

# EXCHANGE REPORT

OLIWIA PRZEDANSKA

AOD SRI LANKA

11.01.2021 - 12.05.2021

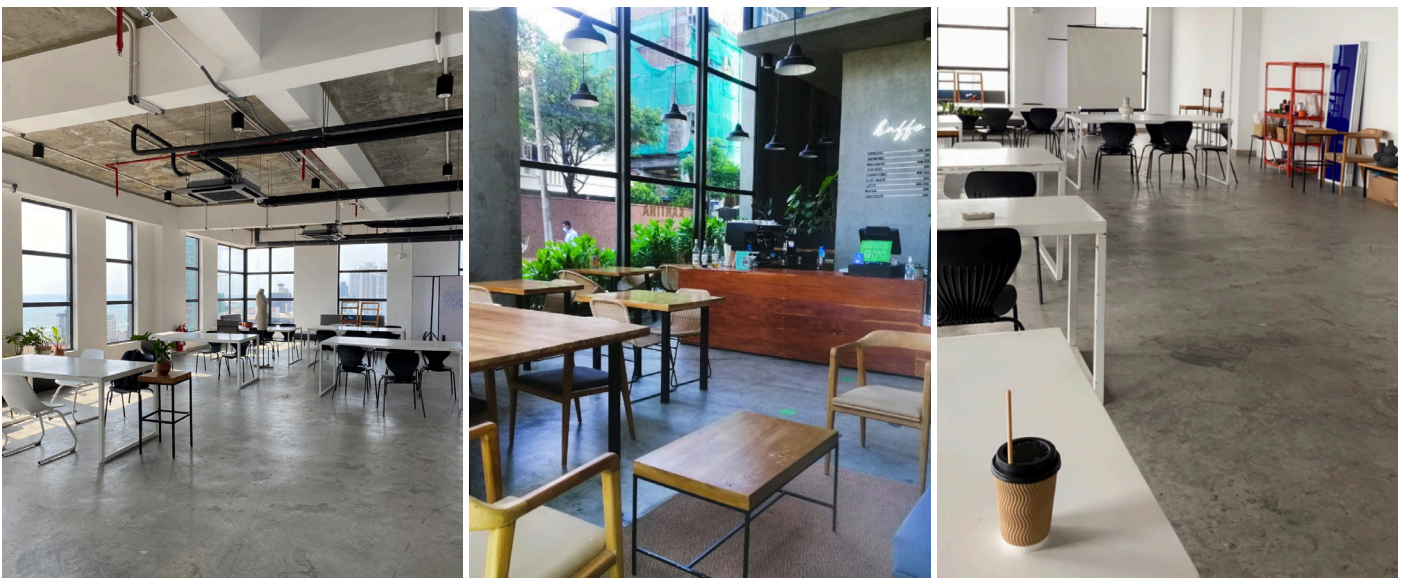
# LIST OF CONTENTS

|                                       |   |
|---------------------------------------|---|
| 1. INTRODUCTION                       | 3 |
| 2. EXPERIENCES AT THE HOST UNIVERSITY | 3 |
| 3. SOCIAL AND CULTURAL EXPERIENCES    | 4 |
| 4. PRACTICAL EXPERIENCES              | 6 |
| 5. CONCLUSION                         | 7 |

# 1. INTRODUCTION

I have recently completed an exchange semester at AOD - Academy Of Design in Colombo, Sri Lanka. I am a 6<sup>th</sup> semester student of the Design & Business programme, specializing in Communication Design & Media and I have been enrolled into the 3<sup>rd</sup> semester of AOD's Communication Design programme validated by Northumbria University. I have taken two modules during my semester abroad, GD5013: *Can Graphic Design Save Lives?* and AH5010: *Cultural Theory for Graphic Designers*. The semester officially started in January and ended in May, however due to the Covid-19 pandemic as well as the travel restrictions placed, I was only able to travel to Sri Lanka in March. Therefore, the first two months of my exchange took place online.

The AOD campus is located at the Colombo Innovation Tower, which is a 20-floor creative space designed in the minimalist, industrial style. The building has its own nordic style café that serves delicious coffee and bakes, with a variety of vegan options which I especially loved.



# 2. EXPERIENCES AT THE HOST UNIVERSITY

It is fair to say that Sri Lanka is not the most obvious and common exchange destination. It is however a destination with a great potential - it has an exotic climate, picturesque landscape and most people speak and understand some English. The main reason I chose AOD as my host university was its collaboration with Northumbria University, which I expected would be beneficial for my development as a graphic designer, however it is needless to say that the opportunity to take this education on a tropical island was equally exciting. The modules have been chosen for me from above and I could not pick anything myself. The first two months of online studying went well and I was very excited to move to Sri Lanka and get the full exchange experience once travel restrictions eased up and I got my visa sorted.

It was surely an adventure to travel to Sri Lanka in the middle of the pandemic and study at the university that has never hosted an exchange student before. Both were noticeable at every turn and I have to admit that it did give me a bit of hard time, especially when dealing with bureaucratic formalities. Unfortunately, my host school was not as helpful in the process of visa issuing as I would expect it to be. I had to delay the travel to my exchange destination due to the difficulties with obtaining a student visa. Finally, I ended up arriving to Sri Lanka on a tourist visa and after two weeks of the hotel quarantine I was picked up and kindly

welcomed by one my fellow students that was assigned as my study buddy. In hindsight, I am really happy and grateful that she was there to help me and support me with anything that I might have needed, especially considering the fact that the communication with the university itself was not always smooth. To name one example, I have never been given access to the student portal with the library services and submission links. I had to take initiative to solve this problem one week prior final submissions.

I have good memories of my first day at AOD when I was physically introduced to the class and some of the staff members along with one of the module tutors. I soon found out that I was attending the 3<sup>rd</sup> semester classes which was not made clear any earlier. Despite the relevance of the curriculum and good level of teaching, I was not fully satisfied with the level represented by the class in some areas of work. I believe that it made my overall study experience less valuable for me than it could have been. This also had a direct influence on my course preference - I found *Cultural Theory for Graphic Designers* course much more beneficial due to it being an individual project unlike the *Can Graphic Design Save Lives?* which was based on cooperative learning. Furthermore, I really enjoyed the teaching methods and passionate approach of the AH5010 module tutor, Samantha Weerawardane. Unfortunately, the group work experience I had in the second module was not as enriching as the other experiences I have had throughout my studies at KEA. I was unable to learn from my fellow group members which I find disappointing and I wish I was given an opportunity to choose a group myself and not be automatically assigned to one.

Apart from the study course, AOD has, to the extent possible during the pandemic, provided me with the opportunity to explore and learn about local crafts. I was invited for a fashion department educational field trip to Gampaha, one of the traditional handloom villages. I have visited a powerloom weaving factory as well as multiple artisan families that craft handwoven pieces on handlooms. I was told I would be able to join another field trip and learn about traditional Sri Lankan lace making. Unfortunately, it has never happened.



### 3. SOCIAL AND CULTURAL EXPERIENCES

Cultural differences between Denmark and Sri Lanka are rather significant and to be honest, difficult to overcome in such short time period. The Sri Lankan way of living is slow and relaxed which can also be observed in all kinds of institutions, from the Immigration Department, to the medical centers, to AOD. It would usually take a couple of days to get a simple email response and multiple hours in the waiting room to get something registered or issued. It is quite stressful

when the people you rely on keep redirecting you back and forth in hopes that someone else can answer your inquiries and take days to answer any of your questions. It was noticeable that Sri Lanka is still a developing country and not everyone has access to education, especially in the older generations. This results in the people's inability to accommodate a Western person into their culture and instead treat them as tourists. I traveled to Sri Lanka with a companion and, if possible, I would recommend other exchange students to do the same. It makes things much easier since living and traveling in Sri Lanka is a lot to deal with for just one person, especially during the pandemic when everything seems to be twice as much complicated.

On the other hand, I really enjoyed Sri Lanka from a tourist point of view. It is an incredibly beautiful country, with a variety of places worth visiting. Unfortunately, I had to come back to Denmark two weeks earlier than planned due to the lockdown imposed in Sri Lanka and was not able to explore all the sites I wanted to. However, I was still lucky enough to visit four different provinces and see some of the most incredible places in Sri Lanka. My first trip was to the Central Province and Uva best known for their tea plantations and stunning mountain landscape.



My next trip was to the Southern Province which I liked enough to come back a couple more times. I was overwhelmed by the beauty of this region and the kindness of the people living there. The coast is full of long beaches, palm-studded bays, wildlife and waves for those who like surfing.



## 4. PRACTICAL EXPERIENCES

The application process was easy and smooth as AOD did not hold any admission tests and filling out the application form was the only requirement as far as I can remember. Regarding any formalities from KEA's side, I was being directed by my exchange coordinator, Hanne Vang Hansen, which made everything appear fast and easy. Hanne was always there to answer my questions and was regularly checking up on me when in Sri Lanka. I have also received a lot of prior departure help from Sachindi Weerakoon from the host university. After two months of online learning and over a month of trying to get the visa sorted, I flew to Sri Lanka where I had to undergo two weeks of a hotel quarantine. This was undoubtedly one of the most costly parts of my journey.

I was offered a place in the AOD student residency, however I have chosen to rent an apartment through Airbnb. Accommodation prices in Colombo are very affordable and there are many good standard apartments available close to the AOD campus. I have stayed at On320 Residencies located close to the Cinnamon Gardens and I really recommend this place. There is an outdoor swimming pool, a gym and a small supermarket within the property which I found very convenient. One thing to be aware of in Sri Lanka, especially when working or studying remotely, is a poor infrastructure that results in massive power outages and unreliable internet connectivity.



Living costs in Sri Lanka are low compared to Denmark, the rent of a two-bedroom apartment is about 6000kr, groceries for two people is about 650kr per week and a good dinner at a nice restaurant is about 150kr per person which also covers a couple of drinks. I have mostly been eating home cooked meals, but there are plenty of good and cheap food places available on Uber Eats. Local taxis and Uber rides are very cheap, varying from 3kr to 12kr within the city but again, some of the taxi drivers will try to charge overpriced fares seeing a foreigner. Therefore, I would recommend to stick to meter taxis or using one of the ride hauling apps. When it comes to long-distance travels, I recommend taking trains since the railway in Sri Lanka is quite well-organized and the routes are truly scenic. Car rental prices are on the international level, but the traffic in Sri Lanka is very chaotic and disordered which makes it difficult and stressful to drive given the poor quality of the roads. Another way to move from place to place is using the private driver services that are relatively cheap in Sri Lanka. There is a well-connected and cheap bus network around the country, however it seemed like the drivers prioritise completing the route as fast as possible, at the same time disregarding passengers' and other road users' safety which was the reason why I never took a bus.

## 5. CONCLUSION

Overall, I am really glad that my exchange semester in Sri Lanka worked out in the end. It has been a great trip and an eye-opening cultural experience. In the long run, I see it as an adventure and self-development journey. Despite my educational expectations not being fully met, I do not regret my choice of the exchange destination. It has been educational in its own, unusual way which I really appreciate. I have made some friendships that I hope will last a lifetime, and achieved certain learning outcomes, especially within research and writing which will certainly come in handy when working on my bachelor thesis in a few months. I wish my exchange semester did not fall on the pandemic times as this would probably make things more accesible and open the doors to more opportunities.