



# WUR Goes Abroad

## 1. Student Information

|                                    |                                  |
|------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Field of study in Wageningen       | Biology                          |
| Study period exchange (dd/mm/yyyy) | 04/01/2023 until 26/05/2023      |
| Country (exchange)                 | Iceland                          |
| City (exchange)                    | Reykjavik                        |
| University (exchange)              | Haskoli islands                  |
| Faculty (exchange)                 | Engineering and natural sciences |

## 2. Motivation for exchange

### Why did you choose to go on study exchange?

When I heard about the possibility to do an exchange, I knew that I wanted to do that since I always said I wanted to travel, but I never did it because of covid etc. I didn't really know what I could expect from an exchange, but I like to do adventurous things and to meet new people, and that is exactly how I experienced this exchange.

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

Iceland has always been a country on my bucket list, because of the unique nature. There, this university had some courses that were related to my biology/ecology study. It was definitely the right choice, since you can do so many trips in Iceland to hike and explore every waterfall there is. I also feel like the exchange students that go to Iceland all have the same interests in hiking and going outdoors.

## 3. Accessibility to reach destination

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

I just took a direct flight to Keflavik and from there you can take either the normal bus or the fly bus to your apartment, I don't think it really matters in price or time. There are also indirect flights that are maybe cheaper, but since I booked my flight on time, the direct flight wasn't that expensive. If you are really adventurous, you can also take the ferry from Denmark, I have some friends that are going to take the ferry back, first to the Faroe Islands, then to Denmark and then home, which is pretty cool :).

## 4. University and studying

Could you provide some general information about the followed courses?

|   | Course         | ECTS | Short description of the contents  | Appreciation of course:<br>1(low) - 5(high) | Remarks   |
|---|----------------|------|--|---|---|
| 1 | Marine ecology | 6    | Course with a lot of lectures, quite interesting. But a lot of information I already learned from marine | 4   | The exam was a take home exam, which was quite some work, since you had to write 20 mini essays |

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|   |                                      |    | courses in Wageningen. The teacher knew a lot about the subject and there were also a lot of guest lectures. The final grade consist out 2 presentations, an essay and an exam.  |   | sort of. I ended up handing in 12 pages with a whole reference list. This sort of exams you never have in Wageningen. I also was the most nervous for the presentations in this course, since the teachers are really interrogating you after the presentations with all their questions.  |
| 2 | Terrestrial ecology                  | 6  | Also consist out of a lot of lectures and guest lectures, that cover a lot of aspects from terrestrial ecology. Every week you had to read articles and write a journal club, which was some work. We also had a groups project in the end, which was nice with 1 fieldwork day and you had to write an essay and present about a topic.   | 4 | This course didn't have an exam which was great, so there is no real need to pay attention to the lectures :). However it was mandatory to be present at the student lectures, which every student from the class has to give one time.  |
| 3 | Conservation biology                 | 6  | Again, the course consists out of a lot of lectures which cover some basic aspects of conservation biology. There were quite some assignments, but they were really small and almost no work (and the teacher is reaaaally flexible with the grades). Only the conservation plan that you have to right in a group is some work, but fun to do.  | 4 | Really fun course, because the teacher was really amazing. She was so nice and sweet and that really made this course great. I was always more happy after I left the class then when I came in. However, I didn't learn a lot, maybe nothing at all, because the information was quite global and we already learned a lot in biology classes in Wageningen, so nothing new. But still nice if you want to have a fun time.   |
| 4 | Icelandic nature and cultural legacy | 10 | Course that have besides lectures a lot of excursions to museums, and at the end a daytrip to the Reykjanes Peninsula. It consist out of a culture part, where you have to write an essay and a nature/geology part, that has a lot of small assignments that needs to be done in groups. At the end there is a take home exam.  | 4 | The lectures were okay, not too special, easy to follow. Although I really liked the biology teacher, she was enthusiastic (and a bit chaotic) and for example cancelled the class to watch whales somewhere. The excursions make this course quite fun, and the assignments are not too much work.  |
| 5 | Sustainable futures                  | 6  | This course is really weird. The first weekend, we had a presentation about how we need to stop the economic growth, but recycle etc and be one with nature. And actually I felt like the teacher kept repeating herself after this lecture. There are a lot of small assignments the whole time and you have to present a lot, I never really liked presenting but you really learn to practice that here and I wasn't nervous at all anymore. The course also has some workshops where you have to talk to other classmates about problems and be one with | 3 | Course is given in 4 weekends, which kind of surprised me and which is not really recommendable. However, I made my best friends in this course, since you get to know all your classmates quite well by the 'thinking pairs' where you had to talk about world problems with another student. The teacher can be a bit mean sometimes in my opinion, but the weird workshops made it also fun. It ends with a workshop that you have to give yourself with the whole class and where you have to talk about a |

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|   |  |  | nature by drawing trees etc. Every weekend you get more surprised. |  | problem, and do smaller workshops in between like doing yoga, making cranes (I organized that one), with a lot of food. |
| 6 |  |  |  |  |   |

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

The study load was way less than in Wageningen. I never did so little for university and still got great grades. There were quite some assignments and presentations the whole time, but they were not that much work and the exam at the end was not that big part of your final grade. So there was also no stress in the end. Not every course had an exam, and when they had an exam it was either a take home exam or we knew the questions already beforehand. The information was also not really new for me, so I cannot say I learnt a lot from my courses, but it does show the high quality of courses in Wageningen.

**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?)**

Most of the teachers were really nice, you can call them by their first names and they are open for questions. Some were really great, like Mariana from Conservation biology, she is the most enthusiastic teacher I ever had I think. The local students are not really open, I talked to some Icelandic students, but I didn't make friends with them, but that can also be because of me. Although the Icelanders can speak English very well. However, the exchange students really make up for it, I met so many great people!

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

There are not that many activities that are organized by the university for exchange students. After the orientation days, nothing was really organized by them. Also the sport facilities are not really present. There is a nice cheap gym that you can get access to and some basketball and yoga classes, but no real sport associations. I think Icelanders don't really do sports. However, we as exchange students organized our own sport activities, like playing soccer etc. So you have to organize some groups for yourself if you want to do group sports. Also the other activities you have to organize yourself. You can get free drinks from the university when you organize a national dinner!

## 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?)**

I got a room via student housing. There are quite some student housing buildings, like gamli gardur and Seamundergata. I got a room in gamli, which was really great. My hall was amazing with a lot of other exchange students. Also a lot of parties are given in the party room that you can book in gamli! Otherwise you can get apartments via facebook.

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

So I don't know if Iceland has a lot of culture. I think I got to know more culture habits from other exchange students from all over the world. For example, everyone ate a proper meal at lunch (definitely no bread), which I also started doing. Thereby, dinner time is really late, like at 20/21 or 22 and not 17. But because I was in gamli gardur, we also cooked a lot together, when you have a studio, you can do whatever you want. There were a lot of Germans everywhere and they use a lot of salt, that is one thing that I noticed.

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

It is really expensive, I think I got a really cheap room in comparison to other exchange students in Iceland. I paid 600/700 euros per month. But I also had friends that paid 900/1000 euros per month. However, when you have student housing, you can get student benefits, which is 200/300 euros per month, so that really helped. You have to be an Icelandic citizen to get that, so you have to get a Kennitala and an Icelandic bank account.

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

A lot of student housing is really close to the universities, so I could walk the whole time to every university building. Also the centre of Reykjavik is quite close, maybe 20 min walk from gamli gardur, so really nice. The busses are also really nice, you only need the Klappid app to buy a ticket for 3 or 4 euros and then you can use every bus within Reykjavik for 1 hour. However, I didn't use the bus that much, because outside of Reykjavik it is not that easy to get there by public transport. When doing trips, we always rented a car at bluecar rental, which was ~130 euros for a weekend for 5 persons.

## **6. Free time**

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

Iceland has soo many great nature places. I recommend just renting a car for the weekend and to go on trips with friends. The golden circle and the south coast are a bit touristic, but also Reykjadalur, Snaefellsness or Reykjanes peninsula are really great. Or the whole ringroad is even better. Hikes you can do close to Reykjavik, reachable with the bus, are Ulfarsfell, Helgufoss, Esja, so not that many. Renting a car is overall the best option if you want to do something on the weekend (for 2 days).

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

Go dumpsterdiving!! I never heard of this phenomenon before I came to Iceland, but it makes your stay in Iceland way more affordable. After closing time of supermarkets (in the harbour), we would go to their dumpsters and look for fruit/vegetables or other stuff that they threw away that is still really fine to eat. The bakery was even better, at the harbour you have the Brikk bakery that throws away all their bread and pastries at the end of the day. So we never had to buy bread anymore, since we always found them in the dumpster of the bakery and I ate so many pastries there, that I cannot see cinnamon rolls or chocolate breads anymore.

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

What is really common in Iceland is the swimming pools, which is different than the swimming pools in the Netherlands. It is more sitting in warm water that is 38/40 degrees, without the swimming. You can buy 10-time cards for 40 euros, so not that expensive. I used 2 cards during my halfyear in Iceland! Thereby, there is always karaoke on Tuesday in Gukurin. This place was always filled with exchange students that really started the party by dancing and singing along. Every weekend we went out to different clubs. You don't have to pay to enter clubs which is great, I really liked Hax and Kiki's. The music is nice and every time a lot of exchange students could be found going out on the weekends. Especially when there was a party in gamli till 00/00.30 and then we would all go out after that. I don't even remember what other activities we did, but I think I did most with my hall from gamli gardur, which were really great people and we always had spontaneous plans, like cooking together, doing potlucks, brunches, picnics.

## **7.Challenges & best moment abroad**

### **What was a challenge you have experienced?**

In the beginning it is a bit weird to be in an environment where you don't know anyone. But when you join the introduction days and are really open for talking to new people, you make friends really fast, since everyone is looking for friends. In the beginning, I also tried to be friends with Icelandic people, but that didn't really work out. Also there is not that many activities organized by the university, so you have to find friends and people yourself. Student housing was perfect in that sense, to meet a lot of students. Also it can be really cold, in January it could be -15, so you need the proper clothes for that and running outside is impossible with all the snow outside. So to sport in the cold months you have to go the gym, and I always hated the gym, although this small gym was quite nice. The weather can also be really bad. One month we only had snow and rain and then you cannot do a lot of activities outside. Even in the last months of my exchange, in April/may it was still quite cold (between 5 and 10), we only did 2 picnics outside, or when you do a bbq it gets cold after a while. So most of the activities we did inside.

### **What was your best memory abroad?**

Even though Iceland is so beautiful, I don't think I would say the trips were the most amazing thing I did. Although I saw beautiful northern lights on the first trip we did and we saw so many waterfalls/canyons and other great nature places. I think the first thing that comes to my mind is just sitting in our gamli kitchen and talking to my hallmates, cooking together or doing potlucks. Or chilling in the pianoroom (also in gamli, a nice living room with a piano) and playing piano together, singing or talking. The place can be great, but the people that you meet make it so special. I really feel like I made friends for life in Iceland!

## **8. Contact details (optional)**

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