



WUR Goes Abroad

1. Student Information

Field of study in Wageningen	Biology
Study period exchange (dd/mm/yyyy)	16/01/2023 until 04/06/2023
Country (exchange)	Sweden
City (exchange)	Uppsala
University (exchange)	Uppsala University
Faculty (exchange)	Biology

2. Motivation for exchange

Why did you choose to go on study exchange?

Other universities in other countries can have a different perspective on subjects. And as an ecologist it is interesting to experience different species, climates and ecosystems. And also, studying abroad is an ultimate challenge to your skills of living independently and tests your social skills. And I am a very linguistic person and I love to learn new languages. Learning a new language is done best in the country where it is spoken!

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

A book by Arjen Lubach made me curious about Uppsala university and Sweden in general. I also visited Stockholm once with my family and I loved how much more you appreciated the sun there than in the Netherlands, I learned a little bit about the Swedish language and became a fan. And I really loved the yellow houses in Stockholm. Later I heard that Uppsala was the city where the Swedish royal family studies and that Carl Linnaeus is from Uppsala. More and more reasons to do my Erasmus in Sweden. Italy has also been on my mind, but then I looked at the websites from several Italian universities – I would rather have a university with well-functioning modern technology. And Uppsala university turned out to have the nicest-looking courses to choose from, compared to other Nordic universities and Italian universities. So Uppsala Universitet was my first choice!

3. Accessibility to reach destination

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

It might be worthwhile to take an Interrail pass when you travel by train, because you have more room for a missed train in your schedule (German trains tend to be late sometimes and German train stations can be chaotic) and it does not differ much in price with regular train tickets. There is currently a nice night train from Hamburg to Stockholm, which I managed to take. Travelling by train is very nice, because you can bring more stuff with you than by plane. Another nice thing about travelling to Uppsala

by train is that you might pass by Hamburg (central) station, where you can get an excellent hamburger.

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	Biodiversity and Ecosystem Functioning	15	Biodiversity is suspected to affect ecosystem functions. This course explored how much proof there is for this hypothesis and zooms in on the complexity of e.g. energy flows and species interactions in different ecosystem types (main focus on freshwater ecosystems). In an experiment you try to test your own hypothesis on biodiversity and ecosystem functioning as well.	5	With this course it was the first time in my studies that I heard the term "limnology" and Uppsala University turned out to have a very large and renowned Limnology Department! It was nice to look upon biodiversity not only from a terrestrial perspective, but also from a freshwater ecosystem viewpoint. This course was a great introduction to limnology research methods in the lab and I feel like I learned some useful terms and theory. And the lecturers and lab assistants were very nice overall and the small class size made it very personal.
2	Ecosystems in the Anthropocene	15	Humankind has been affecting the Earth's climate for a long time, but many people agree that the period we live in now, is better referred to as the Anthropocene. The course looks at human history with the focus on humans affecting ecosystems, dives into the foundations of the Planetary Boundaries, demonstrates how (climate-change-affected) lake ecosystems can be modelled and how things are measured in lakes, (burnt) forests and wetlands.	5	This course was exactly what I expected it would be – and more. I aimed for a course that focused more on societal and social aspects of biology. Indeed, the course had a bit more reading, under which a story-like book, written by historians. And the discussions during the seminars were sometimes more philosophical idea sessions than just scientific thinking. The course material was sometime a bit disturbing and overwhelming – some things about human destructions that I read made me cry. But the discussions that we had together helped really well to process everything. Something I did not expect about the course was that it included this many nice field excursions! Now I know how

					to core lake sediments, peat and trees! Bonus!
3	Basic Swedish 2 ¹	7.5/0	The basics of the Swedish language, a bit deeper into the grammar and pronunciation, reading and discussing a book in Swedish, writing small essays.	5	The teacher for this course was a really sweet old lady who always had a lot of stories to tell. She helped me a great deal with really understanding Swedish pronunciation and grammar. Always a nice opposite of my Biology courses.
4					
5					
6					

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

Uppsala university has a system where they have relatively few courses in a semester and you usually do not follow more than one large course at once. In the Spring semester I followed two advanced-level biology courses; one at a time.

Both courses mainly started with a theoretical part with a lot of lectures, preparatory reading and seminars, in which we discussed what we had read. For the second course that I took, there was relatively more reading to do, so sometimes we got a class-free day in the week to do our reading. Overall, I got enough scheduled time for reading – I did not feel very rushed. The first course ended the theoretical part with an examination, which was done in a large computer examination hall. The second course did not have an exam and you were solely graded on your participation and quality of your assignments and presentations, which followed mostly in the second part of the course.

In the second half, seminars were sometimes still scheduled, but mostly the weeks consisted of individual assignments or group work, such as writing assignments or preparing presentations. But there were also lab experiments for the first course and two field excursions for the second course. We went to a research facility at Lake Erken to get a tour and practice sediment sampling. And we went on a two-day fieldwork excursion to a burnt forest/peatland area.

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 classes of students were only very small – between ten and fifteen students – so you got to know everyone very well. For one course, we even went out one time with the whole class as an extra bonding activity. It differed per lecturer how approachable they were – especially lecturers that only had one or two lectures were a bit more distant from the class. But the regular lecturers became good friends with the class and responded quickly to emails, or you could visit them in their office when there was group work going on. The culture in Sweden is very comparable to WUR. Everything is very informal and you feel like you can ask questions at any time.

¹ I followed this course as an extra course, for which no study points were awarded by WUR

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

On the biology campus, there were several little museums (natural history, palaeontology) and very close-by was the tropical greenhouse from the botanical garden, which all gave free admittance to students. In the university buildings, there were also some nice public pianos (from which I made good use) and large microwave rooms (15+ microwaves) for in the breaks.

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?)

As an exchange student you get housing via the Housing Office in one of the large student complexes that are mostly reserved for international students. If you wanted, you could state a preference for a certain housing area in Uppsala. Myself, I did not really mind where I was placed – as long as I got a room. But I was very lucky to get placed in a calm complex with rooms that have their own bathroom and a shared kitchen with four other students. And the rent was very similar to the rent in Wageningen (~€450 per month). There were some housing complexes that were cheaper, but I also heard stories of how messy and noisy it was there and how heating systems were sometimes lacking. There was also a more expensive (~€700 per month), private-room complex, which came across as a hotel.

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

The Swedes are very into “everyone just minds their own business”. People would not easily approach you on the street to help you out, for example when you are looking at Google Maps on your phone. You really actively have to approach a Swede yourself if you want to talk or want help. This was also the case with one of my Swedish corridor mates. I tried very hard to start conversations every time we met in the kitchen and in the end he was more comfortable and quite talkative.

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

Renting a room is more or less similar to Wageningen. A bit more expensive, maybe €50-100 more. My Wageningen room was €400 per month and my Uppsala rent was €450, but it was also more modern and with a personal toilet.

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

Almost everyone cycles to campus, like in Wageningen. That is why I felt quite at home in Uppsala. Next to the bike, I also saw a lot of students and tourists on electric steps that could be found everywhere. I hardly ever took the bus, because you have to buy tickets via the company's app and it was hard to pay with a Dutch debit card (Swedish bank account or credit card required). There were ticket machines at the central station, where

you could also buy day, week or month tickets with other payment methods, but it was too much trouble for me and also quite expensive (I do not remember how much, but for an idea, I once took a 30 minute bus ride (and return) and it cost €9). Uppsala has very nice train connections – in 40 minutes, you are in Stockholm, and a night train to Lapland also stops in Uppsala.

6. Free time

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

In Uppsala itself, I would recommend visiting the botanical gardens – all is in theme of Carl Linnaeus. He is buried in the Domkyrkan, which is also worth a look inside. And be in the centre of Uppsala during Valborg, on the 30th of April! There is a very fun boat race on the river and a beautiful hat-throwing ceremony in front of the university library. A thirty minute bike (or bus)-ride from the centre away is Gamla Uppsala, with its distinct grave hills from Viking times. There is also a cute museum on the history of the site.

In the area, you have Stockholm of course, 40-50 minutes away by train. And you have several nice islands, like Gotland and Åland where you can go by train and ferry (and on the ferry to Åland, you can get cheap alcohol).

And: Go to Lapland in winter! You can go there by night train on a Friday and be back on Sunday night, so you can combine it with studies. There is a nice organisation that provides nice activities in a back-to-basics village near Kiruna, where you can go ice fishing, cross-country skiing, chopping your own firewood, take a Swedish sauna and see the Northern lights (when you are lucky, like me).

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

North of Uppsala there is a very beautiful national park, Fjärnebofjärdens Nationalpark (30 minutes by car), where it is possible to camp on designated camping sites as well (always bring mosquito spray though, even in Spring). Many people do not know you can camp there, but you can and it is beautiful there!

Also a thing that not many people know is the little steam train that departs from a side track behind the central station. It is called Lennakatten and you can buy a

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

Join one of the student nations and you can go out cheaply at one of Uppsala's thirteen student nations (I joined Västgöta Nation, because they have a good soup lunch and their building is very aesthetic). Student nations also have a lot of nice traditions, such as the Spring Ball in May and fancy dinners with for example choir performances. Note that student pubs and clubs always start very early – around 18:00, because they are required to close around 1-2am.

Other restaurants and bars are quite expensive – especially alcohol (thankfully I do not drink). I recommend to cook your food yourself instead of eating out, and when you want alcohol, to go to the nations.

A great thing in Uppsala is Fritidsbanken (two buildings in the city), where you can borrow outdoor gear, like tents, sleeping bags and ice skates.

7.Challenges & best moment abroad

What was a challenge you have experienced?

One of my goals was to go to Lapland, but there was no ESN in Uppsala that arranged trips. And ESN in other cities also did not organise trips that would fit in my class schedule. The season to go to Lapland for the northern lights was only until March and I did not have any friends in the beginning to travel with. So I almost gave up my Lapland plan – until I met some really nice people and we heard from other students that there was a fun travel organization that organized nice weekend trips to Kiruna in Lapland. Together we figured something out!

What was your best memory abroad?

There were so many amazing experiences, especially with the new friend group that I made, but one of the best memories I have of my semester in Sweden was the second field trip from my last course. And after a long-day's field work, we arrived in our accommodation, which was the most luxurious, picturesque accommodation I have ever been for fieldwork. This was because there was almost no other choice in this remote area. But with our 11-people class we stayed in a group of little Swedish huts and houses, surrounded by a beautifully tended garden with loads of good-smelling lilacs and a stunning view over Oil Lake and a little castle. And with the whole group we went for a swim there – that was my best memory. Teachers and students, all enjoying that precious moment in the surprisingly warm water in such an amazing setting. Marvellous.

8. Contact details (optional)

Is the reader allowed to contact the writer?	yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	no <input type="checkbox"/>
Name/e-mail	juliavanholst@outlook.com	