



WUR Goes Abroad

1. Student Information

Field of study in Wageningen	Biology
Study period exchange (dd/mm/yyyy)	04/01/2023 until 13/06/2023
Country (exchange)	Norway
City (exchange)	Tromsø
University (exchange)	UiT THE ARCTIC UNIVERSITY OF NORWAY
Faculty (exchange)	Department of Arctic and Marine Biology

2. Motivation for exchange

Why did you choose to go on study exchange?

I love travelling and I've always wanted to experience what it's like to actually live in another country, learn more about new cultures. I also wanted to push myself by stepping out of my comfort zone, become more confident in trying new things and become more independent. Going on a study exchange seemed like a wonderful opportunity to do so. By going on an exchange, you have to face many new challenges on your own, and push yourself to make the most out of it while you're there and meet new people on the way.

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

I did not really have a particular country in mind yet, but I knew that I wanted to follow marine biology related courses and that I really liked nature. I ended up choosing for UiT The Arctic University of Norway, in Tromsø. The fact that it's all the way up in the Arctic Circle sounded really exciting to me, as it's somewhere I'd not normally go to and because of the different seasonality and natural environment. The snow, the reindeers, the polar night, the northern lights, the ability to cross-country ski almost anywhere during the winter, the midnight sun, and many other things were all appealing to me. Because I arrived in January and left in June, I got to experience both the polar night and the midnight sun which was a very unique experience.

Tromsø itself appealed to me because even though it's quite large, it still has a cozy feeling for some reason. I think it's because the main centre is relatively small while still having everything you need, and that most places are easily accessible. There's also many students living there, including internationals. I also really liked Tromsø because of its location, since it's surrounded by beautiful nature, with its fjords, mountains, and hiking/ski trails. I'd say that the nature is definitely more impressive than the city itself, as it is probably anywhere in Norway, which was a bonus for me.

3. Accessibility to reach destination

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

It is possible to arrive with the ferry boat to Norway in Oslo, but there are no trains going to Tromsø. Therefore, it's probably easiest to go to Tromsø by plane via Oslo or Bergen, and then go to your housing with the bus or the taxi.

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	Marine Ecology	10	General ecology of marine life. Main topics were phytoplankton, zooplankton, benthos, fish(eries), and seawater properties.	5	You will also go on a cruise (5 days, Lofoten or Porsangerfjorden) to learn more practical skills and work on a research question within a small group.
2	Ocean Climate	10	Physical oceanography. You learn about ocean basins, seawater properties, ocean dynamics, waves and tides, and also about fjords. You also learn about the relations to climate (change) and how observations are done.	4	You'll also go on a cruise (2 days, fjords near Tromsø) to gather data and apply your knowledge to a research question within a small group.
3	Ecosystem-based Management	10	Broad course focussing on how management of ecosystems should/can be done, relationship between people and nature.	3	Course content is based on many current topics and situations.
4					
5					
6					

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

I noticed that there were more lectures given than practical/lab classes, especially in marine ecology and ocean climate. There is more focus on self-study. The courses also took place during the whole semester, which did make it possible to divide the workload over a large amount of time. For ecosystem-based management there was a good mix of lectures, seminars and workshops. I'd say that overall, the academic level of the courses was not much different than at WUR. The schedules were not very structured. One day you could have a very relaxed day while the next day is a day full of classes without any lunch breaks, only 15 minute breaks.

However, the academic level of the lab sessions (from marine ecology and ocean climate at least) were in my opinion lower than those I'd followed at WUR, or at least less challenging. There were only a few in the courses that I followed and often we had to follow along or look at a demonstration rather than work more individually, and sometimes it felt a bit unorganized/messy.

I learned a lot on the marine ecology cruise, where we got to learn practical skills on the boat, work hard, and learn how to work in a team. It was a great experience!

Examinations were done through assignments and oral presentations at the end. I didn't have a written examination. I heard that at UiT it's quite common to have oral examinations instead of written examinations.

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?)

Engagement between teachers and students felt easy, there wasn't a lot of focus on formality. The teachers all spoke a good level of English. The number of students in the courses were also relatively small, making it easy to get in touch with the teachers. Engagement between students was mostly with other exchange students. Engagement with local students was a bit less, though I think it's kind of similar to how it is at WUR. Most local students mainly engaged between each other instead. But if you had to work together with them, ask them for help, or just have a little chat, they were generally very nice.

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

Samskipnaden, which is the Norwegian Arctic Student Welfare Organisation, offers many things for students, such as housing, dining (on campus), student health (counselling), sports (gym, many sports associations) and activities that are hosted for students (mainly on campus). Every week, a list of activities happening in Tromsø is sent via email as well, to keep you updated on what you can do during that week. Laundry facilities are available at the housing units, which are not too expensive to use. There are also saunas, which are free to use.

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?)

You can sign up through Samskipnaden and then apply for a number of rooms in order of your preference. They will assign you to one of the rooms you applied for based on your preference and their availability. I've heard that it's common to get the room you prefer most, as did I. You can apply for many different types of housing, i.e. private rooms, rooms for couples, rooms with a private bathroom, house/apartment, near campus or further off campus, etc. Most housing is shared though. The rent was a bit higher than in Wageningen as you'd probably expect, but if you get a room with a shared bathroom and kitchen it's actually not too bad.

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

Before I went to Norway I'd often hear or read that Norwegians could often come across as more reserved before you get to know them. In my experience most were friendly and were happy to help whenever necessary, so I don't really think it was that noticeable compared to other places. I guess it was noticeable in a way that it was more difficult to actually become friends with them compared with the international students as the Norwegians usually just engaged with each other, but again I think it's kind of similar to how it is in The Netherlands as well.

As for food, the food that's eaten there the most is actually frozen pizza and taco's! You can even buy frozen pizza with taco toppings. But other than that, they eat lots of fish, and meat. There are not that many vegetarians or vegans. The grocery store does have vegetarian meat substitutes, but when you go to a restaurant, there are generally not a lot of vegetarian/vegan options.

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

It's a bit pricier than in Wageningen, but it was less pricy than I expected. I got a room in a house of six residents without a private bathroom or kitchen, and it did not cost a lot more than my room in Wageningen (which is also not self-contained). However, if you'd get a self-contained room, prices do go up quite a lot.

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

Because of all of the ice and snow during most of the year, most people go to university (or anywhere in Tromsø) by bus instead of by bike. You can buy a monthly, or even a 3 monthly ticket, with a discount for young adults. Public transport in Tromsø is pretty good, and most places are easily accessible. Buses go often throughout the day, but if you'd go to the island Kvaløya (which is next to Tromsø), you'd have to make sure to check the times as those buses tend to only go a few times a day. The taxi is quite pricey, and I'd not recommend using one unless you really need to.

6. Free time

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

Tromsø has many places to explore, especially if you like nature. You can take the cable car to the top, Fjellheisen, and see a beautiful view of the city surrounded by the mountains and the fjords. You can also hike up there via stairs called Sherpatrappa. On top there is also a small café/restaurant and a gift shop where you can treat yourself after you've made it. On the main island, you can take a relatively easy hike to Vardentoppen, which is the highest point in Tromsøya. There's also the lake Prestvannet, where you'll find many birds and many locals too, walking with their dogs, or doing a run. Another place where you can take nice walks or go cross-country skiing is around the lake Skattoravannet.

There are many cross-country ski routes connecting all places throughout the island. I rented cross country skis for the semester, and could pretty much go skiing almost right when I went outside my house! You can rent them for free for one week at a time at a place called Turbo if you get a Norwegian phone number, or rent them from Kraft for 500 nok for the whole semester.

On the island next to Tromsø, Kvaløya, there are many places you can visit as well to see pretty nature, and reindeers walking around freely.

Other than that some very nice (but expensive) activities are whale-watching in January/early February, husky-sledding and kayaking in the fjords.

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

If you want to have some fun with your friends you can go to Storgata Camping. It's a place for minigolf (which is a popular activity there) where you can also have a drink or do karaoke. When you go to Ersfjordbotn in Kvaløya, I'd also recommend going to Bryggejentene, which is a very cute and cozy café in front of the fjord. There is a pretty waterfall nearby too.

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

Restaurants are often quite expensive. Some cafés in the centre that I liked going to were Smørtorget, Café Sønn and Pust. Backstube is also a nice place where you can have a quick bite. There are also some museums worth going to, such as the polar museum and the arctic university museum (both free for students). There's also a small arctic botanic garden (also free) close to the university, though you'd have to wait until all the snow is gone later in Spring of course.

7.Challenges & best moment abroad

What was a challenge you have experienced?

Despite most Norwegians being very friendly when you approach them, I found it more difficult to connect with them compared to with exchange students, but I think it's not noticeably different than in other places. Other than that, it was challenging to go back home, as I really enjoyed my time there!

What was your best memory abroad?

That's a difficult one, but I think the friendships I made, the confidence I built through the experiences I made there, and just exploring all the nature that was out there! The 5-day cruise from the course Marine Ecology, which went all the way up to the North Cape, is also something I'll definitely remember. I will always remember the memories I made in Tromsø!

8. Contact details (optional)

Is the reader allowed to contact the writer?	yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	no <input type="checkbox"/>
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