my studies and after my friend did an ERASMUS exchange, I started looking into different universities and courses available to exchange students. My program is held in English already, which made it easy to find courses that I could take language-wise.

I chose Lunds Universitet in southern Sweden, because it has a good international reputation and courses that I was interested in. I took two master level courses that covered rather basic ecology and two more applied courses which included field trips and independent studies. It was one of my major aims to get to know applied work in ecology. An additional advantage was that I got to know quite a few places in southern Sweden due to the many field trips we went on. Another aim was to learn Swedish, which I did in a university course before I went. This was very helpful in everyday life.

Application and preparation

ERASMUS makes it very easy to go on an exchange within Europe. The application was online in a step-by-step kind of way. All you need to do is get the paper work done in time. I started looking into universities and courses about 10 months before the exchange started. This gave me enough time to choose a university and the courses I was interested in, get familiar with the procedures of ERASMUS and check if I fulfilled all requirements for the exchange.

It was especially helpful to talk to my ERASUS coordinator during the processes of choosing a university and application. Take advantage of talking directly to people both at your home university and your ERASMUS university. Coordinators and former exchange students are usually very happy to share experiences and to help with any problems during the application process.

If you're accepted for an ERASMUS exchange, then you should start looking for accommodation. I knew that it was very difficult to find housing in Lund, because there are many exchange students coming in each term. LU Accommodation offers housing for international students. You can apply at their website (http://luaccommodation.lu.se/), but there is no guarantee to get an offer. So I looked at local websites like http://bopoolen.nu/ or https://www.afbostader.se/ to find a place to live. Here you have to be a member of Studentlund (http://studentlund.se/), which also takes care of most of the student life outside of university. You can apply prior to your visit or on the spot, when you get there. If you don't find housing before your exchange starts, make sure you check out the hostels or couch surfing very early to make sure you have somewhere to stay.

It is very useful to start a language course as soon as you're accepted. There are Swedish courses available to exchange students, but usually they are very many people and you have to take care of getting a spot very early. Universität Bremen offers many courses at different levels for different languages. It's just very nice to be able to say hello and goodbye or go grocery shopping in the language of the country you're visiting.

Just some practical tips before you go: Make sure to be able to get hold of money. I find it easiest using a VISA card, because I usually pay cash. There are however a few places that only accept card payment. Swedish people pay really any tiny amount of money with their cards. Don't forget to bring all charging cables and eventually a network cable, because not all student houses have WiFi. A doctor’s check up is recommended, because for example the dentist is not included in the Swedish insurance and can be very expensive. At Lunds Universitet you will be covered by the Swedish State Insurance for foreign students.
Courses

There are many courses available to exchange students and offered in English. Lunds Universitets website ([http://www.lunduniversity.lu.se/international-admissions/](http://www.lunduniversity.lu.se/international-admissions/)) is well organized and you can browse courses early on so you already get an idea of what you want to study. This is also good for your letter of motivation; if you already have a clear plan of what you want to do, you show your interest and preparation for the exchange.

At the Biology department the courses offered usually take place either in the first or the second half (period 1 or 2) of the semester. They take about two months of intensive study with lectures, excursions, lab work, seminars, independent study and project work, depending on the course you chose. These courses are 15 credit points, so at the end of the semester you will at least have 30 ECTS if you take two courses during your exchange; Erasmus requirement fulfilled. There are also half time courses that are 7.5 credit points like language courses. It's nice to have some free time, if you only study half time, but I would highly recommend to chose the 15 credits courses, because you will be in university almost everyday and see your friends and have lunch together, it's just more fun!

Lunch in Lund is very different from that in Germany, because the university does not have a "Mensa". Each faculty has their little cafés where you can buy coffee, drinks and snacks during the day and at lunch time they serve different dishes at rather expensive prices (sandwhich about 5 €, warm dish about 7 €). There are student kitchens with 10 microwaves in the room, so you can just bring your homemade delicious lunch and warm it up in the kitchen.

Arrival

It's easy to get to Lund from Germany. Train connections from Hamburg cost about 40 € one way if you book about 3 weeks in advance. If you plan on going back an fourth a couple of times you might want to get a BahnCard 25 to get a 25 % discount on tickets.

The closest airport in Malmö, but it's rather small. A better chance to find flights is to Copenhagen and then take the train to Lund. To use public transport you should get a Jojo card, which you top up with money and buy tickets with. This also gives you a student discount on buses and trains within Skåne, the province of southern Sweden.

Arrival day is a huge event at Lunds Universitet. It is very well organized and many, many students volunteer to help the newcomers find their way. Even if you arrive a day or two earlier than arrival day, you still have to go there to check in, properly register at the university, get your welcome package, buy tickets for welcome activities and get to know people while standing in line and waiting. There are some welcome-to-Sweden-trips that cost about 10 € to a nearby national park, zoo and IKEA but also free guided tours through the city and Lunds cathedral.

At arrival day you can also by blankets and pillows for your student room. You can check online, what your student room provides and what you have to buy. For example there are some Student rooms, which have their private bathroom – usually without a shower curtain, you can bring that or buy it on the trip to IKEA.

You will get a SIM card which you only have to top up with money once to have free internet access for one year. Lunds Universitets buildings are spread all over the city, so there's a good chance to use the university's wifi or eduroam almost all over town.

If you can't bring your own bike you should definitely buy one during the first days of your exchange. There are many Facebook groups for selling and buying stuff in Lund, or the very popular “ebay” site [http://www.blocket.se/](http://www.blocket.se/). Bikes will be sold out very quickly, because it's the absolute best way to get around in Lund. Nothing is really far away from anything, because Lund is a small city. Wherever you find a place to stay will be fine, because it will take you max. 20 minutes by bike to get to university.
Studentlund membership can be taken care of prior to arrival, but the next step will be to choose a student nation. You can check all the different nations at the website, but in the end it does not really matter which one you join, because you can take part in any activity of any nation, you just have to be member of a nation. When you picked your nation all you have to do is go there with your studentlund confirmation of payment and they will take care of you. A little bit later you will get your studentlund card which allows you access to all the student clubs, brunches, lunches and sports.

Living in Lund

It's easiest to get around by bike. There are two parks in the city and then many green areas around the city. It takes only 40 minutes to bike to the beach Lomma or Bjärred.

There are a few supermarket chains of which Lidl and Willy:s are the cheapest, coop and ICA are a little more expensive. Generally living expenses are a little higher than in Germany. If you pay 6 € for a beer at a club (3 € at a student club) you will never complain about prices in Germany anymore. But there are also more or less private parties at the student houses, so called corridor parties, where you can bring your own beverages.

I spend a lot of time grocery shopping, because there are so many different things. You should try something new every time you go, because there are some things you don't expect to be very good and also it's fun to try new stuff.

As mentioned before it's useful to learn a little Swedish before you go. It's rather similar to German, so take the time and effort to learn it. It's more fun when you can ask for köttbullar or kanelbullar in Swedish. Also I would recommend to join a sports team, where you can meet some Swedish people, because you will hang out mostly with other internationals.

As Lund is close to the coast of the Baltic Sea, it can be very windy and rainy from time to time. Make sure you have a good rain jacket and pants, because you will take your bike everywhere in any weather.

There are a few places to see in Lund which you will learn more about at arrival day and during the orientation week. For example the Söderåsen national park, Skånes djurpark, a zoo with only nordic animals, the coast, Malmö (third biggest city in Sweden) and many more. If you have the time you should try to see some of the places and travel a little bit around Skåne. It takes only 3 hours to get to Göteborg, Sweden second largest city and a little more to go to Stockholm, the capital and biggest city in Sweden. With the Jojo card it's only 22 € for a return ticket to Copenhagen, where you can go on a nice day trip since it's only 50 minutes from Lund.

Conclusions and future perspective

Lunds Universitet is an amazing place to study. There are many international students and it's a lot of fun to get to know people from all over the world. Getting to know the Swedish culture, making new friends and seeing new places was an amazing experience and I only wish for everyone to make the same experience – and still it will be so much different.

This exchange helped me to figure out what I want to work with in my future career, because we did so many applied things and I enjoyed learning in this friendly environment. Teachers were very close to the students, so it was no problem to approach them with any questions you might have, this can concern you studies, projects, future careers or anything really.

If you don't take the opportunity to travel, see the world, new places and people NOW – when will you? Studying abroad will change your perspective of many things and it will teach you to socially interact, learn a different language and make good decisions in your future based on the experiences you have gained about other people and yourself.