



WUR Goes Abroad

1. Student information

Study programme WU	Master Biology
Exchange semester (dd/mm/yyyy)	08-01-2024 until 13-06-2024
Exchange destination: University	Universitetet i Tromsø (UiT)
Faculty	
Country	Norway
City	Tromsø

2. Motivation for exchange

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

For the experience mainly! I wanted to challenge myself, since I am not the biggest fan of change. What better way of doing so than moving to another country for 7 months... In addition, with the help of the Erasmus grant, it was financially possible to live in an expensive country for that long, which made it even more appealing.

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

I am not a fan of warm weather, so everything south of the Netherlands was no option. Then I chose Norway, because I have been here two times before and I love the nature and mountains here. I also really appreciate the work life balance the Norwegians have, especially in hind sight.

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

I mainly chose UiT for its location. I was looking for an university in Norway and found out about UiT, the most northern university in the world. The chance to live in the arctic circle for 7 months and experience the polar night as well as the midnight sun was a real plus for me!

3. Accessibility to reach destination

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

Not necessarily! I chose to fly here, but I am going to travel back by train and bus. My main reason for that was time. To get here, I chose the faster option. But since it is now summer, I will take the time to travel down in a different way. I really want to feel the distance between here and home, so traveling back for 10 days hopefully does the trick.

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	Infection, Inflammation and Immunology	10	An overview of various infection types and the immune systems response to these different infections and autoinflammation.	4.5	This course was the most relevant for my studies, so it gets the highest score. It does not get a 5, since I feel like for 10 ECTS it was not a whole lot of work and I would have learned way more with 10 ECTS in Wageningen.
2	Sea Ice Habitats and Biology	5	This course thought us about the unique environment found in sea ice, and what organisms utilize it. It also put emphasis on the effect of climate change on the sea ice and what influence that will have in the future	4.5	This course fit my polar exchange adventure the best. In the midst of arctic winter, we went onto the sea ice in a nearby fjord to do sea ice sampling. We also learned how to stay warm in -15 oC. I learned a lot about sea ice, but as this knowledge might not be super relevant in my later studies, I give a score of 4.5.
3	Top Predators in polar marine ecosystems: Biology, Role and Management Implications	10	We learned about which top predators occur in marine ecosystems, their basic physiology, what their position in the foodweb meant for their relevance and how this knowledge informs management of marine mammals.	4	This course mainly opened my eyes to the real-live implications of research. One seminar we roleplayed an UN advisory board on a marine mammal related topic. This made me realize that people, communication and arguing are an important, challenging but highly relevant part of research. However, the rest of the course focussed more on an ecosystem level, which is not my speciality. I enjoyed it nonetheless, therefore I give it 4 points.

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

Yes.

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

Yes.

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

No, but that is mainly because of the high standards I am used to as I had only ever studied in Wageningen before. The difference between effort needed in preparation for 10 ECTS was huge. During my exchange, I felt like I had way less contact hours and way more free time too. It was also easier to get high grades I feel like. I am nonetheless very satisfied with the educational lessons I learned here. I got to do my first ever oral exam, which went great. I also realized how lucky I am to study in Wageningen, where the base level is already super good. A real world example is the following: imagine you have to present a paper. In Wageningen, you would not even think about reading out your notes during presenting. This is a no go. However, here in Tromsø, that seemed to be the standard. Even during the final presentations, people read their written text from PowerPoints presenter mode. In addition, a lot of people spoke about writing style and unclear figures as their main criticism on their paper. As I was one of the few people who actually spoke from their head, and had a content-related point of criticism, I got an easy high grade. A way higher grade than the same presentation would get me in Wageningen. That really stuck with me!

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

Yes, the variety was super nice.

f. What is it like to study there?

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

Compared to Wageningen, it is a walk in the park. The lectures were the same speed and difficulty as in Wageningen, but per course I only had ~two per week. In Wageningen, you have to do something for your course every day. Here, I could go two weeks without having to do anything for one of my courses. Therefore, I had way more free time. Honestly, that was also hard to navigate. I felt guilty that I was not doing more, even though there wasn't anything to do! So the workload was definitely lower. In my opinion, the academic level was also lower than back in Wageningen. There was a lot of basics that were repeated time and time again. At least the length and speed of lectures was just as I am used to. The lesson material was also less advanced than in Wageningen. For one course, we had to prepare ~10 questions in advance using online videos and a compendium. Then we spend a full 2 hours to check these questions. That often felt like a waste of time, but luckily I had time to spare with the low workload.

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?

The lecturers were really approachable, as were the local students (they did need a few weeks to get to know). The main difference with WU was the student participation. As mentioned in question F, I had 2 hour seminars to answer ~10 questions. And we needed the whole 2 hours everytime! This was likely because of Norwegian culture. People really do not like to speak publicly, and everytime the teacher asked a question, it took 2 minutes of silence before a Norwegian student would answer. Back at WUR, everybody is really protective of their own time, and every minute of silence feels like a minute of freedom wasted. So, back home hands are raised immediately. It took me a lot of time to adjust to this, so I was mainly the one to answer all the questions in class. This was because for me, waiting to raise your hand for no reason felt rude to the teacher who asked, and felt like a waste of time. After a while, I spoke to a Norwegian girl in my class about this. She confirmed my suspicion: that Norwegians are very shy in these situations. She also told me that the class found it really direct (I guess she meant rudeahaha) of me that I answered everything all the time. A good learning moment for me as a very direct and very time efficient Dutch person!

h. What does the university offer students additionally?

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

There was super good catering in almost every building. However, as an exchange student, I found it to be expensive (just as the forum café is in Wageningen). So, I continued my habit of bringing my own food to uni. As for sport, there was a very well equipped gym on campus, which also offered associations for team sports. I however did not join an association, as I was already happy by myself in the gym and in the mountains. The laundry facilities were regulated by housing organisation Samskipnaden. My whole building only has three laundry machines (conveniently on my floor), which had me worried at first. But the online system for reserving a timeslot on one of the machines worked perfectly, and I never really had to wait with doing my laundry.

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?

In the spring semester, it is rather quiet in terms of number of students (the autumn semester has 600 exchange students whereas we were with 200). So finding a room through housing association Samskipnaden was pretty easy for me. I got my first pick, where I only have one roommate. After this experience, I would not recommend that. Eventhough my apartment, view and location were great, I did not get along with my roommate. When hearing stories of people who made great friends with roommates, it really stung. Talking about rent, I was expecting to pay more. I ended up paying 5100 NOK, which is about 490 euros. This is still way more than I pay back home, but for it being Norway I was really satisfied. I will never get to spend this much time in Norway for this little money.

b. What is the culture like?

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

As I lived with just one roommate which avoided me, I can not say much about this rather than this: Norwegian people are really shy and reserved. It takes a long time before people will say hi to you

when you meet them on campus or in the city (except for when they have had a drink). In addition, nobody dances when going out. Clubs are filled with tables and chairs where groups of friends sit down to chat over the music. Therefore it was really hard to meet new people, mainly Norwegian people whilst going out. That was a real shock to me! But I could also appreciate their shyness everytime I went with the bus. People really do not like to sit next to strangers on the bus. When it is busy they will rather stand then sit next to somebody. When they do have to sit next to you, they will get up as soon as a free spot becomes available. As somebody who also appreciates their personal space, it made going with the bus a way more pleasant experience.

c. Could you give some information about public transport infrastructure?

E.g. Cost public transport card, taxi prices, how to travel to the university?

For a monthly bus ticket, you pay around 30 euros. With this ticket, you can travel in the whole area of Tromsø (Troms). This is great, especially with the OV compensation we receive when going abroad (I am super sad for future exchange students as they are abolishing this regulation soon). The busses on the island are going every 10 minutes and are mostly on time. No complaints there! I did pick an apartment building that is located only 20 minutes by foot from the university, so I did not have to use the bus to get to uni (also not in winter). But what I heard from others, is that the buses can be crowded. Taxi prices are crazy, just as in the Netherlands. Therefore, most people avoid taxi's and walk home/ stay with a friend when they missed the last bus after going out. Norway is a pretty safe country, so walking home at night (especially when it remains night in midnight summer season) feels okay. In the summer, the city placed electric scooters (step in Dutch) everywhere, which can get you home for around 5 euros (depending on the distance).

6. Expenses

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

Category	Expenses
Travelling there	250 euros
Visa - if applicable	-
Vaccinations - if applicable	-
Insurances (extra) - if applicable	10 euros
Daytrips/sight-seeing	100 euros
Housing costs per month & type of housing/accommodation	490 euros
Grocery costs per month	200 euros
Public transport costs per month	35 euros
Restaurant/going out for dinner costs per month	20 euros (I almost never did)

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

Higher! Especially for fresh food and alcohol, Norway is really expensive. Do not expect to go out and drink every weekend, unless you are prepared to pay a fortune. I also paid more rent, and went on more trips then I would back home to explore the area.

c. Additional remarks regarding expenses?

Overall, I am satisfied with my spending habits. Just a few things to be prepared for: alcohol is super expensive, so when going to Norway, do not expect going out, partying and doing crazy things drunk to be a large part of your exchange if you are on a budget. But to counter that: new outdoor hobbies means new outdoor gear which means more spending! At least for me it did... So which path you decide to wander, be prepared for additional costs.

7. Free time

a. What are must-sees in the area?

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

Get a DNT membership! This will allow you to book a night stay in a cozy mountain cabin for only 125 NOK (~11 euros). In addition, a lot of bigger cities in Norway (Tromsø included) have BUA (also called Turbo). This is a place where you can borrow free outdoor gear (backpacks, sleeping bags, headlamps, tents, cookers, ski's, snowshoes, bikes etc) when you have a Norwegian phone number. The only thing that is annoying when traveling around here, is the bus. You can get places with a bus, but it takes a long time and a lot of transferring. When doing trips further away, use the app GetAround to book a car. For around 50-85 euros per person (invite all your friends and fill up that car!) you can rent a car. Places I recommend here are the island of Senja, the blue lake and for a longer trip in a holiday weekend: go to Lofoten! If you are willing to spend more money, take the plane further north to Svalbard/Spitsbergen. I did this in march, and it was an amazing experience!

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

As mentioned in the point before, visit DNT cabins! These are mainly targeted to Norwegians and not to Tourists (as the whole website to become a DNT member is in Norwegian only). It is a very cheap way to get a wonderful weekend away in the mountains around the city where you can relax fully since there will be no service and often not even electricity. Do be prepared to use an outhouse, pee in the wild and drink melted snow or water from meltwater streams!

8. Challenges & best moment abroad

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

For me, I felt like there were so many things that I wanted to do, that I had to say no to activities that happened at the same time. In retrospect, I really should have gone with the other activity instead of the one I chose. This led me to miss out on some amazing people that I could have met earlier or I could have had a better bond with. I dealt with this mainly by accepting that I did not know before, and that it was a great lesson in the end. I also count my blessings with the people that I did get to meet!

Oh and in addition: I decided to try to get into the A2 level of the Norwegian course since I already learned the basics of the language on Duolingo. However, I do not recommend this if you are not really motivated to learn the language and using it. All other exchange students did A1 level of Norwegian (the basic level), so I missed out on meeting more people that way. The people I met in A2 were employees at the university, or full-time master students who already found their friend groups. So, stick to A1 with the other exchange students!

b. Best memory?

This is to hard to say, but I would say the many hikes I did in the mountains here. From my first snowshoe hike in the dark winter to my solo cabin trip in the light summer, the nature here is what made this experience so worth it for me!

9. Contact details

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