



WUR Goes Abroad

1. Student Information

Study programme WUR	BSc Forest and Nature Conservation
Exchange semester (dd/mm/yyyy)	20-08-2023 until 19-12-2023
Exchange destination: University	Agricultural University of Iceland (AUI) Landbúnaðarháskóla Íslands (LBHÍ)
Faculty	Environmental & Forest Sciences
Country	Iceland
City	Hvanneyri

2. Motivation for exchange

Why did you choose to go on study exchange?

I have always wanted to move abroad and experience life in another country. When I found out that I could go abroad for one semester, I knew I had to try it out. I wanted to find out how I would manage to live and study somewhere differently.

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

I have always admired Scandinavia and was lucky to have visited many Scandinavian countries before, so I knew that I wanted to go north. Iceland and the Agricultural University of Iceland stuck out to me because of the location and the courses.

The courses seemed interesting and diverse, they were also different from the courses I had followed in Wageningen.

I had never visited Iceland, but I had seen a lot of the fascinating nature through social media. The university is located quite rural and that really attracted me. I wanted my exchange to be an experience that was much different from the life I have back home, I wanted it to be a real adventure, so Iceland seemed like a great fit.

3. Accessibility to reach destination

Do you have any tips to reach your exchange destination?

By plane is the best way to go. Try and book on time to avoid expensive tickets. If you want to bring a car, you could go by ferry which stops in the Faroe Islands, which could be a great trip. You can also drive and then fly from the Faroe Islands.

The university will accommodate transport from Reykjavik (the capital) to the university. You can easily get to Reykjavik from the airport by bus.

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	Restoration Ecology: Theory and Concepts	5	Introduction course on restoration ecology with lectures, individual assignments, group work and field excursions.	4	This course was quite intense and demanding, but I can say that it was the course that taught me the most. Great opportunity to get to know the field of restoration ecology.
2	Ecological Restoration and Global Environmental Challenges	4	Course on global initiatives that are relevant to ecological restoration. Mainly theory, but offers a diverse perspective on global efforts.	3	This course was good to follow and not as intensive. With lectures and guest lectures it offers a wide range of insights on global issues.
3	Arctic Circle	2	Short course about the Arctic Circle Assembly which is held annually in Reykjavik.	4	Easy course that is highly recommended. You have the opportunity to visit the Arctic Circle Assembly in Reykjavik for three days. Afterwards you are asked to write a few assignments, but it is not as demanding. Really useful for people who are interested in the Arctic.
4	Icelandic Culture	2	Course on Icelandic language and culture. It is an essential course for international students and a great way to get to know more people. A mix of lectures and field excursions	4	A fun and light course for international students coming to Iceland. Useful to get to know Iceland and its people. Highly recommend.
5	Forest Ecology in a Treeless Country	2	Short course based on field excursions to Icelandic forests. Also, an introduction to the basics of forest ecology.	5	This course was really fun. Taught over four days, of which two field trip days, this course allows you to visit the forests of Iceland. You are asked to give one presentation on the final day. Very interesting and overall, fun.
6	IN&E Issues at the Arctic Edge – Environmental Issues in Iceland	5	Course on different topics regarding the environment of Iceland. Lectures, quizzes and a short report.	3	A course that covers many different topics regarding the Icelandic environment. Through multiple lectures given by lecturers from a variety of disciplines.

7	IN&E Issues at the Arctic Edge – Nature of Iceland, Field Excursion	2	Three-day fieldtrip to the south of Iceland with a finalizing report.	5	This course is supplementary to the Nature of Iceland course. Three days of fieldtrips to the south and a final report. Lots of fun to go on a trip through Iceland with the other students.
8	IN&E Issues at the Arctic Edge – Nature of Iceland	5	Course on different topics regarding the nature of Iceland. Lectures, quizzes and a short report.	4	A course that covers many different topics regarding the Icelandic nature. Through multiple lectures given by lecturers from a variety of disciplines. Great way to get to know the basics on Icelandic flora and fauna.
9	Grazing Ecology and Management	4	A course on the ecology and management of grazing. Covers rangelands worldwide and the different topics regarding grazing.	4	This course is very interesting. It covers grazing through many different aspects and perspectives. Builds on basic knowledge of ecology. You learn a lot and the workload is not that much.
10	Sketching and Observing the Environment (Visual Art IV)	2	Short course on sketching and visualizing landscapes.	5	Four-day course of which you will spend most of it drawing the outdoors. This course is fun, also for non-painters. Teaches you how to visualise and interpret landscapes. Highly recommended as it is a very calming experience that mixes creativity with the outdoors.

What is it like to study there?

E.g. study forms, academic level, examination, workload, lesson material.

Studying in Iceland is overall good. The level can differ between courses, if you want courses that are similar to the level at WUR, I recommend taking master's courses. The workload is not as intense, but if you don't distribute your courses and ECT's fairly over the exchange period, it can get a bit intense at some points.

The material is good and interesting. Some things can become repetitive as many courses want to cover the same basics. The examination is much less intense than at WUR. During my time here, I didn't have to study for any exam, as most of them were open book and over a long time slot. Many courses rely on short quizzes you take during the course and these are often quite easy.

A lot of the education in Iceland is accessible as distance-learning. All lectures are recorded and most examinations are online. This can also be useful if you want to go on a trip during your exchange.

The semesters and exam periods are quite similar to those at WUR. There are four terms and after each there are two weeks of exams and finalization of assignments.

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 culture at AUI is very comfortable. You can easily approach teachers and lecturers, and everyone is on first name basis. I would say all staff and students speak English and are very welcoming to talk to. It can be difficult to engage with local students at the university, as you will mainly follow English courses with other international students. But when you do share a classroom with Icelandic students, it is always fun and a good atmosphere. The best way to get to know Icelandic students is by joining the activities organized by the association.

It is important to know that the university has two campuses. One located in Hvanneyri and the other in Reykjavik.

What does the university offer students additionally?

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

The campus in Hvanneyri consists out of one main building. The university has a canteen where you can get a lunch buffet every workday, but this can become quite expensive. You can access the university 24/7 and use it for activities such as movie nights or potlucks. In the university there is a gym where you are free to exercise.

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?

Housing will be offered to you by the university. This consists out of small furnished apartments with 2 to 3 people. Most international students live together. You cannot choose who you want to live with, but if you wish to switch it is not a big issue. You pay rent (around €500) every month. The housing is on campus, so going to university won't take you more than a five-minute walk.

What is the culture of the country like?

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

The Icelandic culture can be a bit different from the Netherlands. The distances are much larger and the climate much harsher. The culture can be described as a bit more American, but it still remains a western European culture. Icelanders are easily approachable and most speak English quite well. As the country is very popular among tourists, everything is accessible for internationals.

Could you give some information about public transport infrastructure?

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

Public transport is available in the cities and larger towns, but not in more rural areas. In Hvanneyri, there is very limited public transport. In Iceland, you rely on cars to get to places. This can be quite difficult as most internationals do not own a car, and if they do they are not very likely to bring them to Iceland. My cohort was able to rent a car from

the university staff. But making connections with the Icelandic students is very useful as they all own cars. Especially since the town doesn't have a lot of facilities (there is only one pub, a museum and a wool shop, so no grocery store) a car is very much an essential.

If you want to go on trips, I recommend renting a car. This can be pricey, but it is essential to get to places you want to go to.

6. Expenses

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

E.g. you can also indicate price differences (higher/lower/equal) in comparison to the Netherlands.

Ticket there: around €300

Visa if applicable:

Vaccinations if applicable:

Insurances (extra, if applicable):

Housing costs per month & type of housing/accommodation: equal/higher, furnished apartments with 2-3 people

Groceries: €40 a week

Public transport: €2,50 for a bus ticket

Restaurant/going out for dinner: at least €30

Daytrips/sight-seeing: five-day trip with car rental and accommodation is between €250-300 per person

Additional remarks regarding expenses?

Iceland uses Icelandic kroner, which can roughly be converted by dividing the number with 1000 and that times 7.

Alcohol is extremely expensive and difficult to buy as the sale of alcohol is executed by the state and only allowed on certain hours/days of the week.

7. Free time

What are must-sees in the area?

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

Iceland has must-sees pretty much everywhere, but in the area I would recommend the following; Skorradalur (a forested valley with lake, great place to go hiking), the pool in Borgarnes (the pool is an important part of Icelandic culture), Krosslaug natural hot tub (Iceland is known for its natural warm springs, but this small pool is nearby and in a beautiful forest), Reykholt (this town has a rich history, you can visit a museum and go for a walk), Barnafoss (one of Iceland's best known waterfalls and lava fields), Glymur (Iceland's biggest waterfall in a beautiful area with many hiking trails) and Hreppslaug a small local pool only open in the summer).

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

Here are some of my favourite hidden gems in Iceland; Samúel Jónsson's Art Farm, Önundarfjörður Pier (Holt í Önundarfirði), Landmannaleið Rest Area, Malarrið Lighthouse and Rauðisandur.

The Westfjords and Snæfellsnes are some of my favourite areas that are not that busy.

Do you have general tips and tricks about leisure time?

E.g. recommendations for restaurants, going out?

Most of my free time I spend going outside, going on hikes or day trips. We spend quite some evenings knitting, crocheting or watching a movie. Other nights we went out to the pub. We organized a lot of dinners together since everyone lives nearby it becomes very easy to meet up. A quick trip to the pool is also a great way to spend your leisure time. I have saved lots of locations in Iceland that are worth a visit and have mapped out quite a few hikes, so feel free to contact me.

8. Challenges & best moment abroad

What challenges did you encounter and how did you overcome them?

Getting accustomed to an entirely new environment can be hard. I came here not knowing anyone, not knowing the country, the language. You are being thrown into this new rhythm which can be overwhelming in the beginning. My best advice is to give yourself enough time to get accustomed and also taking some time to yourself. Say 'yes' to every opportunity in the beginning, you won't regret it. Even if it sounds weird or strange, just say 'yes'.

If anything is unclear prior to the exchange or during, you can always ask questions to the staff or the Icelandic students. Not a lot of information might be given, but if you ask, you will always get an answer.

One of the positive aspects of going on exchange to a more rural area, is how you easily form a community with the people that are in the same situation as you. All other international students came to Iceland not knowing anyone, this brings you closer to them and forms a great connection. In the end, all you really have is each other, so people tend to gravitate more towards one another.

What is your best memory of your time abroad?

One of my favourite memories is playing mud football in the riverbanks, which was a very interesting, but fun experience. Another great memory is going on trips with other students. Being away from the town and university, and really getting to know everyone is so much fun. But my best memory would probably be, seeing the northern lights for the first time on the night of my birthday.

9. Contact details (optional)

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