

Hi there fellow exchange student! 🌍

I anticipate that you are getting excited about gearing up for your adventure abroad! And if those butterflies are mixed with a twinge of hesitation, know that it will all unfold in due time:)

Let's cut straight to the chase, here are some valuable & practical things about being an international student here in Utrecht.

ACCOMMODATION - HOUSING 🏠

Disclaimer: The infamous housing crisis in Victoria follows you overseas when you come to Utrecht. Therefore, my number one tip with finding housing is to **be proactive**. I cannot stress it enough that finding housing is your top priority *before* coming on exchange to Utrecht. Now, don't panic because there are numerous ways to go about this, and the fact that you're already reading this and actively planning your exchange is an amazing start:)

1. SSH - Specialized Support Housing

SSH is a Reserved Accommodation Program coordinated with Utrecht University. They have a limited number of accommodation available for international students and is first come, first served basis. The booking is therefore like buying concert tickets, you have to be online and ready right when the clock strikes since they book up in a flash. I was fortunate enough to secure a shared, double room through SSH, and I know numerous other UVic students who have also booked with the reserved program, so it is possible! If you are unsuccessful in booking, you can be put on a waiting list with SSH, however, I would not count on this as a viable option. For more information and how to go about booking, see the SSH website: <https://www.sshxl.nl/en>. To be transparent, this is THE most secure, viable option for finding accommodation in Utrecht.

2. Goin' App + Whatsapp + Facebook

Another way to find housing in Utrecht is through networking. By getting on the socials and branching out there, you can make connections with people who are in the same boat, looking for housing or a new roommate!

This option requires you to take a leap out of your comfort zone, but isn't that what going on exchange is all about? Plus, the students using Goin' and these group chats are in the exact same boat as you, new international students searching for places to stay and looking to make friends!

Find the Whatsapp/Facebook/Twitter group chats for your term/year using search terms like: "Utrecht Erasmus/International Students __your-term__" or "Utrecht __your-year__ New Students"

3. Online Housing Platforms

There are also number of online sites where you can search for alternative accommodation. It is best to check these housing portals on a regular basis as things go quickly, and when reaching out, be sure to include a description of yourself, situation, and what would make you a great tenant:)

Here is a link to the alternate housing portals:

<https://www.uu.nl/en/education/welcome-to-utrecht/prepare-your-stay/arrange-housing/ways-to-find-housing/housing-providers-agencies-platforms#housingproviders>

Here is a link to the Utrecht University's main site with **valuable** information about securing housing:

<https://www.uu.nl/en/education/welcome-to-utrecht/to-do/arrange-housing>

Side note: Utrecht University highlights that if you have not found housing before your exchange departure, they strongly advise you to reconsider coming. Although this statement seems earth-shattering, it is something to take into serious consideration. When arriving in Utrecht, I chatted with numerous students who were here without a place; the lucky ones were staying with extended family, but many were living out of suitcases and staying in hostels with 4 other people in the room. When moving to a foreign country, you are already adjusting to a new way of life, doing your groceries even has the added challenge of all the packaging being in Dutch. Adapting to a foreign country while not having a secure place to go "home" to and constantly having the added pressure about needing to find a place can become overwhelming and be taxing on your overall experience. Therefore, it is best to start early in your housing search and to be persistent. Put your mind to it, make plan A, B & C, and keep a positive attitude, for the Netherlands is waiting for you to come discover all its winding canals.

ARRIVAL 🙌

There is a checklist of things that you need to get done when arriving to Utrecht. Here is a very helpful link from UU's site walking you through the steps:

<https://www.uu.nl/en/education/welcome-to-utrecht/when-you-arrive>

- Make sure to make an appointment to register with the city as soon as possible, it books up very quickly

PRO-TIP: Although the Welcome Week and Introductory events may sound cheesy, I **really** encourage you to go to these events! This is where you will get to mix and mingle with all the other international students before classes pick up and people's schedules fill up:) I met some of my closest friends through the Welcome Week! And I also highly recommend checking out the student associations at UU! There are a multitude of different groups, sports, etc. and this is a great way to engage in activities you are interested in and to meet like-minded people:)

Here is a link to a complete list of the student associations at UU (150 total!):
<https://students.uu.nl/en/student-life/student-life-in-utrecht/student-organisations>

UNIVERSITY LOGISTICS

ACADEMIC CALENDAR 📅

- The main difference between UU & UVic would be how the school semesters are structured. At UVic, the university calendar is split into a tri-mester system, September-December, January-April, May-August, with students taking a range of 3-6 courses per semester. In Utrecht, the university calendar is a quarter-system, consisting of 4 blocks, roughly: September-November, November-January, February-April, April-June. Within this quarter system, students only take 2, and sometimes 3, courses per quarter. Only having 2 courses at a time has allowed me to focus more in depth on these given courses and freed up time for me to maintain a better life-study balance!

MULTIPLE CAMPUSES 🏠

- Science Park (Uithof)
- City Centre
- International Campus

Be sure to check which campus your classes are at, since there is a decent travelling distance between them! Also, if you have back to back classes on different campuses, I would recommend emailing the course coordinator/tutorial supervisor; in most cases, it is alright to be a few minutes late due to transportation

Here is a link with the building code names and links to their locations:
<https://students.uu.nl/sites/default/files/geo-building-abbreviations.pdf>

TRANSPORTATION

FLIGHTS ✈️

- Victoria, Canada -> Utrecht, Netherlands
The easiest travel route to Utrecht from Canada in my opinion would be to fly directly into Amsterdam's International Schipol Airport. From there, one takes an easily accessible, 25 minute train to Utrecht which costs \$12.90.

BIKES 🚲

Bikes bikes and more bikes. Utrecht is ranked as the #1 most bike-friendly city in the world, and it shows in the sheer quantity of bicycles here. The infrastructure is built to make cycling everywhere a breeze, and with my exper. I *highly* recommend buying or renting a bicycle while studying here in Utrecht. And to make your life even easier, slap a basket on there for your backpack/groceries!

PRO TIP: **two locks** AND always lock your bike to something;) AND do NOT park in the no-bike zones (you would be surprised...)

Rent - Swapfiets: <https://swapfiets.nl/utrecht>

Buy - 030 Fietsen: <https://030-fietsen.nl/>

- Since I was here for a year, I decided to invest in a bike:)
- Serviced my bike for free and always very kind!

BUS

Unlike at UVic, UU students do not receive free public transportation and no, there isn't a student discount for Canadian internationals:(The buses going to Science Park are usually chock-full in the mornings, thus I would recommend not relying on the bus. With biking being the dominant mode of transportation, other types don't come close to its accessibility and feasibility.

Note: when using the bus, you tap in with a credit or debit card (one which works in Europe) and **tap out** when exiting the bus - the charges will be made to your account according to the length of the journey. Remember to tap out again after leaving! Or else it charges you the boarding fine (€ 4,00 for bus & € 20,00 for train).

TRAIN

The train system in Utrecht is straightforward and easy to use. Plus there are many different places you can travel to from the hub of Utrecht Centraal! Check out the main page for more info: <https://www.ns.nl/>

Note: you can purchase tickets here <https://www.ns.nl/en> OR you can tap in and out with your valid credit/debit card the same way you would with the bus.

DAILY LIFE

Here are some things I think are useful for going about daily life in Utrecht:

APPS

MyUU: <https://apps.apple.com/nl/app/myuu/id995217070>

- App of Utrecht University
- Student identification, timetable, courses, results, etc.

Buienradar: <https://apps.apple.com/nl/app/buienradar-weer/id621542526>

- Weather app that accurately depicts when it is going to rain and how much
- Very very very useful for the rapidly changing weather here in NL

9292: <https://apps.apple.com/nl/app/9292-reisplanner-ov-e-ticket/id556557690>

- Reliable Transit App

Splitwise: <https://www.splitwise.com/>

- Evenly distributes shared expenses
- Used with my roommates & on trips to balance costs and spendings, very useful

Social Deal: <https://apps.apple.com/us/app/social-deal-the-best-deals/id910898851>

- VERY good deals on restaurants and activities in Utrecht:)

GROCERIES 🍎

Jumbo

- <https://www.jumbo.com/service/jumbo-extras>
- My personal fav<3 - become part of their points system and get discounts;)

Aldi

- <https://www.aldi.nl/>

Albert Hein

- <https://www.ah.nl/>
- A tiny bit more pricey than the two above - yet good lunches for grab & go

Action

- <https://www.action.com/nl-nl/>
- NOT food, discount store-chain, *Walmartish* equivalent

Note: All the product names are in Dutch! Overtime, you will learn the basics, like “Kip” means “Chicken”.

GYM 🏋️

Basic-Fit

- Decently Priced - 7 locations
- https://www.basic-fit.com/nl-nl/sportscholen/utrecht?gad_source=1&gclid=CjwKC_AiAs6-sBhBmEiwA1NI8s5rOKf7I7MCbirJDIBn-uhp7JaBxEiz_S1ON2bSwVZtBgGjM5jNjfBoC7AsQAvD_BwE

Train More

- Great facility and very close to the main UU library in City Centre
- A little more towards the pricey side, yet worth checking out -> free trial day
- <https://free-trial.trainmore.nl/>

Sports Centre Olympos

- Gym at the UU Science Park
- Very small and usually crowded...

- Can get membership with all fitness classes and facilities included, which I would say is the bulk of the value
- <https://www.olympos.nl/>

MEDICAL 🚑

Thus far, I have found healthcare in the Netherlands to be quite different from Canada. Medication that would be on the shelves in Canadian drug stores or grocery stores is tucked in cabinets behind the counters in Pharmacies here in the Netherlands. This includes flu and cold medicines, and you require a prescription from a General Practitioner (GP) for medication that you would find over-the-counter in Canada. For example, I wanted to purchase an antibiotic ointment (such as Polysporin) and required a prescription.

Furthermore, you are not able to simply walk into a hospital and wait in an Emergency room to be seen. Mostly all cases, unless life-or-death extreme, must first require a referral to a hospital from your GP, if they deem a hospital visit to be necessary. For this reason, and requiring a prescription for even strong cold medicine, I would advise registering with a GP. A few of my roommates and I have registered at Janskerkhof General Practice for UU students, and they have practices both in Science Park (Uithof) and in the City Centre. Here is the link for registration:

<https://huisartsjanskerkhof.nl/nl/inschrijven/>.

INTERNATIONAL STUDENT ASSOCIATIONS ☀️

- ESN Utrecht
 - Weekly events, trips, lots of activities!
 - <https://esn-utrecht.nl/>
 - https://www.instagram.com/esn_utrecht?igsh=cjQxd3lkMWFmNDZu
- Buddygodutch
 - Become partnered up with a Dutch student!
 - <https://buddygodutch.nl/>
 - <https://www.instagram.com/buddygodutch?igsh=MTdkdWFnaHQ2cXdxYg==>
- ISN Utrecht
 - Fun parties:)
 - <https://www.instagram.com/isninternational?igsh=YmE4cnV3YTg2dGJy>
- International Student UU
 - UU's Instagram with all the deets for International Students
 - https://www.instagram.com/uu_warmwelcome/

PLACES IN UTRECHT 📍

Here is a link to some of my favourite places in Utrecht! (Restaurants, Cafés, Study Spots, and more:~) and I am continuing to add to the list!

<https://maps.app.goo.gl/CcqCNwkBdRidv6Hi6>

As a bonus, here is my page on Notion that goes into a little more practical depth about the subjects covered here & some extras;)

<https://ninasimons.notion.site/UVIC-UU-464661ef06ad41db9b317df1705537ef?pvs=4>

Alas, I have tried to cover some of the fundamental basics and I hope you have a general idea about how to tackle daily living here in Utrecht:)

If you have anything particular you would like to know about, more specific questions, or just want to reach out to say hi, please feel free to contact me at:

Email: nina8simons@gmail.com

Instagram: @ninasimonss

The Netherlands is waiting for you!

Nina Simons

        *from one exchange student to another*         