“Exchange isn't a year in life, it's a life in a year.”
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see: www.uva.nl
The Journey Matters

“A journey of a thousand miles must begin with a single step.”
– Lao Tzu

A famous essayist once said that the journey, not the arrival, matters (T.S. Eliot). Another famous man said that a journey of a thousand miles must begin with a single step (Lao Tzu). Of course, many more cheesy quotes tell us truths about traveling. I chose these two because it puts emphasis on the journey, the experience, and the ongoing process of personal development that comes with traveling.

Like all exchange students, going on exchange for me was one big journey. It all began with a dream, a dream to go to the States. This was my first step, and many steps followed. The preparation, filling out paperwork, obtaining a visa, taking a language test, buying a flight ticket, saying goodbye to your loved ones - it is already part of the journey. And then: The Big Moment, the day of departure. From that moment on you feel like the ‘real’ journey has started.

I would say the journey of studying abroad is like a rollercoaster, with many ups and downs. It is not only a change of environment; it is a change for you as a person.

In this magazine you will find stories of current exchange students. People who are changing and want to share part of their journey with you.

With love,
Maartje Hensen,
on behalf of your Global Ambassador Team
The Switch

The exchange life through the eyes of Kaila, who did her exchange at UvA, and Eva, a UvA student who spent her exchange year at Kaila’s home university. Get inspired!

Q. Did you experience many cultural differences?

Kaila: Considering I’ve been visiting The Netherlands every year since I was 2 years old, I experienced more cultural differences than I expected. One thing that I found particularly interesting was the “zesjescultuur” in The Netherlands.

Eva: There are a lot of differences, but not too much that I was shocked with. However, I was shocked by the fact that when the teacher asks a question, there would be a lot of hands in the air. That’s not how things go in Dutch lecture rooms…

Q. Dutch food vs Canadian food!

Kaila: I’m definitely a fan of Dutch desserts and sweets! I love “pannekoeken”, “stroopwaffels”, and “poffertjes”!

Eva: Although I loooved the pizza, pasta, fries, poutine, I can’t live without Dutch cheese!

see: www.uva.nl
Q. Do you prefer studying at a campus university like Mac or at a city-university like UvA? Why? Are there any ‘opvallende’ differences?

Kaila: Studying at McMaster was perfect for my undergraduate degree. Attending a university with a campus is nice as it gives students a sense of security and community. However, while on exchange, it was great that the UvA was spread throughout Amsterdam, as it forced me to explore the city.

Eva: I would say I prefer a city university just because I’m used to it. But then I went to Canada and even though I lived off campus, I had a little sneak peak of how a campus life could be like. I liked the fact that there are always a lot of things going on. You can live at the campus, there are restaurants, a club, parties within the campus and so on.

Q. What do you miss the most about the Netherlands/Canada since you’ve been back home?

Kaila: The Dutch food, language, and culture. I also miss being able to bike everywhere.

Eva: Canadians are super kind. It’s both a stereotype and the truth. I definitely miss that! Besides, I miss the overwhelming nature, crowded cities, skyscrapers and skylines…

Q. Would you recommend future exchange students to go on exchange to your home/host university?

Kaila: I would definitely recommend future exchange students to study at both my home university and the UvA. I think McMaster has a lot to offer to students coming from abroad. Not only is it located in a beautiful part of Ontario, but it is also an academically recognized university.

Likewise, the UvA is a fantastic university to do an exchange at. Students who choose to study at the university will have an amazing experience. Amsterdam is also an incredible city and is relatively easy to navigate for foreigners.

Eva: I totally agree with that!
Taste the Delicious Oriental Food

Dumplings, ramen, curry, pho, and more, Asian food is attracting people from all over the world with its unique spices and special flavours.

Amsterdam also offers a wide variety of Asian cuisine, so don’t hesitate to dive into different kinds of Chinese dumplings, Japanese sushi or Korean barbecue.

Go the authentic way and grab some chopsticks!

The Big Cities

Asian metropolises are quite different from Amsterdam. For one, cities like Shanghai, Seoul and Tokyo have larger population than the population of the whole Netherlands. Skyscrapers can be found everywhere, and many shops run for 24 hours. These crazy, crowded, and modern cities will never fail to grab your attention.
Q. What is the main difference between teaching methods at UvA and UNSW?

There were a lot of differences, especially the way of teaching. UNSW used team-based learning and there were more assignments. We worked more in groups together and the classes were more interactive. More presentations and weekly quizzes. There was a lot of lab work and through this way of teaching you learn a lot, also because of the interaction with your group. Also the teachers were very passionate!

Q. Which subject would you recommend to the current exchange students?

One of the interdisciplinary courses, provided by the IIS if that’s possible!

Q. What is the main difference between UvA and Stevens?

At Stevens, there were only lectures and homework. Here in Amsterdam, it is common to have classes with a TA where additional assignments are done aside from the homework.
Sofie Kramer  
home uni | UvA  
host uni | Universidad de Sevilla  
Major | Literature  
best UvA professor | Boris Noordenbos

Q. Which subject would you recommend to the current exchange students?

Literature in Theory after 1900

Q. What is the main difference between UvA and Sevilla?

UvA demands more individual reflection on the material. In Sevilla, it was about reproducing what the teachers tell you.

Tjerk Moeskops  
home uni | UvA  
host uni | Waseda University, Tokyo  
Faculty | Social Sciences  
best UvA professor | Giseline Kuipers

Q. What is the main difference between UvA and Waseda?

At UvA I am used to having lectures including a lot of discussion, this was very different for most of my classes at Waseda. The level of the classes and the way of teaching differs greatly between the two schools. I must say that the level of education at the UvA is a lot higher than of Waseda.

Terence Speyer  
home uni | UvA  
host uni | HEC Montreal  
Major | Managerial Economics & Strategy  
best UvA professor | Joris Maree

Q. How was the teaching method at HEC Montreal?

HEC Montreal teaches more practically, meaning that theory is combined with putting it into practice. For example, if you take a finance course, you will apply financial theory by investing in a simulated portfolio. Or you would use software to manage inventory in another course.
Ever since I started university, I always wanted to study abroad. I wanted to be surrounded by different cultures and experience other ways of life but I was not entirely sure if I would be able to fulfill this aspect of my life since schooling in the US is already quite expensive. For this reason, I dedicated my time at my home university mentoring international students. During that time I lived vicariously through them. But the more I encountered exchange and international students, the stronger my desire to travel became. This desire then led to a keen interest which then sparked me to investigate more about studying at AUC.

In terms of exploring the city I feel more comfortable walking and biking around Amsterdam than I do in New York City since Amsterdam is usually less crowded and relatively smaller.

It was of course difficult at first. The toughest part about the exchange program was the first two weeks. In that, I was trying my best to get acquainted with my situation and was nervous about the level of difficulty in the classes. However, once I got everything settled such as having a bank account, Dutch number, and actually starting classes really helped me ease into life in Amsterdam.

I also experienced culture shock. This happened in the process of emailing the person from whom I was supposed to receive my keys. The person seemed rather harsh through email but was absolutely lovely in-person. It dawned on me then that I had encountered the ‘typical’ Dutch personality. I always loved
to be surrounded by diversity and there is no shortness of that in Amsterdam. I love that I am also exposed to different cultures that I never experienced in New York, such as Indonesian, New Zealander, just to name a few.

Since I have been here, I have discovered that I really enjoy living on my own, and being completely responsible for myself. I think it is a worthwhile experience. You will experience a new growth within yourself. Also, I would advise you to immerse yourself in the culture. Take your time getting to know where you are and if you are in Europe try to travel to as many countries as you can, it can be really easy once you are able to manage your schoolwork.

“I really eased into the life here in Amsterdam. You will be able to experience a new growth within yourself”

Chloe Kruger
home uni | University of Cape Town, South Africa
host uni | UvA

I decided to go on exchange because it gave me the opportunity to combine my love of travel with the chance to experience a new academic environment. The chance to live independently seemed exciting and I knew it would give me the opportunity to grow personally. Amongst many options I was especially drawn to the courses offered by the University of Amsterdam because of how different they are to the courses that I take at my home university and I was excited to incorporate a different academic experience into my undergraduate degree. I had heard from people who had been on exchange before that Amsterdam was just an amazing city – offering some of the friendliest people, most beautiful scenery and incredible attractions! Since I arrived in August, Amsterdam has definitely surpassed my expectations.

Budgeting and having to take care of myself took some getting used to, but I have really enjoyed being independent and have
realised that I can rely on myself a lot more than I thought I could. Making friends has been a definite highlight of my experience and I have been lucky enough to meet great international students, and also some local students who have helped me to adjust to life in Amsterdam.

Yet being so far away from home is definitely a struggle. A lot of other people are from Europe or other parts of the Northern Hemisphere and have the opportunity to go home over the holidays or have family visit. Geographically, I am much further away and in the beginning I felt as if I was worlds away from my family and friends.

Fortunately, I love meeting people from all over the world and hearing about their experiences and perspectives. Being on exchange has given me the unique opportunity to broaden my horizons and my own world-view simply by interacting with other international students from different backgrounds.

"For those considering exchange –
  take the opportunity!
  You will not regret it
  and any cons will be outweighed by the pros.

For those currently on exchange –
  live in the moment!"

I decided to go on an exchange because I thought spending some time overseas would provide me new perspectives to see my home country and myself. Also, I’ve always wanted to live in Europe because I was fascinated by the European culture and liberal social values.
I didn’t have a problem getting used to Amsterdam because people here are nice to foreigners and the transportation and public services are efficient. Since living expenses are relatively high, here is a tip: Learn to cook yourself, you can save a lot, so be prepared to cook by yourself. In Japan, many students eat and drink with friends outside, but students here hold home parties very often.

Another thing about Amsterdam that’s rather different from Japan is the classes. In Japan, most classes are lectures, but here I only have seminars. Japanese students tend to be passive during the class, but Dutch students love to discuss. Students are expected to participate in the class actively, which I find very tough, but hopefully, I’ll get used to it.

“I didn’t choose Amsterdam, Amsterdam chose me.”

I decided to go on exchange to Amsterdam to get out of what I knew, to get out of my comfort zone and see what it would be like to live a drastic change away from home. I feel like I didn’t choose Amsterdam, but that Amsterdam chose me. There is not a big explanation, I just followed my instincts and I was lucky I got to the city I wanted.

Being on exchange made me really know myself better, what I love, what I don’t like, what is important for me, what is less important. I have learned to open up my eyes even wider to new possibilities in life. The start of my exchange was intense with dealing with all the technical issues, but it turned out fine. Also, I found out that I love living by myself. I already love to cook, and just discovered new talents in myself, making meals out of what’s left in my fridge ha-ha!

Stephanie
home uni | HEC Montreal, Canada
host uni | UvA

see: www.uva.nl
Hotspots Amsterdam

Some of the best spots to be in the city!

Nine Little Streets, Jordaan, West

A lovely neighborhood of nine parallel streets that are lined with coffee houses and clothing stores. They are along a canal, lined with old stone, and hidden from tourists, while still in the center. There are plenty of expensive stores, but if you keep your eye out, you will find fabulous vintage shops as well.

Café Schuim, Center

Located across the street from the Humanities Bunghuis faculty on Spuistraat. A great place to grab a beer or coffee and hang with locals. Regulars are always excited to see new faces and share their stories. The graffiti painted walls and big comfy chairs create a cozy vibe.
The Eye Museum, North

A cinema and museum that presents and preserves both Dutch and foreign films. It plays new and old award winning films that can be hard to find anywhere else. If film isn’t your thing, go for the in-house bar and unique architecture. It’s a giant modern building on the city’s waterfront!

International Language Café Amsterdam (ILCA), East

This event occurs every other Thursday and is a great, free, and relaxing way of practicing or teaching any new language you wish. It’s also a perfect way of meeting new people, both international and Dutch! Located on Balistraat 48A.
Hannekes Boom, Central
This place is perfect for a relaxed vibe on a sunny day!

De Pijp, South
One of the hippest neighborhoods in Amsterdam.

Rum Baba bakery, East
Located in Amsterdam Oost (East), an area that is recommended if you are looking to get away from the hustle and bustle of city life. Rum Baba is known for its homemade cakes. The chocolate chip cheesecake comes specially recommended.
The Exchange Bucketlist

All the crazy things you want to do on your exchange!

- Stay in an overwater bungalow
- Stay with locals through couchsurfing.com
- Go kite-surfing in IJmuiden, or at a beach in The Netherlands
- Ride a double-decker bus
- Go skydiving
- Eat a pizza in Italy
- The Trans Mongolian Express one day
- Go on a cruise

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Your Exchange Life: Video Compilation

Call for video entries!

This semester, your Global Exchange Ambassadors are working on a video compilation of as many students as possible sharing their experiences abroad. Please help us to answer the following questions (you may choose to answer as many as you like, but preferably all). Creativity is encouraged – your answers can be purely in visual form or you can sit in front of a camera or you could come up with anything else that tells us about your experiences! This video is to help promote studying abroad, to share different student experiences, and it can also act as a memento for you and your peers. We will share the complete video compilation with you by the end of the semester. Please check out the preview video of current exchange students in Amsterdam to get a better idea of what we want to create at https://vimeo.com/142135316.

Questions to answer:

1. Which city and university are you studying at?
2. Where are you from (e.g. home university or hometown)?
3. What is your favorite place in your new city and why?
4. What is your favorite food in your new city?
5. Could you show us a little around the campus or the city?
6. What is a new word that you learned in your new city?
7. Any advice to someone who wants to travel to your new city?
8. Anything else to share about your exchange experience?

Deadline: December 1

Please submit your videos to sarahrome21@gmail.com. Let us know if you have any problems creating or uploading your videos, and we would be happy to help.

Have fun!
Photo Testimonial Contest

Take the Amsterdam vibe in a snap and win a prize!

You are travelling to all corners of the world to study abroad and we want to hear your stories!

Send us your best picture, along with a capture, your name, your home university and your exchange destination

The contest is open to all current exchange students (Global & Erasmus)

Submit to: photocontestuva@gmail.com

Deadline: December 1st, 2015

see: www.uva.nl
Preparing for Exchange and the Zipf’s law

“Luck is when preparation and opportunity collide.”

You’re going on exchange and make the most of it. When you arrive, you’ll take no prisoners and meet ALL the internationals and locals. But how do you prepare for studying and living like a local?

Here the Pareto principle (the 80/20 rule) enters the story, which states that 20% of “things” cause 80% of effects. For example, 20% of people own 80% of the wealth; 80% of a company’s profits come from 20% of its customers and 20% of a carpet receives roughly 80% of the wear, because of its inherent Pareto distribution.

Zipf’s law is the “discrete” version of this law, and states that the same thing goes for language, 20% of words account for 80% of that language. So when you take the area under a curve representing word-frequency, you’ll find that 80% of the area (80% of that language) is “caused” by 20% of words.

So how can we apply this, to the art of preparing for an exchange?

Given the opportunity to go on an exchange, there are two types of “preparers”. Those who are overwhelmed and fear the unknown and leaving their comfort zone. They spend their time thinking of all the different possible bad outcomes. On the other hand, there are those who just go with the flow and don’t prepare anything extra while thinking it’s more important to put that plan into action than to spend an eternity preparing for it. But here is why both should prepare: When you prepare yourself, you’ll create a framework to build upon, you’ll be less overwhelmed and will know where to start. You will overcome those fears by being prepared, knowing it will have effect.

You’ll have greater confidence and have a great head start to meet and integrate with the locals, and make the most out of the experience. This allows you to focus on the things you can't prepare and be open-minded, soon enough you get to really live like and understand the locals.
Preparation might seem daunting, but here Zipf’s law comes to the rescue. You do not need to know everything or prepare perfectly for it to be effective, since 20% of your efforts will get you 80% of the results. How to prepare: For the actual preparation, language is a great example because it’s so important and difficult, but these principles can be applied to any cultural/interaction-based skill that will follow, like dance or sports.

You start observing the language, reading and listening to simple sentences of which you know the meaning. Start very simple and don’t overwhelm yourself at this stage; at first the sounds and words of the new language can appear almost indistinguishable but you’d be surprised how far little vocabulary and an understanding of the context will take you. Using a book like Assimil, audiobook like Pimsleur or application like Duolingo will be helpful at this stage. You could also directly apply Zipf’s law and start with a word frequency list. The 100-200 most common words in the language would be a great place to start, although you’ll learn those words from the simple sentences, those words are key.

You won’t only be learning the language but also building your study habits, like motivation and discipline, which are the most important to succeeding in preparation. Motivating yourself to practice every day is difficult, with the goal so far ahead in the future. So set short-term goals and prioritize meeting them daily. You will need discipline to work through the hard parts, so make yourself comfortable facing fears of failure. Speaking and applying the language will be the important part of your learning so tackling these hard parts first will bring you the greatest results.

Then you’ll start applying and interacting with the language by recreating simple sentences and scenarios, empowering you to deal with the most common situations and build from there – be sure to include pronunciation! Taking lessons at this stage would be wise since a teacher will set you on the right course and will provide you with people to speak with. This still leaves the rest, the 80% of obscure words, which might pop up once in a book, for example. While reading, the meaning of those words can be constructed from context; while speaking, this can be handled by circumlocution (aka talking around a word). As you progress past this point, the gaps will fill themselves, but this framework will have to be in place.

Then you will reach the immersion/improvisation stage, you’ll start making your own unique and experimental sentences and go past the 80% of understanding. These sentences are no longer going to follow the fixed pattern of question and response your earlier materials gave you. So speaking with a person and overcoming the fear of doing so is key now. You’ll apply the basics you learned to improvise and read interesting things that allow you to immerse yourself in the language. The motivation will come from how interesting the information itself is, so immerse yourself in blogs, podcasts or videos (about your host-university). At this point you’ll be having long conversations about anything (at a language café like ICLA, for example). You’ll also be learning the more obscure words, which are the sauce, not the meat, of the learning phase!

see: www.uva.nl
So how does this actually work? Why is language Zipfy? One explanation applies the principle of least effort. Speakers and hearers minimize the work necessary to reach understanding. Speakers want to use the least amount of words as possible while listeners want as many words as possible to completely understand what is meant. Also, a popular word grows more popular by being popular, since when it gets more visible more people will use it.

In general, preparation consists of practicing skills that you will apply in your host country. Since going on exchange requires more than just understanding 80% of language, you’ll have to put in a lot more effort to prepare for this. Luckily this isn’t necessary for most other activities where 80% is sufficient. By learning 20% of the most common dance steps, concepts in sports, or cultural things like cooking and making music, you will be well on your way to integrate into your country.

Here are some suggestions about what to practice from current or past exchange students around the world:

Holland: Learn how to ride a bike and how to be direct, no beating around the bush.

Southern Europe: Practice an instrument, since many social gatherings include music-making.

Latin-America: Learn Spanish/Brazilian – being able to speak at least at a B2-level will make all the difference, since everyone will speak Spanish (internationals and locals alike). And learning how to dance is an essential part of going out.

North-America: Practicing/understanding their sports (ice-hockey and American football), and understanding their cultural sensitivities (being politically correct).

China: China is huge and diverse, their provinces very different with regards to climate landscape and economy. Cooking is very important, and knowing basic words about its ingredients and origin allows you to interact with locals’ important aspects of their lives. Also speaking in Mandarin will greatly help!

Japan: The Japanese have a very different value system. Sports are very big, so practicing their popular sports like baseball will help. Learning Japanese will also be rewarding.

South Africa: The local language shouldn’t be a problem, fun to interact with. They love sports like rugby and hockey.

Australia: Surfing, and keeping an eye out for the drop-bears! Also they love treating each other, don’t expect the favour to be returned right away or systematically, but it will!

So, before going on exchange, practice some basic skills/local activities. You won’t need to put in a lot of effort to get a great return of your investment. It will let you integrate and make the most of your experience, but it is also a great excuse to pick up a new hobby!
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