



WUR Goes Abroad

1. Student Information

| | |
|---|-----------------------------|
| Field of study in Wageningen | Bachelor Biology |
| Study period exchange (dd/mm/yyyy) | 29/08/2022 until 15/01/2023 |
| Country (exchange) | Sweden |
| City (exchange) | Umeå |
| University (exchange) | Umeå University |
| Faculty (exchange) | |

2. Motivation for exchange

Why did you choose to go on study exchange?

I wanted to travel and get to know (people from) a different culture. And, it is a unique opportunity to be able to study abroad without financial worries.

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

I had an image of Scandinavia as having beautiful nature, progressive politics, and high quality education. My first pick was a university in Norway, but I was finally accepted by one in Sweden. The courses they offered were in the same vein as those I had at WUR, but more of personal interest, or relevant to the career I'd like to have.

3. Accessibility to reach destination

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

I went by car and returned by plane. The car ride takes days, so I recommend making overnight stops to enjoy the different parts of Sweden. There are two flights connecting Schiphol and Umeå, which takes +-4 hours if you have a short layover.

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 | Immunology | 7.5 | Main cell types and mechanisms of the innate and adaptive immune systems | 4 | We got to practice with how the immune system works, but it a lot of it was just memorisation. |
| 2 | Bacterial Physiology and Pathogenesis | 7.5 | Bacterial physiology, gene expression, behaviours and communication, virulence factors. | 3 | The lectures were quite comprehensive and engaging, but the pathogenesis part was mostly memorisation. The lab work was not very challenging. |
| 3 | Freshwater Management | 15 | Biomonitoring using invertebrates; Different kinds of human impacts on freshwater ecosystems, and remediation. | 5 | I personally learned a lot about different ways we use water as a resource. There was a focus on management, especially having limited data or dealing with conflicting interests. |

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

Work forms were similar to WUR, mostly blending online lectures and tutorials with face-to-face ones. The workload was of similar difficulty, but at a fairly slower pace than I was used to at WUR. Exams were on paper, and a bit easier than I am used to.

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?)

Teachers and students have an informal relationship. Most teachers and students are Swedish, so it is the main language within the university. However, everyone speaks English at a high level so it is no problem when international students are present in the conversation or class.

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

The buddy programme is amazing, and organised by students that take a year off to work on it full time (we have one at WUR too, organised by ESN). The library is too small for the student population (just like at WUR), but there are plenty of nice spaces to study spread across campus. Printing is free. There are lots of cafes to have *fika*, which is a corner stone of Swedish social life. There is a rather expensive, high quality sports facility. Mental health is considered to be quite important, and there are easily accessible psychologists and (religious) confidential advisers.

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?)

When applying to study at the university, you can request housing from their international housing office. You have to apply to individual rooms, and they tell you when you are next in the queue. The buildings belong to www.bostaden.umea.se. You can apply on their website, too, but there are fewer offers than you get through university. I paid 3900 SEK per month for a room with private bathroom and shared kitchen.

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

Swedish students are a bit distant at first, but are friendly and sociable when you get to know them more. In the north of the country, people are eager to help each other, especially in the harsh winter weather. The cuisine is very fun to try. But you might miss quality fresh vegetables and meats, and food in general is expensive.

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

Rent is 300-400 EUR per month, groceries are about 200 EUR per month. Prices for furniture or clothes, etc. are the same as in Netherlands. Alcohol tax is very high; e.g. getting a beer in a bar will cost you about 10 EUR.

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

Umeå is small and a great city for biking, so I recommend getting a bike. When there's snow, car roads and the main pedestrian/bike roads are maintained. If you prefer to take a bus while there's snow, transport would be about 75 EUR per month. Taxis have no fixed rate; a 30 mins ride cost me 40 EUR.

6. Free time

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

Take a walk in one of the nearby nature reserves in summer, or go cross-country skiing or skating in winter. There's an ice rink for curling where you can go with a group to get a workshop, and some nice museums. Buses will take you to national parks near Umeå, but going by car is much more convenient. The train infrastructure in Sweden is good; e.g. I took a 10-hour train ride to Abisko (the very north of Sweden). Stockholm is about 8 hours away. Going by car takes about the same time as by train.

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

The nearest national park is Skuleskogen. I recommend going by car if you plan to go for one day. What also doesn't show in the travel guide, is that dogsledding is actually a threat to reindeer herding, an essential part of life for the Sami people (the native people of Lapland). Perhaps save this for a trip to North America or Russia, where dogsledding as a tradition actually comes from.

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

In the neighbourhood Ålidhem, there is a *fritidsbanken*: a rental shop for sports and

camping gear, where the rent is free, no deposit either. They simply trust customers to bring back items intact and on time. I think it's a wonderful place!

7.Challenges & best moment abroad

What was a challenge you have experienced?

The winter weather in north Sweden is not a joke; snow just keeps coming and doesn't melt away until May, and when it does melt the whole city turns into an ice rink. I had to accept that during these times, it takes longer to get around, and I had to be careful. I had to fall and hurt myself a couple of times to learn this lesson, haha.

What was your best memory abroad?

One of the Swedish students from my buddy group took me mushroom picking in Autumn. She was happy to show me, but said that she would never share her picking hotspot to other Swedes! We cooked them for dinner, as well as moose meat that her father had hunted, and cloudbberries, also wild-picked and native to north Scandinavia. It was such a privilege to taste authentic Swedish cooking, and hear about her experiences having lived in Umeå all her life.

8. Contact details (optional)

| | | |
|---|------------------------------|--|
| Is the reader allowed to contact the writer? | yes <input type="checkbox"/> | no <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| Name/e-mail | | |