



WUR Goes Abroad

1. Student Information

Field of study in Wageningen	Animal Sciences
Study period exchange (dd/mm/yyyy)	30-08-2022 until 23-12-2022
Country (exchange)	Finland
City (exchange)	Helsinki
University (exchange)	University of Helsinki
Faculty (exchange)	Faculty of Agriculture and Forestry

2. Motivation for exchange

Why did you choose to go on study exchange?

I wanted to broaden my horizon by living and studying in a different country, and was curious to meet many new people, both international and local, and learn about different cultures. I was also excited to take courses about topics that are not offered in Wageningen.

What is the reason you chose for this country/university?

I always had great affection for the Nordic countries, as I have gone on vacation in Sweden and Norway many times, and was inspired by the culture, beautiful nature and people. I had never been to Finland before, but it spoke to me as I was excited to discover a new culture and country. I thought the courses offered in Helsinki were very interesting, and I was excited at the prospect of a stronger winter than in the Netherlands. The standard of education in Finland is also high, so this confirmed for me that I wanted to go there.

3. Accessibility to reach destination

Do you have any tips to reach your exchange destination? (E.g. bus, train, etc.)

When you go by plane, Helsinki airport is just half an hour from the city centre by train, just buy a ticket for the ABC zone for €4,10. The I and P train go in a loop in opposite directions, so it is relatively easy to get off at a stop close to where you need to go, or perhaps take a bus to get to your room, also covered by the ticket. I took the ferry between Helsinki and Travemünde (Germany). This takes over 30 hours, and getting to Travemünde from Wageningen another ~6 hours, but the trip was nice. Some people I met took the Flixbus to Berlin and then from Berlin to Tallin (Estonia) followed by the ferry to Helsinki. You can also come by train if you want. In short, there are many options, though if you want to avoid flying be prepared for at least 2-3 days of travelling.

4. University and studying

Could you provide some general information about the followed courses?

	Course	ECTS	Short description of the contents	Appreciation of course: 1(low) – 5(high)	Remarks
1	AGRI-211 Wildlife in the Farming Environment	5	Biodiversity on farmland, effects of farming practices on wildlife, conservation	5	Very interesting course with field work every week, as well as two excursions to Finnish farms. Completion by several short essays, a group presentation and a final report.
2	EKM-122 Ecological Economics	5	Ecological economics (full versus empty world, circular economy)	4	Interesting course, lecturer is interesting but guest lecturer was incredibly boring. Completion by three longer essays.
3	ECGS-018 Food Webs of Aquatic Ecosystems	5	Structure, components (and their interactions) and functioning of aquatic food webs	4	Very interesting topic and lectures. Workload very doable. Completion by group essay and group presentation.
4	EKM-123 Organizations and Economic Degrowth	5	Degrowth (economic growth cannot be sustainable) theories and implications	3	A social sciences course. Very interesting perspective on what society should look like. Felt somewhat out of my depth sometimes, but liked the course regardless. Completion by a 13 three-page essays, which was quite some work, but not too difficult.
5	ECGS-031 Arctic Climate Change	5	Arctic climate change processes and features (lots of geography)	2	Interesting and lots of new information, but some lecturers were incredibly boring and hard to follow. I also just do not like geography very much. Completion by final exam with essay-like questions.
6	EEB-204 Speciation Theory	5	Current knowledge of speciation, both in theory and modelling	4	Very knowledgeable lecturer and interesting topic, but often very complicated. Every lecture was half theory and half mathematical modelling. Completion by weekly learning diaries, oral exam and 6-8 page essay. Higher workload.

How is the study formalized? (E.g. study forms, academic level, examination, workload, lesson material)

A lot more essays and assignments than in Wageningen. Most courses have no traditional exams like I have for almost every course in Wageningen. I think the lecture topics were easier than in Wageningen, but since there are many required assignments, I did not find the work load to be lower than in Wageningen, like people told me beforehand. Lectures also often had mandatory attendance.

What is the culture of the university? (E.g. How approachable are the lecturers, engagement with local students? What are the differences with the WUR?)

The lecturers are very approachable and since I took some courses with less than 30 students, they also made an effort to learn names or did introduction rounds in the first lecture. In my group works, Finnish students made a reasonable effort. Outside of group work, I found it hard to make contact with local students, as they are not usually willing to make small talk. I think that students stop working earlier as compared to Wageningen, as the library was often quite empty after 17h. A difference I also noticed was that the 1,5-hour-long lectures (which are almost all of them) would not have breaks. Finnish students have a tradition of wearing overalls with patches on them for special events, with the colour being specific to the study they do.

What does the university offer the student additionally? (E.g. Catering, sports facilities, laundry facilities?)

When you show your digital student card, you can get warm vegan lunch for €3,10 (or €3,20 non-vegan) at Unicafe. It was €2,60 (or €2,70 non-vegan) when I arrived, but they raised the price unfortunately. The food was somewhat bland sometimes, but usually quite nice and you're allowed to take a lot of food for that price, as well as make yourself a small salad and a slice of bread with margarine or homemade hummus. I really enjoyed going for lunch for 1-2 hours every day with my friends.

There is UniSport for group classes or just to go to the fitness (unfortunately not on the Viikki campus), though I found it too expensive at €36 per month after the student discount. There is also a sports facility offering about 2-3 group sports per week on the Viikki campus itself. If you're at the faculty of biological and environmental sciences (I was at agriculture and forestry), you can go to the zoo and aquarium for free.

5.Housing-travelling-living

What are the possibilities for housing? (E.g. Availability to sign up for a room on campus, private rooms, rent rates?)

During the application process, you can sign up for both Hoas and Unihome (the student housing providers). Unfortunately, I was placed on the waiting list. I found my room through the ESN Wageningen room swap platform. I heard finding housing is not easy in the city of Helsinki itself, but Wageningen is much worse in terms of housing crisis. Housing is a bit more expensive than Wageningen, but not that much.

What is the culture of the country like? (E.g. Differences with home, local cuisine, habits, manners?)

People are very closed-off and quiet, except when you go to the sauna. Like I mentioned, most Finnish people do not like small talk at all and would rather stay in silence. Finland as a country is quite well-organised and clean. When it snowed, the snow shovel machines were already done the next morning. I found that Finnish people are generally very helpful, but only if you ask for help first. Make sure to wave the bus down when it comes, as it will drive straight past otherwise. In general, I found Helsinki to be very peaceful, and I felt safe walking the streets on my own at night. The culture was actually not that different from Wageningen.

Could you give a general price indication of the place of residence compared to living in Wageningen?

I had a studio apartment that was almost double the price from Wageningen, but this was in the private renting sector as I was not offered student housing. Rooms from Hoas or Unihome that my friends stayed in were about €450-€550. Most groceries were a lot more expensive than in the Netherlands, especially vegetables. Alcohol is very expensive (think €8 for a beer). Some places (e.g. swimming pool) offer student discounts.

Could you give some information about public transport infrastructure? (E.g. Cost public transport card, taxi prices, how to travel to the university?)

During the introduction week, you are able to get a HSL (Helsinki regional transport) card with student discount on it, after which you can buy a season card for four months (~€150 for AB zone). The buses drive quite often and are trustworthy, but are also late or early a lot. The HSL app works very well, and also shows delays. I took the bus to the campus every day. With the zone tickets (AB zone in my case), you are allowed to take every transport in that zone, including buses, trams, trains and the ferry. There is a lot of public transport infrastructure, so travelling outside the city is relatively easy and not too expensive. The only times when I was severely annoyed with the public transport was one week where the HSL app was broken and the buses drove very irregularly because of heavy snowfall, meaning I had to wait at the bus stop for 30-60 minutes several days in a row at temperatures around ten degrees (Celsius) under zero. Otherwise, the HSL left me with a good impression.

6. Free time

What are must-sees in the area? (E.g. nearby destinations, how do you prefer to travel, when to plan?)

Suomenlinna (a fortress island) is definitely worth a visit. Nuuksio national park is an hour away by public transport and beautiful in the autumn colours and offers a great variety of trails to explore. Sompasauna, a free public sauna at the edge of the sea, should be part of your Finland experience in my eyes. Feel free to help by, for example, cutting wood. Porvoo (one hour by bus) and Tallinn (by ferry only two hours) are also nice cities to visit. Though not quite nearby, visiting Lapland is also a must!

What does not appear in the travel guide, but is worth a visit?

If you are simply feeling tired of studying, there is an arboretum next to the Viikki campus where I have spent hours walking around. There are also quite some city parks in Helsinki where you can go for a walk.

Do you have general tips and tricks about leisure time (E.g. recommendations for restaurants, going out?)

Monday through Thursday, beers at the Irish Pub are only €3,50 (very cheap for Finnish standards). The Thai Vegan Kitchen has amazing inexpensive vegan food. Hesburger (fast food) after a night of dancing is also a good place to be. There aren't really student bars like we know them in Wageningen, so be sure to keep an eye on the student parties organised by ESN. I recommend restaurant Zetor if you want to taste some Finnish cuisine and dance afterwards.

7.Challenges & best moment abroad

What was a challenge you have experienced?

When I was halfway through my exchange, a loved one at home got diagnosed with cancer. This is when I found it most difficult to be so far away. I also do not have a credit card, which I survived okay, but I recommend getting one before you go if you do not have one, as I had to rely on other people to buy online things for me sometimes (like tickets to parties, tickets for the ferry to Tallinn, etc.).

What was your best memory abroad?

The ESN trip to Lapland was amazing and a definite recommend, especially the day trip to Norway, where I swam in the Barents sea. Making new friends from so many different cultures was also a great experience, and the mundane task of eating lunch every day was suddenly much more fun. I was lucky to get more snow than usual for the time of year in Helsinki, and I loved simply being in a snowy environment.

8. Contact details (optional)

Is the reader allowed to contact the writer?	yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	no <input type="checkbox"/>
Name/e-mail	anna.kalkwijk@wur.nl	