IT University Travel Report

**Host University:** Auckland University of Technology (AUT)

**Study Programme at IT University:** MSc in Digital Innovation & Management (DIM)

**Exchange Agreement or Study Abroad:** Study Abroad

**Courses studied abroad:** Advanced Project Management, Innovation Management, Digital Interaction and User Engagement

**Exchange Period:** Semester 3, Autumn 2018

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### My stay abroad

**What was it like to study at AUT?**

Before going, I had heard from other people who had been abroad, that the academic level was lower than in Denmark. However, when I started my classes at AUT, I was convinced otherwise. I think that the academic level for my three chosen courses was quite high and I learned a lot of new things, including how to use software such as MS Project (in Advanced Project Management) and Adobe XD (in Digital Design and User Interaction).

I have been happy with my choice of courses, because they were so different. Advanced Project Management was class-based teaching where the lecturer talked from his PowerPoint presentation and every now and then asked questions combined with in-class assignments and a project simulation which was quite challenging but fun. This course was the only one we needed to read for, whereas the two others just required us to participate in the lectures. Innovation Management was more of a conversation and role play between the teacher and students, practicing how to pitch, negotiate and other tools for starting up your own company. Lastly, Digital Interaction and User Engagement turned out to be more of a lab where we used most of the lectures working on big Apple computer screens in programs such as Adobe XD.

The classes started on 16 July and ended on 18 October, followed by a week to prepare for my oral exam in Innovation Management – my only oral exams. All other exam assignments were written and individual (except from one written group exam) and handed in throughout the semester. In total, I handed in 9 exam assignments throughout the semester, although smaller ones than the exams we now from ITU. All assignments were graded and summed in one overall grade for each course. For me, this new way of being evaluated was kind of stressful because I had to do the assignments in-between lectures. However, I think it was mostly in my head because I was not used to this kind of examination.

For the social life on campus, I was a bit disappointed. AUT hosted several events throughout the semester, but AUT was poor at advertising the and only few students showed up – even in the intro week. Also, AUT had no real Friday bar, and their bar called Vesbar only has room for about 30 people and usually closes around 9pm. Unfortunately, this limited the social life on campus. This is also why I have been satisfied with living at WSA who hosts a lot of events including BBQs, dessert nights (even though the quality of the free food is rather low), study sessions, parties, sport activities etc.
What was your initial motivation for going abroad and did your stay meet your expectations?
I had heard so many great things from other students who had been abroad on their bachelor or master, and they basically told me to go for it and that I would not regret it. Also, I love travelling and being able to combine that with my studies seemed very compelling to me. Especially in a scenic country like New Zealand which is known for its outdoor activities such as hiking, biking and more adventurous activities like bungy jumping. The last one, I would have sword that I would never dare to try, but not even one month after arriving to New Zealand I did the 40-meter bungy jump from Auckland Harbour Bridge – what an adrenaline rush! 😊😊

I was also motivated by the challenge it was to be far away from everything I know (family, friends, boyfriend, Copenhagen, ITU, work...). I expected I would have times where things would be tough, but I also knew that overcoming the hard times would make me stronger – and that everything I left back home would be there when I returned with all the great experiences in my backpack.

Overall, my stay met my expectations and the only thing I have been a bit disappointed about during my stay is the social life. As explained above, I think that AUT could do more to integrate international students, especially in the intro week where I missed some kind of social “ice breaking” activities to get to know a lot of different people.

Please describe what you got out of your stay, both personally and academically, and how do you expect it to contribute to your further studies?
For me personally, I think I have become better at opening up to people that I do not know too well. That is a quite essential skill when you are so far from everything you know and need to establish a whole new network in a short amount of time. I also learned, that when I had days where I missed everyone and everything back home, it helped me to get out and be social and active to clear my mind.

Academically, I have obtained a lot of new skills that I can use in my thesis writing and future career. Especially Advanced Project Management taught me things which I expect to use in a potential future position as IT Project Manager. I have also learned just how much you can accomplish in a very limited time when you plan your studies right, without missing out on all the fun things in (study abroad) life – going on day trips or weekend trips, eating out, going to the cinemas etc.

Arranging your stay

Please give a short description of the process of arranging your stay:
I really wanted to go abroad, so I started to look at ITU’s partner universities. I was keen on going to Kyoto University, but eventually it was announced that it did not offer any seats in the autumn semester 2018. Therefore, I started to look more into partner universities in the US, Australia and New Zealand. I read about the different universities, their papers, and travel reports from other ITU students who had gone there. I finally came to the conclusion that my first priority was Brisbane, second priority was Wellington and third priority was Auckland. I sent my application to SAP, and I was offered a place at my third priority. I was thrilled but also a little disappointed that I did not get in on my first priority.

Shortly after, I received an email from SAP who provided me with info about how to enroll for papers at AUT and other paper work that needed to be done prior to my trip, e.g. pre-approval of courses. It was a bit of a jungle to find the papers in AUT’s system (Arion) because it was not clear to me which papers were for bachelor students and which were for master students. However, I eventually found out how to use the
system and found one course that would be part of my individual specialisation (Advanced Project Management), one that could replace a mandatory course at ITU (Innovation Management) and one elective (Digital Interaction and User Engagement), equaling 30 ECTS points. After a month or so, all courses were approved by SAP, and I could start booking flight tickets, buy travel insurance, apply for visa and SU Udlandsstipendium etc.

**What resources did you find helpful in planning your stay and which people did you use?**

For me, it was really helpful to read travel reports from other ITU students who had studied a semester abroad. It also helped me a lot to talk with other students who were going abroad in the autumn semester 2018 like me, and with people in my social network who had been abroad during their studies. The International Coordinator from ITU, Eva Maria Steensig Hauerslev, was a great help too. Finally, I was assigned to a contact person from AUT, Kenneth Holt, who helped me with a lot of practical things and any questions I had for my studies at AUT and stay in Auckland in general.

**How did you arrange practicalities such as accommodation?**

I checked out AUT’s website to find their recommendations for accommodation for students abroad. AUT offers student accommodation at Wellesley Student Apartments (WSA), only 2 minutes’ walk from campus. However, I found it quite expensive and at the same time I was not that keen on living at a dorm. Therefore, I chose to search for shared flats through the links provided on AUT’s website. After having used a couple of hours on searching for flats and flatmates, I was overwhelmed by how confusing the process was. When I finally found a flat that looked nice and was affordable, I checked out the current flat mates, and they were mostly full-time employees around 30 years old. I knew I wanted to live with other students – preferable international – which was why I eventually chose to apply for accommodation at WSA.

I was glad I did it, because it is an easy way to get to know a lot of people, and they arrange a lot of social events throughout the semester. I however arrived really early morning 5 days before orientation day, and even though I have noticed them beforehand, it was a struggle to get the security guard to let me in. When he finally did, he told me that I could not get a room before the staff arrived at 8pm, meaning that I would have to wait a couple of hours before I could get a room (at this point I had been travelling for 24 hours!). Luckily, another (Danish) guy arrived shortly after me, which made the guard reach out to the staff. They turned up after about half an hour to check us in and give us a key for our apartments so that we could get some sleep. The apartments had clearly been locked down during the break – it was so cold and the first thing I did was to close all windows and turn on the heaters. Also, the cleaning was not that impressive.

Other from that, I have been pleased with my room and four roommates, although the nationalities could have been mixed more. I lived together with a guy from Czech Republic, a girl from Germany (who speaks fluently Danish) and two Danish guys from my class at ITU. All of us had separate rooms and shared kitchen and living room plus two bathrooms. The apartment is well-equipped and if you miss anything, you can just ask the reception for it and they will give it to you shortly.
Expenses and Financing

Please comment on expenses connected to your stay abroad
The biggest expense was the tuition fee, but with the “SU Udlandsstipendium” of 46,000 DKK and the 10 %
discount due to the partnership agreement between ITU and AUT, I only had to pay around 10,000 DKK.
Other expenses include: Accommodation, flight tickets, insurance, visa, trips inside and outside NZ,
gym/sports club membership and general living expenses including food, mobile plan, transport etc.

Did you apply for scholarships and would you recommend any ones in particular?
I applied for around 16 scholarships before going, and I received 5 of them including; ITU Travel Pool,
Lemvigh-Müller Fonden, Knud Højgaard’s Fond, Oticon Fonden and Dansk Tennis Fond. I received between
2,500 and 10,000 DKK from each of the funds. I started applying for funds in March, and I used quite a lot of
time on it which I would recommend anyone going abroad to do – it really pays off! Also, I was not working
during my stay (due to the visa restrictions) so the funds were my only income except from my SU.

Recommendations for other students

Overall, my semester at AUT have been a great experience which I would recommend anyone else to try.
When going abroad, you develop your academic skills and especially your personal skills which for me has
been worth a lot. Even though, not every day will be the adventure you have dreamt of (due to exam
assignments and what not), you will get some unforgettable experiences that will overshadow your “down”
days. So, to quote Nike: Just Do It!