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Utrecht University Exchange 2013

For my international exchange I went to Utrecht University in the city of Utrecht, The Netherlands, from February to June. I didn't know where I wanted to go for my exchange at first, but I had heard great things about the Netherlands and Utrecht seemed like a good, central location in both The Netherlands and Europe.

I found the meet and greet with current and past exchange students, organized through the UVic International and Exchange Student Service, very useful for information and tips on what to expect. I have also had experience with being a Buddy in the program offered through the IESS, which was a great way to get to know people from many different cultures. The most useful tips I got were to buy a bike and a very sturdy bike lock (bikes have a habit of getting stolen otherwise) when you arrive in Holland. You can do this either through bike shops, or student groups on Facebook that the ESS (Erasmus Student Society) will tell you about once you are registered. A rain jacket, umbrella, and gloves are also a must, if you are going to be biking or walking, because although you may not be out in the rain for very long, it definitely makes the trip more comfortable. However, there are also many city buses, which run frequently throughout the city.

Throughout my exchange, I lived in Kanalstraat 173, which was a student housing building with only about 35 people in it, located in the Lombok area of Utrecht. Another suggestion I have, if you are living in SSH housing, is to buy the bedding they offer, which you will get upon arrival. Unless you have another arrangement worked out, it is much easier to arrive and have all of that waiting for you rather than having to go out looking for bedding after travelling for so long.



Here are some of my friends across the street from our home in Lombok in late February.

Lombok is very different from other neighborhoods in the city and has a high Turkish, Moroccan and Surinamese population. There are really great markets and bakeries along this street and it was the best place to buy cheap, fresh produce in the city. It was located about a 5-minute bike ride away from the city center and a 30-minute bike ride from the furthest campus (there are a few different campus depending on what faculty you are in).

In the first couple days of being in Utrecht, the Erasmus Student Society (ESS) and the University held an orientation for all the new students, which helped to describe many Dutch quirks, and commonly asked questions. The ESS also held many great events throughout the year and I would highly recommend that anyone who attends UU sign up with them. You will also find that debit is the most commonly used type of currency in stores and it will be very beneficial for you to get a Dutch bank account. I got an account with ING and once it was set up, it made buying things online and in stores much easier.



One of the ESS events: night kayaking through the main canals in Utrecht. It was very interesting to see the city from such a different perspective!

The courses in school were very interesting and I had the opportunity to work in groups with both other exchange students and Dutch students, which helped me get to know more people. A couple of the courses I was able to take were Utrecht in the Middle Ages, and Dutch Present Day Society, which I enjoyed because I was able to take what I learned in the classroom and apply it to what I would see on the streets around me. I found the compressed courses (2 courses in 8 weeks) a little rushed, but once you got into the flow of the course and understood what the teacher expected of you, it got better.

One thing, not related to school, that I highly recommend you do, it buy a museumkaart (Museum card). For fewer than 50 Euros you will get access, and even skip lines, to tons of Museums in Holland. There are many museums in Utrecht even that made buying this pass worth it. Even if history does not interest you, there are many music, art, science and other types of museums to visit.



The Speelklok Museum in Utrecht, which contains various automatic music machines from huge organs to small music boxes.



Some of my friends walking down a street in Amsterdam on one of our day trips. It is very easy to make day trips to many great cities in the Netherlands!

Overall, my exchange in Utrecht was amazing and I would highly recommend it to anyone who enjoys travelling, meeting new people, and trying new things. The

main advice that I could give anyone would be to keep smiling and making an effort, because once you have come home, you don't want to wish you had tried a food, or gone to a place you chose not to while you were here!