One semester to rule them all

Before departure
As a foreign student, I applied for an exchange semester with the sole intention to make the most of my time abroad. TU Delft is a well reputed university and boasts pioneer alumnus students. To be able to imbibe the atmosphere that creates these exemplary individuals served as my motivation to choosing TU Delft. Also I had met a couple of very interesting people from TU Delft who were in KTH for an exchange semester and I imagined that it would be amazing to meet them in their home countries.

Initially, being a non-EU citizen proved to be a demotivating factor to apply for an exchange semester on account of the various additional procedures that needed to be addressed. Visa applications, follow ups and medical reports piled above course selections and accommodation hunting made me question my intent on doing an exchange semester. Luckily, with the help of an outstanding education office at KTH I was able to stay motivated and on the right track.

Upon arrival
Though classes started in early September, TU Delft had organised a two week long introduction programme for ALL incoming students. What this meant was that for 2 weeks, every new student at TU Delft had the opportunity to get accustomed to life in Delft, life in the Netherlands and most importantly meet random strangers with the singular purpose of having a good time. It was an extraordinary 2 weeks. Towards the end of the 2nd week we had our faculty introductory activities where you could meet and interact with existing students to address queries specific to our courses. Though Delft as a city doesn’t have much to do the introductory activities were both entertaining and knowledgeable. It equipped me with information and contacts that made my exchange semester the ‘oomph’ factor.

Financials
I did receive the Erasmus grant through KTH a few weeks before my exchange semester started. As a procedure a predefined amount of money per month is given to each individual on exchange. This amount depends on the country where the exchange university is and cannot be changed. The money is sent to your bank account in two instalments. 70% at the start of your exchange semester and the remaining 30% after the exchange when all the formalities related to the exchange semester are complete.

The Netherlands, as expected, was a less expensive country than Sweden. Everything from breakfast cereal to a fancy night out proved to be much cheaper than the similar activity in Stockholm. The realization of this will nudge you to spend more. I personally caved. I ended up spending more than I would have if I was in Sweden and had a proportionately better time. This becomes an addictive feeling. As a method to save money I would suggest keeping a track of your spending and allotting budgets to each type of activity and attempt to stick those budgets. Just the act of keeping a track of your spending will prove to reduce the amount you splurge. But keep in mind that as an exchange student it is required of you to have a great time and sometimes it may not come cheap. Your exchange must be a pursuit of creating great experiences and that’s something you SHOULD NOT compromise on.
Accommodation
As an exchange student you will need to apply for accommodation through DUWO (equivalent to the Swedish SSSB) which seemed a pretty straight forward process. Though it is a simple process it also proves to be expensive. Accommodation rent through DUWO is much higher than the average rent in Delft. From the experiences of my peers the accommodations are not very impressive with sub-par quality of consideration for incoming students and their transition to a new city.

Luckily, I organized my own accommodation through a friend that knew someone in Delft who was also going on exchange. I lived in a large apartment shared with two Dutch students. I had met one of them when he had come on exchange to Stockholm. Both my flatmates were very welcoming and made sure that I had an easy transition, always made me feel at home and gave me the unique opportunity of experiencing the Dutch lifestyle first-hand.

It is possible for exchange students to organize their own accommodation though it might not be as streamlined as through DUWO. Many websites offer the opportunity to get in contact with potential hosts. Though you also run the risk of getting rejected multiple times before you stumble upon your future house, I would suggest first applying for accommodation through these websites and turn to DUWO accommodation as a backup alternative.

University and studies
The university campus blew me away. It was beyond anything I had expected. It demands a reciprocal sense of pride to have studied in a university like it. Every department had their own buildings with a unique theme behind their designs motivated by the subject area. The courses I had studied at TU Delft proved to be much more demanding than KTH. At times this made it hard to enjoy my semester like an exchange student should. Depending on the courses you opted for, classes would take place during the day to later in the evening. After which you would play a game of catch up with the assignments of these courses. It seemed necessary to put in about 2 hours a day to work on assignments and revise the lectures. My lack of ease studying at TU Delft could also be attributed to the fact that I took core courses that were mandatory to students from the Transport and Planning course. This was a personal decision and as an exchange student you have the opportunity to pick elective courses and still get the required credits.

Courses
As explained before, the courses I had picked were core courses that were meant for students of the Transport and Planning Masters. They proved to be challenging and honestly more demanding than I would have expected or preferred. On the other hand every course was well planned with excellent instructors. It was clear from the start that the slides, explanations in class and assignments were streamlined with specific learning objectives. The teachers are proven experts in the field and the passion that they have for their subjects ease the learning process for students, provide clarity of understanding and are always open for creative discussions and resolving doubts.

City and country
In the six months of being in The Netherlands I along with many others fell in love with Delft and The Netherlands. In my case I had an exceptional exchange because I had the unique opportunity to live with two other Dutch students. They introduced me to many other Dutch students who were all very welcoming.

As a foreigner, at no point did I ever feel unwelcome or different while interacting with people. A common stereotype about their Dutch is their directness in dealing with situations. I can say with absolute certainty that this is the truth. I would attribute their straightforwardness to making them the most amazing people I have had the opportunity to have interacted with. Not only were they indifferent to my differences, they embraced it and this made me and other exchange students feel welcome.
Other stereotypes of The Netherlands include its flat geography, its bad weather and the sheer number of cyclists. If you are in the Netherlands for anything longer than a short visit you will need a bike to get from anywhere to anywhere. The flat geography makes it easier to cycle on those amazingly designed cycle paths. The bad weather is made horrible when you need to bike in the rain and wind. I would frequently picture myself in being casted in ‘The Revenant’ while cycling through the rain and wind.

**Leisure and social activities**

Delft is not a city with a variety of things to do. The various leisure and social activity locations start to make life routinely uneasy. Put simply, you can get bored. After one semester I could already picture the monotony of life if one stayed in Delft. However, the exclusivity of these activities create preferred hang out locations which leads to bumping into people you thought you may never see again.

My spare time was mainly spent doing activities with ESN, hanging out with friends, going to the gym and travelling. Delft is nicely placed in the ‘Golden Quadrilateral’ of The Netherlands giving it simple access to bigger cities (mainly Amsterdam, Rotterdam and Den Haag) with a wider variety of things to do. All things considered I did begin to appreciate the peaceful familiarity of Delft.

The university does an amazing job with their introductory weeks and the sports and culture facility encourages individuals to participate in range of activities that can divert the monotony of life between having to study and attend classes.

Through organisations like ESN and BEST, I came in contact with many other students from different parts of the world each with their own versions of life.

**Other recommendations and observations**

As an exchange student your highest priority should be to have a good time and to create memorable experiences. Talk to random strangers, take the opportunity to travel and choose to venture outside the bubble that is your life.

Also, I would recommend that you take advantage of the facebook groups in Delft and the Netherlands. You don’t need to pay 28 euro for a return ticket to Amsterdam if you buy a daily 7 euro group ticket of one of the many facebook groups. Buy second hand bikes, search for accommodations and much more.

Lastly, give organisations like ESN and BEST a chance. Have fun!