



You're Gonna Need to Get a Bike: Chronicles from Bike Nirvana and TU Delft

Before departure

Deciding to go on exchange was an easy decision. Getting the chance to spend time in the Netherlands, especially as a country that is regarded as a place that is a leader in active transportation, and spatial planning was a great opportunity to get some experiential learning. I opted to exchange at TU Delft because of the contacts that I had in South Holland, the proximity to the rest of Europe, and the quality of education that TU Delft is known for. As an EU national, it's a seamless process to get set up in the Netherlands and from an administrative and legal standpoint, there was little, if nothing, that needed to be arranged beforehand. If you don't have a EHIC before you leave, make sure you get that sorted well in advance with Försäkringskassan. I wasn't able to get mine in time, despite applying 6 months in advance. Rest assured that emergency medical coverage is still provided, but you'll need to front the cost and apply for reimbursement in the event that it's necessary. The Insurance that KTH provides is largely sufficient, but getting an EHIC is a good action to take before you leave!

Upon arrival

I arrived two weeks before the start of courses. I had been in the Netherlands from June and had moved my belongings to Delft at the start of July, then I took an Interrail trip until I needed to be back in Delft. There was a week long social orientation programme that I arrived in the middle of, so I was only able to have a token level of participation. The following week before the official start of classes, all the MSc 1 students from the Built Environment faculty had to attend a week of workshops which earned us 1 ECTS, in addition to the required 30 ECTS course credits for the semester. I should note that I brought my own bike, which was critical to transporting myself from the start—getting a bike should be your first order of business, after municipal registration of course!

Financials

I would be lying if I said that the ERASMUS stipend wasn't a major deciding factor in whether or not I could feasibly study abroad, so that was a huge help.

There are grocery stores that don't take payment cards from the VISA and MasterCard networks, so it's useful to get a bank account and a Dutch debit card on the Maestro network so you can go cashless. It will also enable you to use Tikki which is the equivalent to Swish. Cash is still widely accepted, but using it can be a faux pas. Cards are more socially acceptable in most situations. It's still important to carry a small amount of cash in the Netherlands for certain situations.

I was fortunate that I was able to find a part time job that could work flexibly around my studies to help offset costs (and have a travel slush fund ).

Accommodation

I knew someone who owned a house in Delft, so I was lucky to have the option to rent from them. The university offered a housing service, but charged more than 200EUR as a service fee, which was not used toward any rent payment. Kamernet is a good website to start your search if you choose to find accommodation independently.

The cost of living was generally less expensive than in Sweden. Groceries were less expensive, and rent was notably less than what I paid in Sweden. It's also worth noting that I lived an 11-minute bike ride from campus which was considered far compared to some of my classmates. I lived in a rowhouse with

two other flatmates and I paid reasonably more than my Dutch classmates who lived in student homes or corridor rooms.

University and studies

Masters students who exchange at TU Delft in the Urbanism program are provided with a fixed course package because there are two courses per quarter (two quarters in a semester) and each of them are intimately linked they need to be taken together. Normally a theory is taken alongside a design course. Even if you are in the second year of your masters at KTH, you will exchange into year 1 at TU Delft because the second year of the program is dedicated to a degree project/thesis.

The study was very structured, but the assignments were incredibly open-ended and subject to interpretation, it's important to communicate with your tutor to get frank and honest feedback throughout to ensure success and manage expectations. I found evaluation to be somewhat arbitrary and designed to prescribe grades in a narrow range by design. There were also point-categories that omitted the entire 'good' to 'very good' range. Evaluations resulted in results that were either attributed to 'satisfactory' or 'excellent' point-descriptors.

Lessons and studio time was completely in English, and there was the option to enrol in Dutch classes for those who were interested.

Courses

Courses were predetermined as mentioned above. Courses covered topics on design and theory of the built environment. Studio courses were worth 10 ECTS and theory courses were worth 5 ECTS. Course codes for the courses that I followed were as follows:

- AR1U121 HISTORY AND THEORY OF URBANISM
- AR1U090 R AND D STUD: ANAL. AND DESIGN OF URB FORM
- AR1U131 SUSTAINABLE URBAN ENGINEERING OF TERRITORY
- AR1U100 R AND D STUDIO: DESIGNING URBAN ENVIRONMENTS

City and country

I had visited the Netherlands before, and I had a good idea of what to expect. I specifically chose it for the cycling culture and 'metropole'-like accessibility to get anywhere on the train network. Dutch people are, broadly speaking, open and frank. All of the Netherlands has about 25% mode share for cycling, and this is more prevalent in cities like Delft, so cycling is totally normal and de-dangerised. The infrastructure is safe and welcoming for all abilities, 'walking with wheels' is the de facto method of transportation. You can buy a bike and sell it when you're done, or lease a bike from Swapfiets for a modest monthly fee and avoid needing to perform any maintenance. There was a discount in September for new subscriptions for about 11EUR/mo.

If you commute via public transport, it's advisable to get an OV-chipkaart. The anonymous blue card cannot have any discount applied to it, but the personalised yellow one can have discounts on it. For example, if you travel after 9am and before the afternoon peak you can pay ~5EUR per month and get 40% off your train fare. The plastic for both types of cards costs 7EUR, but the personalised card can only be obtained after you register with the municipality and have a Dutch bank account. The personalised card will also enable you to opt-into the OV Fiets bike sharing scheme online to be used at any major NS Station where you can loan a bike for 3.50EUR/24h.

Leisure and social activities

Did I mention biking? Besides that, it's easy to get to France, Belgium, Germany, and the UK and there are often great discounts through NS International to escape for the weekend (I did this whenever I could). If you want to head somewhere for the day within the Netherlands, there are often promotional tickets that will save you a great deal. Current promotions are normally compiled on [this website](#).

Because I had a part time job, most of my time not studying was spent working. The university had a comprehensive offering of leisure activities which I was only rarely involved in.

Other recommendations and observations

Always lock your bike twice. Once to itself, and once to a fixed object and encompass both your wheels and the frame. Bike theft is common in Dutch cities and can be easily prevented by locking properly.

Get lights for your bike (and/or make sure they work)! Fines are expensive and law enforcement is not flexible.

Only tourists wear bike helmets, but it's your own prerogative to decide if you wear one.

Moving money is a pain and can get pricey because the banks set unfavourable rates that cost you, I used [TransferWise](#) because they use the mid-market rate and are super open about their very low fees.