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Exchange report

Hogeschool van Amsterdam (HvA)



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Introduction

I have always wanted to study abroad for the experience of settling in another country, experiencing a different culture and to meet new people. This was my motivation for going abroad. Unlike many others who go abroad on exchange I was going with my girlfriend and our 1½ year old son. For a long time we wanted to go to the US, because they have massive universities which offers a wide range of classes, and since my girlfriend studies law, we would have to go somewhere where it made sense for the both of us. And of course, we also had to be able to afford it, find daycare for our son etc. Eventually we settled on Amsterdam because it had interesting classes for me at HvA, she could go as a free mover to Vrije University, there was plenty of daycare opportunities, Amsterdam is very similar to Copenhagen, so in terms of culture there wouldn't be much of a difference, and we would be able to afford it. The fact that I went with my family also meant that I didn't go out as much, as we couldn't afford a babysitter and that the experiences I had in Amsterdam often were with a kid, which makes them different from the ones you will have.

I will try my best to give you my honest review of my time in Amsterdam, and come up with as many tips and tricks as I can. If you have any questions feel free to write me on my email 😊

Living

Through my contact at HvA I was directed to DUWO who offers student accommodation for exchange students. They have a great website and several student housing options all over Amsterdam. Prices are like in Copenhagen for a dorm room. We didn't however find housing through DUWO. If you want one of the better options you need to act fast when you receive your login details. Since we were traveling with a child we needed something bigger than a dorm room, and we ended up with a three room apartment through my girlfriends university. We lived at Campus Uilenstede which is 20min out of the center of Amsterdam. It was a big student campus with several high buildings with dorm rooms and also smaller apartment blocks for bigger apartments. The campus had a pizzeria, fitness and gym facilities, a café, a cinema, print shop, bike

shop and a kiosk. It was great for us to live there, but in hindsight we would have loved to have had an apartment closer towards the center of town. We didn't feel like we lived in Amsterdam, since we weren't a part of city life on the campus. With our budget however, we couldn't afford an apartment in the center, but if you can afford it I would highly recommend looking closer to the city.

If you end up settling for a dorm room, please bear in mind that some dorms are very party prone and have parties Thursday, Friday, Saturday. So if you are looking for a more quiet dorm room, I suggest looking for an apartment or private room instead.

Scholarships

I applied for around 20 scholarships or so in total and ended up only getting from Nordea. This shouldn't hold you back from applying for more than me though. If you want any tips or get my list of scholarships which I applied for feel free to ask.

The way I did it was to simply grind it out and search for scholarships online. I found two or so companies that claim to search for you, but they both had very poor reviews on trustpilot.dk so I ended up doing all the search myself. It takes quite a bit of time, but even with just one scholarship the hourly rate is still very good.

Towards the end of our stay we learned that we could apply for a rent refund from the state. My girlfriend talked to some friends at her university which told us we might had to look into it. We did, and ended up getting 1,500€ back! To find out if you are eligible go to www.belastingdienst.nl which is their SKAT.dk

Amsterdam and getting around

Amsterdam is an amazing city. Not only is it extremely picturesque, but the people are all very friendly too. The old part is filled with tourists in the summer, but for a good reason. The canals, the canal houses and the houseboats make for a city like no other. The greater part of Amsterdam is beautiful as well, but not as picturesque as the old part.



Another great thing about Amsterdam is that it is much like Copenhagen in terms of getting around. Everyone bikes and the city is flat as a pancake which makes it very easy to get around. In case you end up living too far from school or you have friends visiting the metro system works very well. When you arrive you can buy a metro card at the metro stations. It will cost you around 7€, but when you use it, the prices are cheaper compared to buying a single/return ticket every time. The card works like Rejsekortet, where you put money on as you use it. Bikes can be bought at any bike shop or on marketplaats.nl which works like dba.dk



Sights worth seeing around Amsterdam and in Holland



I went on exchange in the spring and I can therefore strongly recommend to go watch some tulip fields. It is very beautiful to see a whole pink, red, purple or yellow field and the smell is amazing too. To do this you can rent a car and go explore yourself or go to Keukenhof which is 45min out of Amsterdam. On their website, you can also keep track of when the tulips blossom.

For old school windmills I can recommend going to Kinderdijk near Rotterdam. It is a UNESCO world heritage site, and very beautiful. It is best reached by car.

In Amsterdam, I can recommend getting lost in the old part of town, the 9 streets, a canal tour, The Eye museum, Pilek and Noorderlicht café on the northern side, an Ajax Amsterdam game, the Van Gogh Museum, Foodhallen, the Chanel façade by MVRDV, Rotterdam and Java Island for

people with interest in urban planning.



HvA

HvA is a lot different from the KEA PCG campus in many ways. First of all the campus is a lot bigger with a much nicer view from the upper floors. It is located right next to the Amstel river overlooking the city. There are many different faculties on campus and an extremely well-equipped cantina. There is a workshop, a print shop, a library, a café and plenty of space for group work. Unlike at KEA every class is independent at HvA, meaning that each class has its own exam unlike at KEA where every class works towards the same exam. At HvA there is group work in some classes but not in all. The semester is divided in two blocks and most of the classes only lasts one block. This means you will have exam periods twice in one semester, but the curriculum for the class will be less since you have only had the class for 2½ months.

In the following section I go over every class at had at HvA in detail. The environment at the school is very nice, and it is great to be close to the city.

Classes at HvA

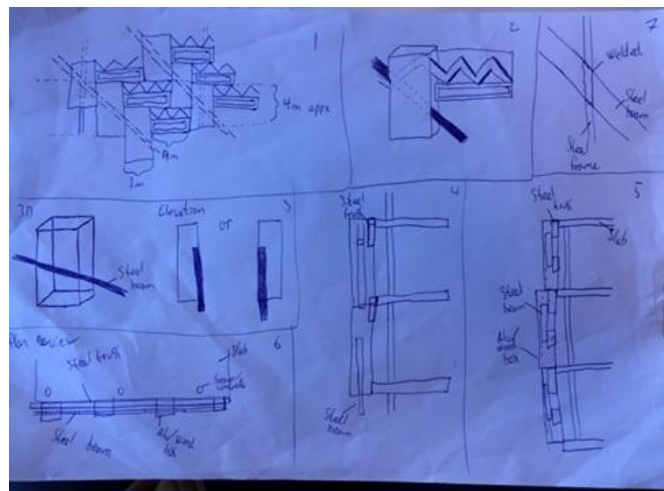
Sustainability class

The class I had looked forward to the most was sustainability class. I had hoped for a comprehensive look on different approaches towards sustainability in the building industry and to learn about materials and perhaps even life cycle analysis. What the subject was couldn't have been more different. It was the teacher in front of the class trying to explain a slide show, which wasn't his own, which meant he didn't always understand what the slide meant. Since it wasn't his own, he didn't bother updating it, so several facts were already outdated. All we had to do for his class was to write a resume of 1,000 words of each class for each week. No discussion or analysis of the subject he talked about, just a resumé. We didn't even have discussions in class, even though we were student from all over Europe with different views on sustainability and approaches towards it. At the end of each block we had to write a report of 2,500 words about a subject he chose. All in all I was extremely disappointed in this class.

Complex details

This was one of the classes I didn't look forward to at all. I am not a technical student, so perhaps if you enjoy the technical side of construction more than me, you would have liked this class more.

We each had to choose a form from an artwork, that would make the base for our complex facade detail. From there we had to do a lot of sketches for each week and over the course of the block we had to turn the sketches into technical drawings in Revit or Autocad.



Hyper Earthship

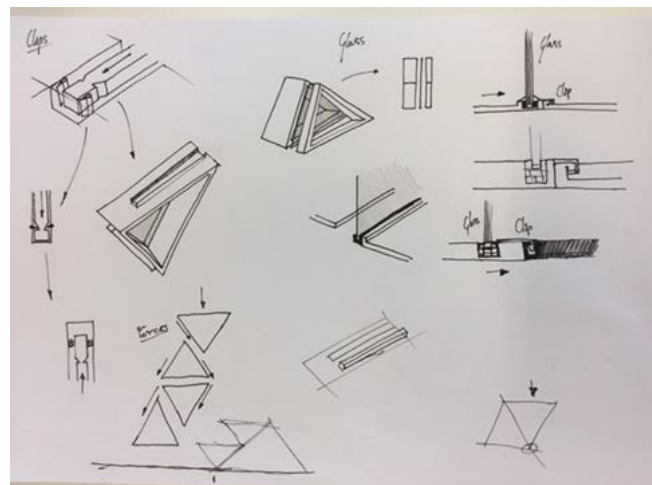
Before taking the class I had no idea what an earthship is, but now I think it is a great philosophy and I would love to incorporate some of the principles in my future work. Basically an earthship is a building which is made from materials in the near surroundings and which runs 100% on renewable energy. A lot of earthships are made from car tires, beer cans and glass bottles. In this class we had to design a facade element which could work in theory. The materials for the facade had to be available as trash in Amsterdam. We went with cork stoppers, spokes and cob (clay, sand and straw) for our facade. The teacher for this class was very nice and I learned a



lot from him. He was good at making you think outside the box and he challenged you in a productive way. This was the only class we had with Dutch students, which was a positive experience. The facade element had to be made in groups, an exchange student and a Dutch student together.

Facade design

The teacher for this class was the same as for Hyper Earthship. In this class we had to look at old skyscrapers and try to draw details of how their facade had been constructed. Then we had to analyze the flaws in this design and how it would be different today. The final part of the class was to pick an unorthodox facade material and design a facade from this material. We went with fiber glass in my group and a self-made click system.



Design project

This class stretched over two blocks, which meant I had it for the whole semester. We each had to choose a Dutch building and analyze it. Shapes, details, construction materials, form etc. Then we had to choose a project from our home country which was similar to the Dutch project and analyze this too. The final part of the class was to transform one of the two projects into a building with a different function. We had to account for new access routes, statics, details, building regulations and floor plans. It was a good challenge although it took me a bit too long to actually figure out what the teacher really wanted. His English wasn't always super good so I think some of his points got lost in translation.

Smart Buildings

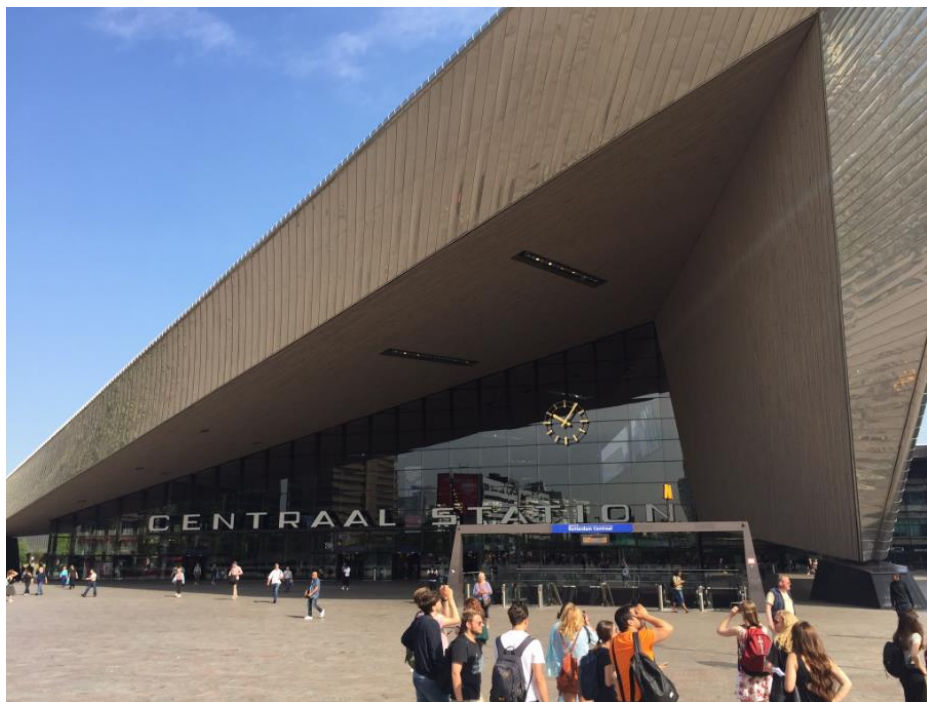
This was another class I had looked forward to, since I had hoped it would be about how buildings could be made smarter with technology, IoT, robotics etc. This wasn't what the subject was about however, it was about how to transform a typical Dutch dwelling into being ZoM (Zero on the Meter) Even though it wasn't what I expected it was still a good class because the teacher was good and because I found the subject interesting. He had original drawings of the Dutch dwelling where we had to find cold bridges and draw details. In a big excel sheet we had to plot in all the values for the existing house, and then figure out what had to be changed and how, to make the dwelling zero on the meter.

Capita Selecta

This was an atypical class since it wasn't teachers from HvA who held lectures, but different architects from different studios. The "classes" were public and costed 5€ to attend. We had to write 4 essays out of 8 lectures about the subject and a discussion of the topic. The topics were very interesting and I enjoyed the lectures.

Excursion

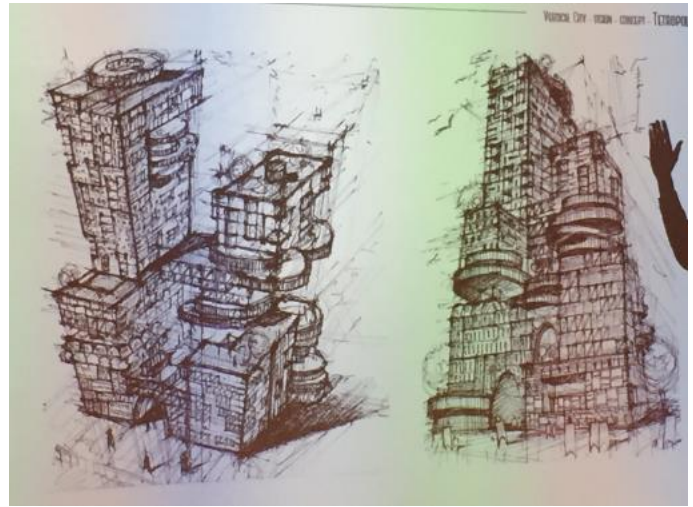
This wasn't a typical class either since there wasn't any lecturing. In groups we had to prepare everything for a student trip to a select Dutch city. We had three groups and we went to Nijmegen, Delft and Rotterdam. For each trip the group had to make a small booklet which we could bring home. The excursions were very interesting since the teachers were very engaged and the students had made such nice booklets for each trip.





Vertical city

This was a themed week on the subject of the vertical city. We were students from many different faculties at HvA like engineers, urban planners, architects and so on. Each group had to come up with their idea of the vertical city and present it to the teachers. We had to do renders, a 3D model and a physical model. It was a great week with great comradery and an interesting topic.



Summary

All in all, I was very pleased with my time in Amsterdam. I absolutely loved the city and would have loved to explore it even more. The teaching level at HvA disappointed me to be honest. I didn't take home the learning from classes I had hoped for and especially the sustainability class disappointed me. I didn't explore much of the party and social life at HvA. I didn't click with many of my fellow exchange students, and since I was doing sports 2-3 times a week with a local sports team and the fact that I was there with family I didn't feel like I had to make friends at school. I met plenty of super nice people outside of school.

This was my exchange report, glad you made it all the way through, and I wish you all the best in your search for an exchange city which suits you.

/Christian P. Madsen

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