Angus Rutherford – Exchange to Mid-Sweden University Östersund, Sweden 2009

Pre-departure include info about visa/passport arrangements, support from partner institution and CSU before you left

It is important in regards to this area to be very, very organised before departure and make sure that you are familiar with all dates etc that may affect these arrangements. Specifically, give yourself enough time to organise properly all facets of your trip before you leave. From my experience, Centrelink is one of the most important things to consider here. Proper communication with them is essential as the money received by them abroad is very necessary!. Support from the host university can be patchy, but the key here is perseverance.

Keep emailing and make sure they provide all of the information that you need in time. CSU is very, very helpful and no question will seem too silly. If in doubt, ask. That is what the staff is there for! You will feel a lot more relaxed when you abroad know that you have covered all bases!

Travel flight information eg best deals, flying tips, luggage restrictions or lack of

There are many cheap flights available if you book in advance, which means sorting out all of the visa arrangements well in advance so that you know your dates! Luggage restrictions are a fact of life and you may have to be prepared to sacrifice some things or alternatively, pay more for extra luggage. Get to the airport on time, Check everything twice before you leave home, and otherwise this is one of the simplest aspects of your exchange!

Insurance travel insurance, health insurance, medical tests/forms to be aware of

Travel insurance does not have to be expensive (maybe $300 for a year) and there exists cheaper still. Just make sure that it covers all activities that you may want to do, it starts before your date of departure and ends after, and also covers any other countries that you may want to travel to. When travelling, always carry a photocopied version of your insurance just in case!

Campus accommodation & meals recommendations, campus layout, accessibility

The campus here at mid Sweden is beautiful! Everything is labelled in English as well as Swedish, it is well laid out and easy to navigate. Most of the international students here live at Östersund camping 3kms from the uni. This is cheap and comfortable. Buy a bike! This will save you lots of money in the long run in buses, and it is very quick and easy to ride to uni. A little slower when the snow comes! There are no colleges as such, which means cooking for yourself – but you can eat cheaply if you shop smart! There exist restaraunts on campus for lunch meals (around $10)

Course information subject list, restrictions, comparisons, pre-requisites, study advise

University is really relaxed here I found. Not many hours of class a week and it is more focused on self learning. It’s not always necessary to buy the text book, as some books can be found online. I didn’t have to buy a text book in my time here. Pre-requisites do exist, though the uni will inform you any problems before you arrive. Be careful to keep track of assessment dates etc as the teacher will not always remind you! You will find there is less hours of class per week than at CSU.

Transport public and around campus

Bus connections are excellent, but avoid taxi’s as they are very expensive. Buy a second hand bike – they are the cheapest and fastest mode of transport!! Well worth buying. When leaving Östersund to travel elsewhere, there is moderately priced but very comfortable trains, and buses to places such as Stockholm. There is also an airport 11kms away but flights can be expensive from here. It is possible to find a bargain however.
**Expenses** university associated fees, personal expenses, exchange rates, where to shop, best prices, money saving tips

The Australian dollar is doing well against the Swedish kroner so things are getting cheaper here. University fees are minimal. Student union and sports clubs such as Ösis are optional, but worth paying the $50 to receive discounts and access to activities such as sports and discounted trips throughout your stay. Groceries, shop at LIDL, a German company similar to ALDI.

Swedish supermarkets will be more expensive. Save money for a good winter jacket and ski gear as the quality and prices of outdoor wear here is much better than in Australia. To save money, don’t spend too much money in clubs or pubs. Drinks are expensive. Go to Systembolaget (government owned bottle shop and the only one available in Sweden) and have pre-party’s! Thinking about small change will save you money in the long run!

**holiday travel** destination ideas, tips

Exchange to Sweden means access to the rest of Europe; trips are only limited by your savings, imagination and time management. Try and see some of Sweden. It is a beautiful country. Go dog sledding up north, skiing in the north and west every weekend or weekdays if you want. I travelled to turkey for a beach holiday and got direct flights from Östersund to my destination. Just check with local travel agents ‘Resia’. It’s up to you where you want to travel in Europe so make to most of it. Ryanair flies out of Stockholm and they have dirt cheap flights to much of Europe.

**Social activities** university clubs, international student activities, sports.

Join Ösis the sports club. This provides weekly tennis, volleyball, basketball, football and ski trips for example to Russia. Well worth the $30 or so to sign up. There are plenty of international student activities. Trips up north, various theme nights, O-week activities – so get involved. It is a great way to meet people from all over the world and make contacts for life.

Skiing is a big part of the attraction to come here. Vemdalen and Åre ski resorts are within 150km, and are cheaper than Australia for a day pass (less than $50). November, December and January are good for skiing, though daylight hours are limited (6hrs). To make the most of your skiing go February, march April. There is more daylight, the weather is warmer and there is still plenty of snow to be found!

**Cultural information** culture shock, language barriers (if any), do’s and don’ts

All Swedes speak English so don’t be afraid. Some better than others though. It is a nice idea to learn Swedish though. It is free to take Swedish classes at the uni and if you already have credits for 4 subjects, it doesn’t matter if you fail. The Swedes appreciate a bit of effort in learning the language. Swedes can be a little shy at first, don’t mistake this for hostility. They are a very friendly bunch and as time goes on you will make many Swedish friends. Just remember to be honest about everything you say, they are very genuine people! Other than that, they are not too different to Australian’s!

**Weather** what to prepare for, how to cope with extremes

The weather starts warmish (if you arrive august) then quickly gets cold. Summers are short. But, Östersund is the winter capital of northern Europe and they pride themselves on this point. It may get as cold as -20, though this makes the winter activities such as skiing and ice-skating even better! It is a dry cold, not humid, so it won’t seem as bad as it is. By a good jacket, gloves and some thermals (best to wait until you are here to do that) and you will be fine!

**What to bring from home/what not to bring** luxuries to keep homesickness at bay, unnecessary items bought from home

Don’t bring toiletries etc. just buy them here. Bring your favourite clothes, iPod, essentials and then wait and see what you need. Don’t bring heavy items such as books, stores here have English sections. It is not necessary to bring your own skis either as second hand markets are frequent. The prices are good and the quality high. If you are worried about home sickness, bring something that
reminds you of home that you can have when these moments come. Otherwise, the best thing to do is to make the most of every opportunity and enjoy your time. You will soon forget about home!!!

**What you may need to buy** accommodation needs (blankets, irons etc), clothing

Buy your linen in a second hand store such as the Red Cross. They generally have all the things you need much cheaper than in the regular stores. It’s only for six months so don’t worry about luxury stuff. Ironing is not something important, at Östersund camping washing machines and dryers are included in your rent and the other advantage is that the camping is the only accommodation that provides a mattress! Warm clothes are the other necessity and a bike!

**Relationships** leaving old friends/making new, homesickness etc

Your friends will be there when you get back, and it is a great chance to meet new people. Be outgoing, attend social events, and don’t be afraid to talk to people! Homesickness of course may be an issue, my grandfather died after my first two weeks on exchange. What helped is that I knew that he would have wanted me to have a great experience and that I had said goodbye to him before I left.

There will always be someone to talk to and as I said, get involved, don’t sit around at home and think about it too much! Get Skype, then you can call your parents or friends for free whenever you like.