

EXCHANGE EXPERIENCES

A semester abroad is an amazing opportunity to explore the world, improve language skills, make lifelong friends, and grow as a person. Sounds awesome, right? The School of Chemical Engineering has a vast number of partner schools around the world. Five CHEM students share their exchange experiences in different destinations.

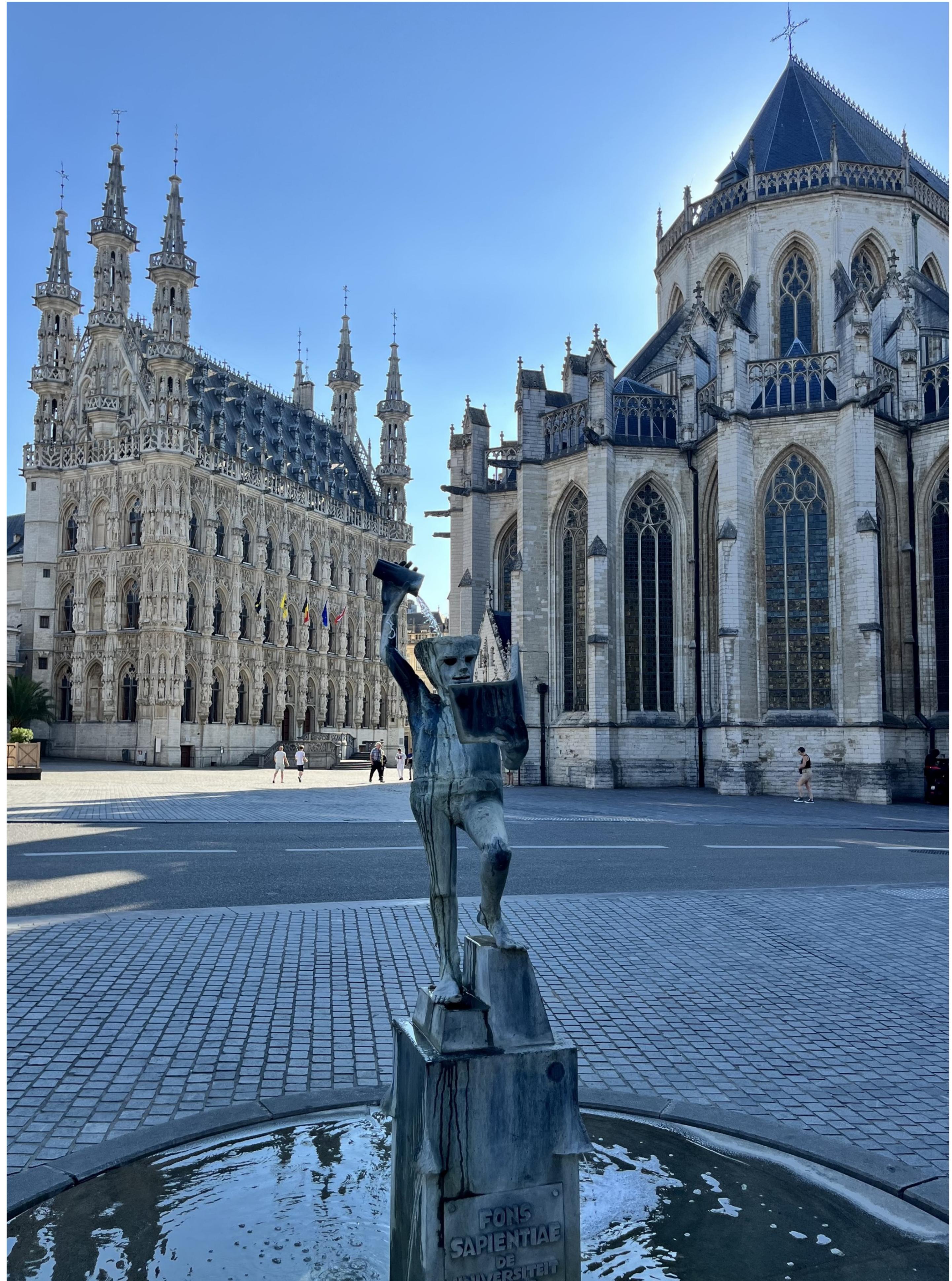
Leuven, Belgium

Niilo Kostiander was in exchange in KU Leuven, Belgium last spring. He chose Belgium because of its central location in the heart of Europe, but at the same time it is a country you might not visit otherwise. KU Leuven's prestigious reputation also motivated him with the decision.

Leuven is a city of 100,000 inhabitants in central Belgium. Niilo emphasizes the beautiful historical architecture of the city and how easy it is to move around the city; you can bike everywhere in 15 minutes. Also travelling to other countries is very easy from Leuven as many European capitals are only a few-hour train ride away. The University has a great influence in the whole city, since almost half of the population consists of students.

KU Leuven is a big university with a wide range of courses to choose from, and as an exchange student Niilo was able to take some courses also outside the department of Chemical Engineering. The teaching was high quality and thousands of motivated exchange students come study in Leuven each semester. There is a designated hang-out space for international students on campus where you can easily make friends from all around the globe.

Going to study in Leuven you get a unique opportunity to experience Central Europe up close, in a highly motivated and international environment. You don't have to speak local languages; you will survive 100% in English. Leuven is a top pick especially for beer enthusiasts, as there is a diverse beer culture in Belgium.



© Niilo kostiander

Niilo's exchange report: https://aalto.moveon4.de/services/download-study-report-file/publisher_id/9/stay_id/263830/file_id/406627

Hong Kong



© Anni Toivonen

Though Hong Kong is very international, Anni recommends learning the basics of Cantonese, which is offered at the school. There is an endless amount of stuff to do in Hong Kong, which makes it a great destination to spend a semester in. You will adapt to a completely different culture, make friends from all around the world, and gain self-confidence.

Anni's exchange Instagram diary: [@antinmaailma](https://www.instagram.com/antinmaailma)

Padua, Italy

Freya Huck is doing her exchange in Università degli Studi di Padova (University of Padua), Italy. She chose Italy, because of a warmer climate, and exquisite cuisine. Padua is a vibrant city of 200,000 people. Students make up a big part of the population. The students keep the city very lively and there is so much to do there. There are different kinds of events happening often, you can attend recreational classes, the nightlife is active, and there are a lot of cafes and other social spots in the city. Biking is a popular way of transportation. The location is great to visit other places outside Padua as well. For example, Venice is a 20-minute train ride away, Milan 1,5 hours away, and the Dolomites mountains 2 hours away.

Università degli Studi di Padua is a prestigious and old university. Compared to Aalto, Freya says the studies to be more independent, and grades are mostly given based on only the final exam. The classes focus on theory more and go into more depth on the topic. One class is usually more credits than what we are used to.

Anni Toivonen did her exchange in the City University of Hong Kong. Hong Kong is a Special Administrative Region of China. The lively metropolis offers the big city life you won't experience in Finland, and extremely different culture from traditions and food to language and manners. In addition, Hong Kong has beautiful nature which is worth experiencing. You can for example go on hikes to the mountains.

The course offering varied remarkably from Aalto's courses and in addition to her Chemical Engineering courses Anni took for e.g., criminology. She encourages future exchange students to take courses you wouldn't be able to study back home. The study culture was a little different in Hong Kong: All courses lasted the whole semester, studying was more independent, and a lot of the studying was remembering things by heart, and locals took studying extremely seriously. However, Anni says that the courses weren't too demanding, and she had a good amount of free time during her exchange.

Most students lived in dorms, where making friends is easy. Most of the events were also at the dorms, varying from parties to sports events.

The course offering is wide, and Freya is taking courses about materials science, renewable energy, chemistry, and a language course. There are also fun elective courses offered, and she is taking theater. There was a 5-day orientation before the semester started where events were held every night and exchange students got to know each other.

Freya's tips for Padua are to learn the basics of Italian since locals don't always speak English, and look for housing as early as possible, Facebook is a good place to find an apartment. You can send Freya questions on Instagram regarding an exchange in Padua.

Freya's exchange Instagram diary:

[@tofoart_aufgrosserfahrt](https://www.instagram.com/tofoart_aufgrosserfahrt)



© Freya Huck

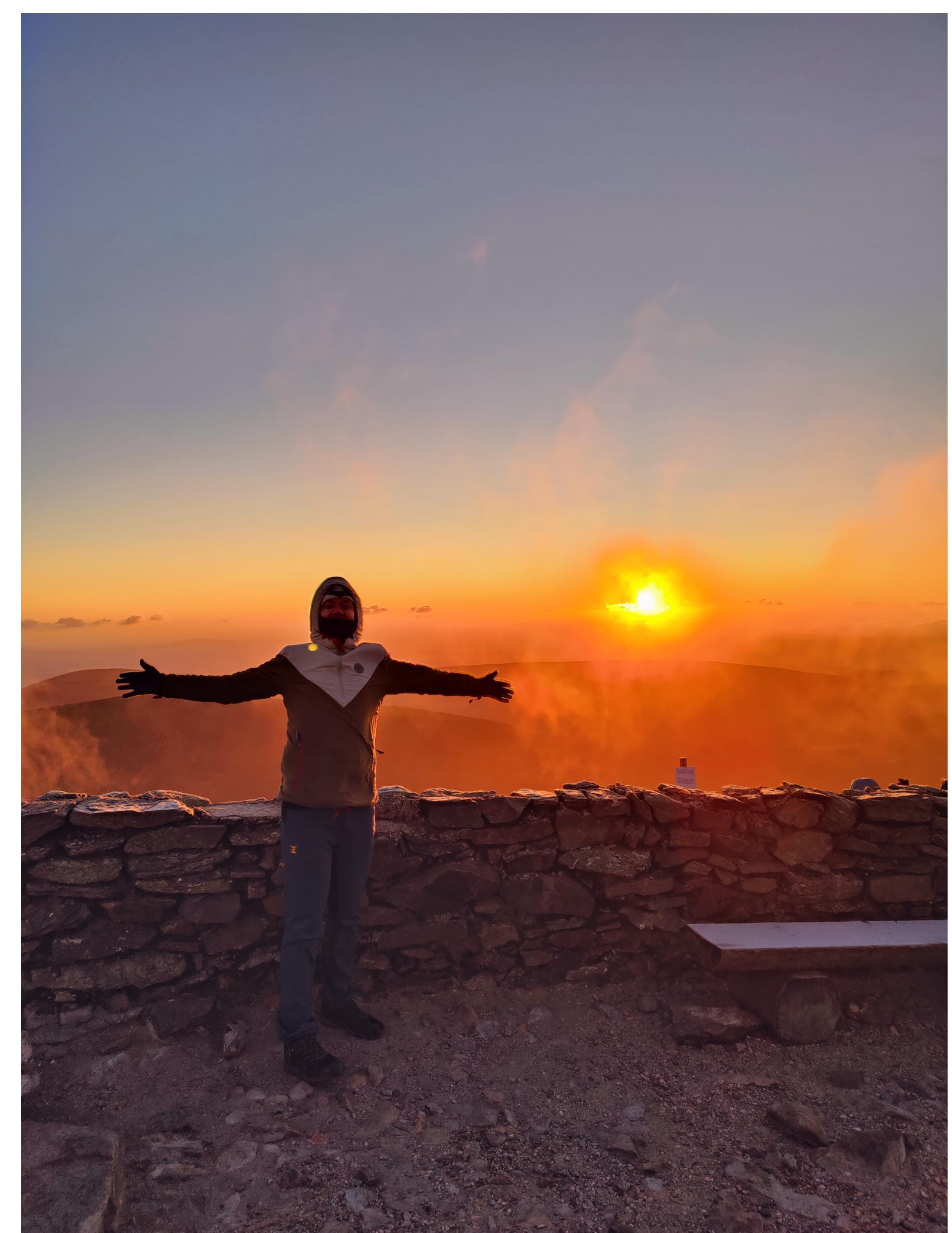
Prague, Czech Republic

Sami Hartikainen is currently doing an exchange in Prague, Czech Republic, a picturesque historic city in the heart of Europe. Prague's architecture is renowned around the world, and it is on UNESCO list of World Heritage Sites. In addition to the vivid city of Prague, Czech Republic's nature is worth mentioning with its mountains, forests, and lakes. Sami also points out the relatively low prices, and rich beer culture in Prague.

Sami studies in University of Chemistry and Technology, Prague. There you can study different fields of chemical engineering, and business. Sami chose this destination mostly because of the interesting materials science courses the school offers. Most locals want to study in Czech, so exchange students have their own courses. Therefore, the classes are small, offering a unique learning experience you wouldn't get in most places. Teaching leans mostly to lectures, and most of the evaluation is done with oral exams. Notable is also the campus, which is an urban campus comprising of beautiful buildings.

Prague is a popular Erasmus destination. The international student organizations are active in there and there is always something fun going on, e.g., parties, or city tours. They also arrange organized weekend trips.

Sami shares his tips for an exchange in Prague: Firstly, locals don't really speak English, and products don't have any labels in English so knowing the basics of the Czech language is a plus, and a translator app is a useful tool. Czech Republic doesn't use euros, so it is important to exchange some Czech korunas, because cash is still the only payment option in many places. Lastly, he encourages to be active and say yes to things to get the best out of your exchange.



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Pohang, South Korea

Jenni Pärkinen spent a semester in Pohang, South Korea studying in POSTECH. She decided to go to Korea, because she has always been fascinated with the culture, and she wanted to improve her language skills. Korea is known especially for K-pop and K-dramas, but there is so much more to this country. Pohang is a coastal city in Eastern Korea. It is known for being a home to various industrial complexes, as well as its culture, which is a mix of modern and traditional, and its nature, including beautiful beaches and landscapes. Jenni found Pohang a peaceful city, with lots of cafes and restaurants to go to. Popular activities also include, e.g., karaoke and golf drives. The clubbing culture is also rich in Pohang and elsewhere in Korea.

POSTECH (Pohang University of Science and Technology) is a quality private university. The courses Jenni took there included for e.g. An Introduction to Brain and Behavior, and Chemistry for Medicine & Life. The evaluation was usually based on the final exam and homework or projects during the course. She wanted to also take Korean, so she also took a course on her free time. One of Jenni's goals was also to get to dance Korean dances, so she joined a dance club at her school. She recommends joining a club to get to know people, especially locals.



A lot of the international students at POSTECH live in DICE dorms, that are designated for international students. There are a lot of common places in the dorms and the community is close-knit. Jenni also recommends getting KakaoTalk, which is the main way of communication there. Google maps doesn't usually work there, instead Koreans use a platform called Naver. Koreans might be hesitant to start conversations in English, but when you get to know them, they are the friendliest people.

Jenni's exchange report: https://aalto.moveon4.de/services/download-study-report-file/publisher_id/9/stay_id/259845/file_id/402444

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