



WUR Goes Abroad

1. Student information

Study programme WU	BSc Soil, Water, Atmosphere
Exchange semester (dd/mm/yyyy)	05/02/2024 until 14/05/2024
Exchange destination: University	Czech University of Life Sciences Prague
Faculty	Faculty of Environmental Sciences
Country	Czechia
City	Prague

2. Motivation for exchange

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

My main goal was to learn to become more independent. Firstly, I wanted to brush up on travel skills, as I had little previous experience. Secondly, I wanted to excel academically while expanding my comfort zone. I wasn't so much focused on finding new connections, but more so on dealing with being alone in a foreign country.

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

Czechia is not that far away from the Netherlands, so the culture shock would not be that great, but still interesting to explore, since it was an ex-soviet country. I was looking forward to seeing nice landscapes as well.

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

The main reason were the courses, which seemed very interesting. The university itself is not so prestigious, which I hoped would allow me to focus on the other aspects of living abroad.

3. Accessibility to reach destination

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

I went by plane on my trip to Czechia out of convenience, which costed me about 120 euros (however, I'm pretty sure cheaper tickets are available). The way back I got the FlixBus to Arnhem, which took about 13 hours. The nice thing is that there are no transits in this trip!

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	GIS II	5	Continuation of GIS I, where ArcGIS is used to work with spatial data, statistics, and manipulations	4	Most of this course is covered in Introduction to GIS in Wageningen, but some elements were handled more in-depth here, which I appreciated
2	Paleoecology	3	A 'workshop', consisting of a day of lectures, followed by 1 (or 2) days of excursion, where you will find fossils in cliffs near Prague and learn about geology	4	Very short, very information dense, and the excursion had many highlights. I wish the course was a bit longer so the information could stick a bit better.
3	Applied Hydroinformatics	5	A series of lectures dedicated to the concept of 'hydroinformatic systems (HIS)', what it means, what its current state is, and where it is going.	2	The lectures were very vague, and it took a long while to even understand what an HIS is. Eventually I gained some understanding, but the course was not worth it. I recommend this course if you like longwinded musings about the history of hydro-technical developments.
4	Numerical Methods	6	Lectures and practicals about the computational techniques involved in solving systems of linear equations, differential equations, integration, etc.	5	Definitely my favourite course: it was challenging, and it enticed me to try to apply the taught algorithms myself. Recommended if you enjoy programming! (Python or Fortran)
5	Flow in Atmospheric Boundary Layer	5	Series of lectures about general principles of atmospheric boundary layer mechanics,	3	The course felt rather surface level, and we did not really put the knowledge into practice. I hoped the course would be more

			followed by a practical in R.		focused on modelling, but was in the end more facts-based.
6	Botany	6	A packed schedule of lectures and practicals about the botanical fundamentals, with students' presentations in between. In the practicals we looked at algae and fungi with microscopes.	3	This course was difficult for me, since the lecture slides were very dense with words I had never heard of before. I haven't had biology in 10 years, so maybe it is easier if you already have some background in this field. I also felt like the lectures were not really engaging and generally hard to follow.

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

Yes, there were about 40 courses to choose from in the second semester. Most of those were master's courses, but in my opinion pretty doable for WUR bachelor students.

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

Yes, plenty of courses that overlap with WUR themes and knowledge.

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

No, generally the courses were quite shallow.

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

I was happy with Numerical Methods, but neutral or less thrilled about the rest. If I had to do it over, I would have chosen more courses in the vein of Numerical Methods, such as Hydraulic/Hydrological modelling, or Hydrodynamics in Porous Media.

f. What is it like to study there?

A semester consists of 12 weeks for lectures and seminars, and then about 8 weeks for examination. The exact exam dates depend on the lecturer, but I got to schedule all of my exams within the first two weeks of the examination period.

In my experience, the course load is rather low. Most courses require you to do something 'for credit', such as a presentation, essay or a practical. After that, the exam is usually a mix of closed and open questions. Many courses do not use textbooks, and even for those that do, I could easily get by with the lecture slides.

g. What is the culture of the university?

I have the sentiment that there is less respect between lecturers and students, in both directions: students often show up late, do not engage in class, and are generally only interested in receiving the credits of a course, rather than the contents. As a result, I feel like lecturers aren't as motivated to involve the students into the lectures, and end up merely reading a PowerPoint presentation. The end product is a less warm atmosphere in class, as both parties give the impression they just showed up because they have to.

This does not mean that lecturers do not appreciate you reaching out! They are often very responsive and happy to help you out.

With regards to Czech students, they are very similar to Dutch students: most of the time, they have their own friend groups which are difficult to penetrate. I would say they are even more 'icy' than Dutch students, but once that layer is broken you can absolutely be gezellig with them :)

h. What does the university offer students additionally?

On Campus, there is a Menza which sells lunch for cheap (think 2 or 3 euro's for a meal with Student's discard on your student (ISIC) card). Beer is common during lunch. There is a nice library with study rooms (but no private rooms like the WUR buildings have). There is also a sport facility with some options like swimming, fitness, tennis, etc.

5. Housing-traveling-living

a. What are the possibilities for housing?

The dormitory WEST is available for everyone studying at the CZU. This dormitory sits at about 40 minutes from campus. There are single and double rooms, regular or premium. I took a regular double room (cheapest option at around 360 euros per month), which means I had a roommate. The dormitory itself is quite alright, with a common room with a table tennis table and a TV, study rooms (Wi-Fi is not always the best), washing machines for about 4 euros per cycle, and a free bed linen change every 2 weeks. Also, personal Wi-Fi routers need to be rented. I took the second fasted option, which costed around 18 euros per month, and the speed was really good.

I have not looked at the private housing market, but I heard that it is quite difficult to find a good deal that is not a scam, so I am glad I went with the WEST dormitory option.

b. What is the culture like?

I found Czech people to be very akin to Dutch people, as they have a similar vein of directness to them, and an outspoken sense of humour (example: there are many notes around the dormitory to the tune of "don't throw trash out of the windows, we are not living in the middle ages!" and "please do not leave your dirty dishes, there is no mother that will wash them for you!"). I did not get to spend much time with many Czech people, but the interactions I had with them were mostly pleasant.

As for cuisine, there is nothing really notable here. The Czech restaurant dishes I tried tasted like microwaved schnitzel and potato salad. Not bad, but I would rather heat it up myself at that point. And for the chimney cake (a.k.a. Trdelnik), I actually quite enjoyed it (but it is apparently not really Czech, only for tourists).

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

The public transport is absolutely amazing: at most stops, there is a bus or tram or metro every few minutes. You could get stranded in the city centre at 3 am, and you can still find a way home. Moreover, it is very cheap, as a student can travel within Prague for 90 days for just about 13 euros. For using the public transport, you should download the 'PID Litacka' app, which is the 9292 for Prague, where you can also buy electronic tickets. You can buy physical tickets at ticket booths or at ticket shops at some stations.

To travel to the university from WEST dormitory, you can take bus 180 to Dejvicka, and the bus 107 to the campus. A bit faster would be to take bus 180, 304 or 380 to Nemocnice Motol, take the metro to Dejvicka that way, and continue with bus 107 to campus.

6. Expenses

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

Category	Expenses
Travelling there	€120 (plane)
Visa - if applicable	-
Vaccinations - if applicable	-
Insurances (extra) - if applicable	€16 euros at WEST dormitory for room insurance
Daytrips/sight-seeing	On average €40 per daytrip
Housing costs per month & type of housing/accommodation	€360, room w/ roommate
Grocery costs per month	€150
Public transport costs per month	Less than €5
Restaurant/going out for dinner costs per month	depends

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

Groceries are comparable, restaurants are slightly lower, public transport is insanely cheap.

c. Additional remarks regarding expenses?

I suggest Vietnamese food as great but still affordable food, since Czechia has a large Vietnamese diaspora :)

7. Free time

a. What are must-sees in the area?

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

I enjoyed the city of Cesky Krumlov, which is a very picturesque small town full of history (quite touristy though). I think Brno and Olomouc were my other favourite cities in the spring.

The Bohemian Switzerland in the north is supposedly very beautiful, but on advice of a classmate we did not go there due to forest fires.

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

I enjoyed all the museums in the cities in Czechia. Most of them are dirt cheap, too: a student ticket can go as low as 2 euros.

8. Challenges & best moment abroad

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

I think I suffered from a bit of FOMO, especially when I did not have anything planned for a while. Since the studying was not that intense, I felt like I should keep myself busy with exploring or travelling, but when I wasn't doing that I felt down on myself.

Eventually I did manage to travel more during this period than ever in my life, so it is all about the little steps I took for myself, but it takes some time to realise that. Not everyone is born a wild explorer.

b. Best memory?

When my girlfriend came over in one of the last weeks of my exchange, we explored the city a lot, and we ate a lot of Vietnamese food. The spring rolls of the 'Ngô' restaurant was some of the best food I've ever had!

9. Contact details

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