



WUR Goes Abroad

1. Student information

Study programme WU	MSc. Plant Sciences
Exchange semester (dd/mm/yyyy)	10-01-2024 until 10-05-2024
Exchange destination: University	University of Helsinki
Faculty	Agriculture and Forestry
Country	Finland
City	Helsinki

2. Motivation for exchange

a. Why did you choose to go on study exchange?

I decided to go on a study exchange because I was eager to see the world and explore student life outside Wageningen. I was also curious about what studying and living in another country for a long period of time would be like

b. What is the reason you chose for this country?

The reason why I chose Finland is that I knew I would never have ended up living in this country in my life because of the cold and dark environmental conditions if I hadn't chosen it as my Erasmus destination. Also, I read somewhere before choosing my final exchange destination that Finland is the happiest country in the world. It made me really curious – I wanted to see and experience that for myself as well!

c. What is the reason you chose for this university?

It is the only university in Finland offering agriculture courses!

3. Accessibility to reach destination

a. Do you have any advice about reaching your exchange destination?

If you arrive in Helsinki during the winter months (when it is really, really cold), save yourself from freezing to death by taking an Uber to your new apartment instead of public transportation. It is really worth it, and I was glad I did that – it was -17 degrees Celsius when I arrived. It was crazy cold! Also, you might not expect it, but the taxis in Helsinki are notorious for scamming tourists and new visitors. Even though they say they will charge you a fixed price, you always end up paying more than expected, compared to Uber.

4. University and studying

a. 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	Translational Plant Biology	5	From the course guide: completing the course the student obtain theoretical and practical knowledge of the genetic and genomics resources and methods in plants biology. gain deep insights of genetics and genomics of environmental responses. is able to apply theoretical knowledge into practice. gets experience of problem-based thinking in planning of genetic experiments. gets Hands-on practice on the available online tools and analysis in plant genetics and genomics.	4.5	Period 3 I liked the course! It was well structured and through essay assignments and exercises about bio technology and genetic modification that I needed to write, I was able to think about the topic from different perspectives
2	Forest Soil and Root Ecology	5	From the course guide: The student learns the main groups of organisms in forest soils, and their role in soil processes and functioning. The roots and root-microbe/faunal interactions are the core of the course. The course has a focus on soil biology, although physical and (bio)chemical aspects are also discussed.	3.0	Period 3 I learned the most by just reading the text book. Most lectures were given by guest PhD'ers that were not really able to deliver the content properly or in an engaging way.
3	Greenhouse Production and Management	5	From the course guide: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Crop physiology and yield formation of greenhouse crops. • Greenhouse environment and key growth factors. • Management of greenhouse 	4	Period 3 Nice course, the course coordinator invited lots of experts to talk about specific topics. Besides the weekly assignments you had to hand in,

			<p>environment, nutrient and water uptake.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Artificial lighting in greenhouse production and vertical farming. • Current status and future prospects in greenhouse production. 		<p>the final assignment consisted out of 6 major essay assignments (written in scientific style) on topics related to the course. I enjoyed the course, as it gave me a good overview of the opportunities and the challenges of greenhouse production in the Nordics.</p>
4	Sustainable Forestry in the Tropics	5	<p>From the course guide:</p> <p>The course will consist of three main components, i.e. Forest silviculture, tree plantations, and agroforestry. The forest silviculture component consists of lectures on silviculture of natural tropical forests, sustainability of natural forest management, non-timber forest products (NTFPs), forest certification and markets. The tree plantation section consists of lectures on silviculture of fast growing trees, smallholder tree plantations, ecosystem services of planted forests, managing large-scale tree plantation landscapes. The agroforestry component consists of lectures on agricultural crop production and management within agroforestry systems, biodiversity in agroforestry systems, carbon sequestration in agroforestry systems, and agroforestry and livelihoods.</p>	4.5	<p>Period 4</p> <p>Good main lecturer and the invited lecturers were all very senior and had lots of (field) experiences on tropical forestry which made it really interesting to listen to their presentations.</p> <p>This course involved lots of reading and writing.</p> <p>The expectation from the course coordinator/main lecturer was high and they gave quite time-consuming assignments.</p>

5	Theories and applications in strategic management	5	From the course guide: Students learn key theoretical concepts and perspectives from the strategic management literature, and are instructed through business examples, cases and simulations how these concepts can be applied in practice. This includes providing practical examples and insights for management advice to entrepreneurs in food and farm businesses.	4.5	Period 4 Well structured course. As I mostly have a plant sciences back ground, this management course was kind of challenging to follow at the beginning with all the new terms. Also, we had to write an scientific review article on theories I barely knew something about before doing the course. At the end, it turned out fine after putting a lot of effort in it. The course is useful if you want to understand more about how to apply important strategical theories in the agriculture sector.
6	Plant Genetics and Environmental response	5	From the course guide: After completing the course the student obtain theoretical and practical knowledge of the genetic and genomics resources and methods in plants biology. gain deep insights of genetics and genomics of environmental responses. is able to apply theoretical knowledge into practice. gets experience of problem-based thinking in planning of genetic experiments. gets Hands-on practice on the available online tools and analysis in plant genetics and genomics.	4	Period 4 The course was well structured. No final examination, but lot's of assignment and a big presentation + report we needed to deliver at the end.

b. I had sufficient possibilities to select suitable courses that were taught in English (Yes, No - Explain):

Yes. However, there were just limited courses related to agriculture and plant sciences in English per period. Meaning, there were enough English courses to fill up your period, but you didn't have a lot of other choices like at WUR if you wanted to do plant sciences/agriculture-based courses in English.

c. I had sufficient possibilities to select suitable courses in my field of interest (Yes, No - Explain):

See above

d. I am satisfied with the level of the courses that I followed (Yes, No - Explain):

Yes and no. I think if you are used to the WUR level and WUR workload, you can manage to survive in other countries. For the courses I chose, the level varied enormously within a course, which I found surprising. Some lectures were really hard with lots of details, but other lectures of the same course were easier. During the lectures, I learned new things, but there were also repetitions from the plant sciences courses (for some courses more than others). The course content was not "practiced" through tutorials or practicals, and the lecturers just briefly went through it, which I found quite unfortunate. In some cases (but not all), the more complicated topics or parts of the story were not really covered.

e. I am satisfied, in the end, with the selection of courses I followed (Yes, No - Explain):

Yes, during my time in Helsinki, I also chose two forestry courses (Forestry in the Nordics and in the Tropics). I am really happy that I did because I learned a lot about forestry, which I did not know before as a plant sciences student. I was actually quite happy with the management course. It was still relevant to my background, but I learned so much because this domain was totally new to me.

f. What is it like to study there?

E.g. Study forms, academic level, examination, workload, lesson material?

There is more freedom compared to Wageningen, because a lot of hours are scheduled for self-study and essay writing. There was less pressure in Helsinki compared to studying in Wageningen, mostly because for most courses there were no final examinations, only large essay assignments. This made it really nice to follow the lectures, because you can sit there and enjoy the lecturers talking instead of taking notes all the time. When I came to Helsinki, I realized how organized the courses in Wageningen are compared to Helsinki (including the high quality of lesson material we got in Wageningen, which was not present in Helsinki). For some courses, I had a feeling that the courses were given by the professors because they needed to, not because they wanted to. There was more chaos in the planning of the courses, and there were not really clear learning outcomes for each lecture. Also, a lot of lecturers were actually quite nervous while presenting the content (maybe that is a Finnish thing), which sometimes made the lectures harder to follow.

Instead of examinations, they gave us major assignments. These were not necessarily easier because you still needed to spend a lot of time working on them and reading many additional scientific papers while making sure your essay was well-written in a scientific style. I improved in writing during my time in Helsinki.

g. What is the culture of the university?

E.g. How approachable are the lecturers, engagement with local students? What are the differences with WU?

Exactly like at WUR, only that the local Finnish students won't actively approach you for a conversation. You will need to start a conversation if you want to talk with them.

h. What does the university offer students additionally?

E.g. Catering, sports facilities, laundry facilities?

Unicafe and Sodexo are places where you can buy subsidized meals (lunch, and at the Unicafe in the city center close to the railway station, also dinner). Through Unisport, students can sign up for a gym subscription (I think I paid just over 100 euros for 4-5 months of a gym subscription, which included access to the sauna as well).

5. Housing-traveling-living

a. What are the possibilities for housing?

E.g. Availability to sign up for a room on campus, private rooms, rent rates?

I would recommend to find a room at Latokartano student village. They offer housing for Helsinki University students whose studies are related to agricultural sciences or food sciences.

I lived in a house with 8 other people and paid 280 euro's for a 15m² room.

b. What is the culture like?

E.g. Differences with home, local cuisine, habits, manners?

Finnish culture is really relaxed, and people are down to earth. They value good relationships with their family, nature, and close friends. Finnish people are not often stressed; they don't do things in a hurry, and when you need help, they are often willing to help you out, even if they are strangers. When you get to know the Finns, you discover that they are not as cold as often described. They do make small talk with each other (more often with other Finnish people than foreigners), and they are open to telling you more about their culture (I met lots of talkative people in the sauna). What I find very nice in Finland is that the people really believe in gender equality, and I felt safe in Helsinki.

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

With your student status at the University of Helsinki, you can get a discounted public transportation monthly card. For 40 euros (if I remember correctly), I could use the trains, buses, and trams within zones A and B 7 days a week. I walked to my university campus (Viikki Campus) and used my transportation card to travel to the city center about three times a week, just to spend time there.

6. Expenses

a. Can you give an indication of your expenses for/during your exchange?

Category	Expenses (in euro's)
Travelling there	280 (including 1 large suitcase with KLM)
Visa - if applicable	X
Vaccinations - if applicable	X
Insurances (extra) - if applicable	X
Daytrips/sight-seeing	750
Housing costs per month & type of housing/accommodation	280, 15m2 with house mates
Grocery costs per month	200 (including lunches & dinners at the university)
Public transport costs per month	60
Restaurant/going out for dinner costs per month	40

b. The price levels were in general [higher; lower; equal] in comparison to in the Netherlands:

I would say that the price levels were generally equal to or sometimes lower than in the Netherlands, depending on where you go and what you buy. I found that things such as shampoo, sunscreen, and sanitary napkins were significantly cheaper in Helsinki than in the Netherlands. Going out to eat lunch in restaurants is also more affordable (14-18 euros for buffet lunch, such as unlimited sushi, etc.). I often ate lunch or dinner for 2.95 at Unicafe (the restaurant/canteen of the university).

c. Additional remarks regarding expenses?

The government has put a high tax % on alcohol purchases. Travelling to different cities is quite affordable by train (VR) and the commercial bus line (OnniBus)

7. Free time

a. What are must-sees in the area?

E.g. Nearby destinations, how do you prefer to travel, when to plan?

When you have settled in Helsinki, go to the city center and take the ferry to the Suomenlinna fortress/island. The ferry ride is really beautiful, as you can see Helsinki behind you. Also, take a walk at Tähtitorninvuori; you will have a great view of the city from there as well.

Gather some friends and go to Nuuksio National Park when the sun is shining. Walking there is so beautiful and peaceful. Also, don't forget to bring some sausages with you, as there are BBQ spots there!

b. What does not appear in a travel guide, but is definitely worth seeing/doing?

Going to a (public) sauna close to a lake and jump into a very cold lake when you feel too hot, to cool down. This is the best feeling ever!

8. Challenges & best moment abroad

a. Any challenges? How did you deal with them?

The biggest challenge I needed to deal with throughout my exchange was learning to walk on slippery surfaces and trying not to slip or fall. At the very beginning, just after the academic year started, I slipped on ice and couldn't walk for 1.5 weeks. I was really frustrated by how long it took to get from place A to place B in the winter because hurrying and walking was not a good combination. I dealt with the situation by taking my time and not rushing the walking process, and I bought myself spikes for my shoes. That was really helpful.

b. Best memory?

Ahhh, there have been so many good memories. From BBQing with friends at national parks, traveling to Lapland with friends (where we hiked in nature while being totally surrounded by thick layers of snow and went on an adventure to see the Northern Lights), staying in a wooden cottage in nature, to eating an unlimited amount of sushi with new friends from all around the world and laughing about ourselves afterward because nobody was able to walk after such a big meal (this was at Nanapo Sushi). But the best memory, I think, was watching the sunset in Helsinki with all my close friends I made during the exchange, during the last weeks of the exchange. Everyone had a great time, and the sunset was just incredibly beautiful.

9. Contact details

Is the reader allowed to contact the writer?	yes <input type="checkbox"/>	no <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Name & email address (if yes)		