

Student Exchange Questionnaire

Name: Lauren Ambags

Massey Degree: Bachelor of Arts (English)

Host university: University of Copenhagen

Semester and year of exchange: Semester 2, 2017



- **Why did you choose this particular university and/or country for exchange?**

I was already sold on the idea of doing an exchange in Europe as I have always been drawn to Europe as my top travel destination. Being based in Europe would also provide the opportunity for a huge range of travelling during the time abroad. I also have a strong Dutch heritage on my dad's side so I was originally looking to study in Amsterdam. However, with many of my distant relatives still living in the Netherlands it almost felt like a safe option and thus I decided I wanted to challenge myself further by fully immersing myself in a foreign country I knew nothing about and had no contacts in. So, branching out from the Netherlands I found the University of Copenhagen in Denmark and it fit perfectly. Not only was I drawn in by the Danish culture, attitude and lifestyle I had heard and read about, the modules offered at KU completely matched what I would have studied back at Massey so in the end choosing the University of Copenhagen was easy!

- **Did it meet your expectations?**

Knowing very little about what it would be like to live in Denmark or even Europe in general, I didn't have many expectations about the study or country itself but my expectations that I had for exchange were well and truly exceeded! Denmark is a brilliant place for international students with a huge student community. All the Danes speak amazing English as well which makes daily life much less daunting – you get the best of both worlds with the experience of a new language all around you but the option to fall back on English whenever you need it. I wanted to go on exchange to immerse myself into another culture and meet people from all around the world and I certainly got just that and more. I will always look upon my exchange experience as the best part of my student life and I will cherish the friends and memories made forever. As clichéd as it sounds I cannot express how much of a life-changing experience filled with self-discovery a student exchange can be, as it was for me.

- **What papers did you study while on exchange? Would you recommend them?**

The University of Copenhagen is rich with international students so they have created a variety of papers directed entirely at exchange students that cover different aspects of culture and history in Denmark. For example, some of those on offer during the semester I was there included Nordic Mythology, Gender and Sexuality Studies, Danish Cinema, Danish Architecture and more. These 'Danish Culture Courses' are worth 15 ECTS each which is great for reducing what could be a daunting workload in a foreign university by meaning you can direct your focus into these bigger modules rather than

having to spread your time and energy across many different studies. I really benefitted from this because I chose to study the first two I listed – Nordic Mythology and Gender and Sexuality Studies and absolutely loved them! Instead of having lots of smaller different assignments throughout the semester you could pour your focus into a research topic of your choice and work towards a thesis style report on this throughout the semester. This worked really well because its much more achievable as an exchange student to work towards one overall goal rather than attempting to get used to many different assessment styles. These courses also offered wonderful class excursions to compliment the topics studied and so this was an awesome way to see more of Denmark and the greater Scandinavian culture. One of the trips I went on for Nordic Mythology took us all the way across to Southern Sweden to look at Viking burial and ritual sites which was a fascinating experience I definitely would not have been privy to otherwise. The lecturers for these modules are very well-equipped at teaching to an international class as well so they are very helpful and understanding of your position and any extra study challenges as an exchange student. Moreover, being in an international classroom presents a perfect opportunity for meeting and making friends with other like-minded and similarly situated students. If you are considering an exchange at KU I cannot recommend the Danish Culture Courses enough!



- **Were there differences in the teaching methods and academic environment at your host university, compared to Massey University? If so, what kind of differences?**
The courses I took part in at KU were somewhat different in teaching style with classes falling somewhere between lecture and tutorial in format and atmosphere. This works particularly well for a group of international students as it fosters discussion and intimacy whilst still covering sufficient content like a lecture achieves. As previously mentioned the assessment style was also slightly different than I was used to with one big thesis style report rather than multiple assignments but like I've said this worked well given the exchange circumstances. Moreover the opportunity to go on class trips was a welcome addition to the academic environment at KU.
- **Did you stay on-campus or off-campus? What was the accommodation like?**
I stayed off campus in a very student dominated accommodation called BaseCamp that I booked through the Housing Foundation which is an Danish accommodation provider for international students. The accommodation was phenomenal – a renovated old military barracks right next to one of the nicest gardens and castle in Central Copenhagen – but I sure did pay a pretty penny for that luxury. With such a handy location, a great student community, cool common rooms, on-site laundry, a great gym and my own bathroom and kitchenette I certainly don't regret copping the extra costs for such an easy and fun living experience. Almost all of my exchange friends lived at BaseCamp and the Resident Assistants put on plenty of activities and parties so the social life at my accommodation was phenomenal.
- **How did living expenses compare to in New Zealand?**

It is difficult for me to accurately compare living costs as a student in the two places because in New Zealand I live at home with my parents so I don't have nearly the amount of expenses as I did in Denmark. The accommodation in Denmark definitely isn't cheap if you want a good location and comfort but it's well worth paying that little bit extra for luxury as I've mentioned. In terms of groceries and daily costs its fairly comparable to New Zealand and any differences in food prices will probably balance themselves out against each other. Eating out is very expensive in Copenhagen however so I'd recommend avoiding that as much as possible. I'd also recommend getting a bicycle as this is the most popular form of transport and will save you a lot of money on public transport in the long run (its also super fun cycling everywhere with your friends and gives you the true Danish living experience – you'll feel pretty fly when you can cycle along with your groceries and coffee in hand without spilling a drop). The biggest expense was setting up when I moved into my accommodation so things like bedding linen and initial household basics but if you can get to the IKEA in Copenhagen you can keep these costs down to a minimum (provided you don't then splurge on the mountains of unnecessary decorative and gimmicky products IKEA has like I did whoops). My weekly living costs (not including rent but taking into account the more expensive settling in weeks) probably averaged around the \$200+ mark and I was definitely on the more conservative end of my friends when it came to spendings (particularly the English, for whom being on exchange is significantly less expensive comparatively). Having said that I wasn't super strict about my budget so you could definitely live in Denmark and happily be more frugal than I (you might just need to fall into a group of friends that partied a bit less than my lot did). If you want to travel around whilst you're on exchange you definitely need to account for a much larger budget to allow for those costs as well.



- **What extra-curricular activities did you participate in at the host university?**
Does partying count as an extra-curricular? Although there were lots of clubs and activities on offer most of my time was simply taken up exploring and experiencing the city with all my international friends so I didn't choose to take up any formal extra-curriculars other than the class trips available through the Danish Culture Courses I was enrolled in. However, a few friends chose to volunteer for various student bars and social rooms (cinemas/board game cafes etc.) and they said they really enjoyed this and would highly recommend them to any other exchange students in Copenhagen. The KU student bar called Studenterhuset right in the centre of the city also holds great social functions and activities like swing classes and quiz nights etc. and is almost entirely staffed by international volunteers.
- **What's one thing you learnt about your host country or culture?**
Something that I learnt about the Danes is that they are very reserved and close-knit people. In fact during my orientation at KU one of the speakers from the university compared the Danes to coconuts in that they are rough on the exterior and hard to get to open up but if you do manage to crack them they can be some of the sweetest

softies you'll come across. I genuinely do love the Danish culture though because they are a very open-minded nation with great health and social policies and a vibrant, active atmosphere.

- **What were some of the highlights of your exchange experience?**

A lot of my exchange highlights revolve around the many memorable moments and fun times had with my collection of exchange friends. Particular highlights would be getting to experience other peoples cultures merging together such as when we all celebrated Canadian and American thanksgivings and had big Christmas dinners were we incorporated everyone's different traditions including the Dutch Sinterklaas ones.

- **What did you find challenging?**

As much fun and liberating an experience exchange is, it is not without its challenges and down moments. For me in particular, being away from home and living independently for the first time was a big step but was a super exciting challenge. At the beginning simple tasks like going to the supermarket and not being able to understand the language on the products was difficult but something you adapt to very quickly and is now something I actually really miss.



Adapting to the Danish mode of transport – cycling – also took a bit of getting used to but was definitely one of the funnest challenges I faced. Less fun challenges are admin based difficulties like applying for residency and the Danish CPR number and things like that but there is always someone that can help you with those and I actually had great experiences with the customer service of the Danish citizen agency staff. I had expected to find making friends and settling in to daily life in a new place to be the biggest challenge on exchange but I'd say that was probably the easiest part of it all and the real greatest challenge is leaving!

- **What do you feel you have learnt or gained from going on exchange?**

Without a doubt I've gained a massive sense of accomplishment, a huge increase in confidence and actually an overall more enthusiastic and optimistic view on life. I gained a fantastic cohort of friends from all around the world and they taught me to be unapologetically myself and to just go out and take every opportunity and not be afraid to be different or push past your comfort zone. I've learnt how to adjust when thrown into the deep end of a completely new way of life and I've learnt a lot about my character and my habits. I've definitely gained a greater sense of direction in life whilst also learning to be really flexible and open to new experiences and change.

- **Do you have any tips for future students intending to travel to the same country or university?**

You definitely want to be properly prepared before you head on exchange but its important to find the right balance between being prepared but also being able to be comfortable and remain flexible if things don't necessarily go to plan. If you are considering studying at the University of Copenhagen in Denmark I would definitely

recommend BaseCamp accommodation (whether you book through Housing Foundation or directly through BaseCamp) and the Danish Culture Courses at the university. I think it's a great idea to keep a budget and expenses book like I did to keep on top of your finances so you don't unwittingly fall into strife later in the semester or year. On that note, as I've alluded to earlier, definitely don't underestimate how expensive being on exchange can easily become if you let it! If you're headed to Denmark for the Autumn semester don't forget your vitamin D tablets because S.A.D. is totally real – when the sun has set before 4pm and if you've been out late the night before meaning you've slept in past 10 or 11am then you get very few hours of daylight which can feel quite oppressive at times. I would definitely recommend finding some southern hemisphere friends you can complain about this to every now and then so you can cope together!

- **Do you have any comments on the support provided to you by Massey University and/or by the host university before/during/after your exchange?**

Personally, I didn't keep much in contact with Massey University during my exchange but it was great to know the support would be there if ever needed it. Its important that you are able to take charge of the admin pre-exchange though because then you'll have a much clearer idea of what's to come. The university of Copenhagen were great as well, super helpful and friendly and offer many lines of support throughout the exchange if you need them!

