

**Exchange university**

Aalto University

Degree programme

Urban Studies and Planning (Architecture)

Nice exchange experience to Aalto University

Before departure

Doing a study exchange was something I had considered before I went to study abroad. I wanted to have the rare opportunity to experience different cultures and ways of education in different countries and to visit different cities to learn more about them.

The documents required for SUPD students to apply for an exchange to study at Aalto University are not complicated: language transcripts, a portfolio of work and a statement letter. Choosing your classes in advance and writing your study plan are also essential and the coordinator will help you to complete them.

In addition, you will need to apply to the Finnish Immigration Service for the appropriate documents if you are staying in Finland for more than three months.

Upon arrival

I took the ferry from Stockholm to Helsinki, which took only one day. There are a number of introductory and question-and-answer sessions with the appropriate student organisations right before the semester officially starts. There is also a formal orientation during the week of the semester: an introduction to the school, an introduction to the courses, tours and excursions around the campus, etc. The Aalto exchange coordinator will also be available to answer any questions I may have when I submit my documents.

Participation in Aalto University's student organisation AYY (similar to KTH's THS) requires a semester's membership fee and a FRANK (similar to Mecenat) student status, as well as access to certain services and benefits.

Financials

International students who have participated in the Erasmus+ programme will receive a scholarship. In terms of prices, daily expenses are slightly more expensive in Finland than in Sweden. At the same time, however, the student canteen at Aalto University offers a student discounted lunch price of €2.80. It is a good idea to go to a Middle Eastern supermarket to buy meat (especially beef) as it is cheaper than other supermarkets. Sometimes Asian supermarkets also sell vegetables relatively cheaply.

There is a semester fee to participate in AYY but it is not compulsory to join the association.

Accommodation

There are two sources of student accommodation in Helsinki: AYY, which is relatively cheap and close to campus but unfurnished, and HOAS, which is furnished but more expensive and, in some cases, further away from campus.

Unlike AYY where there is a queue for housing applications, HOAS does not show a queue process will be notified directly. I applied for a furnished three-bedroom flat at HOAS with two friends and received a quick notification. The accommodation is located far from campus (it takes about 30 minutes by public transport), but the layout and layout of the rooms are very satisfactory. HOAS rentals also come with a free sauna service.

University and studies

Aalto University is relatively extensive and the different areas and buildings are relatively spread out from each other. Therefore, there are bus routes passing through the campus and there are scenic walking routes. The main academic building of the Faculty of Arts and Architecture is next to the metro station, which is a very convenient point.

The courses can be divided roughly into two weeks of English- and Finnish-language lectures, and sometimes there is a mixture of Finnish and English.

Courses

There are many interesting courses at the School of Architecture, but it is important to note that 'interesting' usually means 'sought after' (e.g. wood architecture studio). If you want to take such a course, you need to be prepared to do so second-hand.

After being unsuccessful in the Wood Architecture studio, I enrolled in the Digital Speculative Urbanism Studio. This studio and its accompanying course (a mandatory requirement) already had 30 credits, so you didn't have to worry about not taking it. At the same time, it is stressful and the teaching style is different from previous courses but also very innovative. I got a lot out of the process. If you have a foundation in the appropriate software (rhino, grasshopper, python), it can be relatively easy to learn.

City and country

Helsinki's urban planning and layout is somewhat similar to that of Stockholm, but with many different experiences. Helsinki's city centre is full of original public buildings and facilities: the Oodi Library and some interesting public facilities, for example. It is a delightful mix of familiarity and a distinctive urban streetscape.

Leisure and social activities

Because I don't live very close to the city centre, it cuts into some of the opportunities to attend campus events. I can't keep up with the frequency of activities that require me to be near the school, such as basketball teams. But on my free days my housemates and I would set off from the port and take the boat to different attractions: islands like Suomenlinna and Tallinn.

Also, there are some museums and art galleries in Helsinki that are great places to go. Some of them have free opening hours.

Sustainability

The familiar policy of waste separation and beverage bottle recycling. In addition, people are encouraged to use paper bags provided by supermarkets as an alternative to plastic rubbish bags.

Other recommendations and observations

The climate in Helsinki is more humid than in Stockholm, so you may need to pay relatively more attention to the correct way to store food.

I was also impressed by the fact that the roads in Helsinki can be icy after heavy snowfall in the cold winter months and can be very slippery on the ground for a while.