

## Academics

My program of study is International Business Management. I am taking four courses: Norwegian Language Level 1 (NOR10), Management Consulting (SOL12), Purchasing Strategy and Supply Chain Management (SOL13), Commercialization of Innovations (MBM431). Each course is 7.5 credits. Classes started August 19 and end November 8. The exams are held from November 11 to December 20 this year. Luckily my first exam is November 15 and the last is November 26, so I am fortunate enough to have more than a month of free time to explore and do as my heart desires until it's time for me depart on December 31. Anytime during the semester, dropping out of a course is permitted. There is also an option for students to withdraw from the exam, while still taking the course/going to classes.

### *Course Structures & Assignments*

The courses at NHH are structured differently compared to the course structure at the University of Ottawa. There is a set amount of course approvals (the amount varies depending on the course) that I had to pass in order to be granted permission to take the final examination. In NOR10, I had three course approvals; one that was due on September 13, the other due on September 30, and the last one on October 14. Each course approval was a different task. For the first course approval I had to write ten sentences in Norwegian about myself or someone that I met since I began my exchange. The second course approval was a set of four questions, ranging from 11 to 28 blanks where I had to fill in the blanks with the correct conjugated verb, pronouns, or one of the 5 Ws. Lastly, my third course approval was two questions with multiple blanks, and I was assigned to insert the correct word that was needed to complete the sentence. The course approvals were all pass/fail; therefore, I did not receive any marks for them. This meant that the final exam, which was composed of a three-hour written exam and an oral examination, was worth 100% of our grade. Although it sounds intimidating, my professor was available for questions, and I would converse with my peers and with my friends outside of the classroom to provide clarification on the tasks. My professor for NOR10 also ensured that if we completed the tasks that were assigned during class, and practiced at home that we would do well on our examinations. Since this was a level 1 language course, it was plausible that the majority of students were guaranteed to pass.

For MBM431, one of my three business courses, we did not have any course approvals. To preface, this course is a master's level course, so the structural difference in terms of assignments may be attributed to that. However, for this course the only task we have is a final presentation which is done in groups of 4 to 6. Our task is to create a 20-minute presentation about our development of a commercialization plan for a real innovation. Each of my courses are structured differently; for SOL13 we had a written final examination (the only other course I had a written exam for was NOR10) and two course approvals – in the form of case studies – that were done in groups. For SOL12 we had a final paper that was done in groups, and the only course approval we had was to submit a snippet of our paper to the professor for him to see if we were on the right track with our work.

### *Holidays*

In terms of holidays, there were not many throughout the semester. The only time off that was given was at the beginning of the semester when some classes did not commence until days/weeks after the first day of the semester started (for example, my NOR10 class started August 26 rather than August 19)

### *Welcome Week*

On Friday August 9<sup>th</sup>, international students were invited to a “Grill & Greens” at the school. Here, we were served food, and I was able to meet new people and get to know where everyone was from. The official welcome week at NHH started on Monday August 12<sup>th</sup> and ended Sunday August 18<sup>th</sup>. We were all assigned into welcome week groups and would do the welcome week activities together with our group. Here is where I met many people, and one of those people was a girl from America who I became very close with during my time abroad. The daily structure during the welcome week was similar from day to day; in the mornings/afternoons there would be information sessions regarding various topics pertaining to student life, studies, and answers to the many questions that international students would have. Later in the days, pre-games and parties were held. To my surprise, the parties were held in the basement of the school! Before going to the first party, my roommate told me that there are seven bars in the school’s basement. Being born and raised in Canada, and taking all my levels of education here, this was unheard of for me. However, I quickly remembered that European drinking culture is much different than North American.

## **Before and After Arriving in Bergen**

### *Visa*

In the month of April when I wrapped up my Winter 2024 semester in Ottawa, I was home in Toronto beginning to enjoy my summer and preparing for my time abroad in August. I can’t exactly remember how it came about, but my mom and I were discussing what else I needed before it was time to go to Norway. She mentioned needing a Visa, and I’m not sure why it had not occurred to me prior to this point that I needed a student visa. I froze and quickly emailed NHH’s international student email and received the steps on how to get my visa. Although this was extremely useful, I could have made the process easier and went to their website where they also have this information listed along with every other piece of information international students may need. When I filled out my information in the UDI online portal, I had to pay a little over \$700 for my visa and the processes along the way that were needed (yes, I was shocked at the price too!). On the UDI website, I had to book an in-person appointment to get my paperwork approved and get my fingerprints and photo taken. Online, it says that there was a Norwegian embassy in Toronto, however, Google said it was permanently closed. When we called no one was answering, so I left a message asking if the location was opened. Ultimately no one returned the calls that my mom and I had made, so I was forced to take the 6-hour journey back to Ottawa and go to the Norwegian Embassy there. There is an option for me to get my visa abroad, however, I much rathered to get it before I left. I brought all the required paperwork with me to my appointment on April 25<sup>th</sup>, and the whole process went perfect. They kept my passport to send it off with my paperwork to New York for processing, and I received it in time for my flight in August. On June 11<sup>th</sup> I received an email saying I was granted a temporary residence permit which I printed and kept with me in case I needed to show any officials at the airport. When I arrived in Bergen, I went to the police station

to have another appointment. This is when I took my photo for my residence card, and I was approved to stay in Norway.

### *Courses*

Before I arrived in Bergen, I selected my courses and sent them to University of Ottawa to get approved. A few weeks later, I noticed that almost all of my classes had timing conflicts. Unlike the course selection process at the University of Ottawa, NHH requires students to find class scheduling conflicts themselves, and places the responsibility on students to find courses that do not have exams that overlap either. Luckily, I had discovered this before September 1<sup>st</sup> (the final day to register for courses) and made the proper adjustments. Once again, I sent off my courses to get approved by the University of Ottawa, and they were approved in a matter of days.

### *Housing*

The deadline to apply for housing was May 1<sup>st</sup>. I anxiously applied early April as I did not want to apply too close to the deadline and have any issues with availability or poor accommodation choices. The Sammen housing portal was easy to navigate, and the application was a smooth process. To my surprise, there was no downpayment needed when I was approved for housing. I simply needed to pay rent when the time came, which was the first of every month to the 15<sup>th</sup> of the same month. I am not sure what happens when rent is not paid after the 15<sup>th</sup>, since I am prompt with my rent payments. August 1 was the day we were allowed to begin moving into our rooms, and August 2<sup>nd</sup> was the day I arrived. The process of picking up my keys was tricky at first. It was not because the people at the front desk were being difficult, it was because I could not find my way to the pick-up location. There was absolutely no one around to help navigate me to the gymnasium, except one lady who happened to walk by. It took my sister and I about 25-30 minutes to find the pick-up location (this took most of our time) and get my keys in my hand. Now that I regularly go on campus and go that gym, it's easy for me to give someone directions to the gym's front desk, but when I was new to the area, I was completely lost. To help not get lost on NHH's campus I would suggest downloading "MazeMap" (it has an orange M as a logo).

### *Activities and Groups*

When I began making friends, I was comfortable enough to go out in the city and school to explore. When the first week of school came around, there were many announcements about the different groups and clubs that would be looking for new people to join. Throughout the course of three consecutive days, there were several booths in the gym and foyer of the school hosted by different clubs and groups ranging from sports clubs to finance groups, to event planning groups and even drinking clubs! I remember registering for 10 clubs: Volunteer, International Committee, Marketing, Project Management, Women in Leadership, Case club, NHH Aid club, Analytics, Soccer, Lift club, but only being accepted into 1 – the International Committee. Sadly, it seemed common for the clubs not to choose international students who were only staying for one semester. Also, many of the clubs were gateways to making friends and partying, so if you were not fond of socializing beyond the boundaries of the clubs, then you would not be the right candidate. In hindsight, I may have put too much on my plate by signing up for so many groups, however, I am fortunate that I made many friends within the groups I was accepted into and outside of that. Later in the semester I joined the Tenants Union and was elected as Head of Finance.

## **Housing**

I live in Hatleberg (address: Hatleveien 5) on the 7<sup>th</sup> floor in block F. I live 8 mins walking distance from the school, and my block has all international students. It was apparent that the people in the living accommodations were organized by where they came from (for example, on the 7<sup>th</sup> floor, majority are Canadians – from Ontario, British Columbia, and Quebec). My living situation was not what I expected it to be when I arrived. Unfortunately, I was sharing a single room with another student. Apparently, there had been an influx of international students at NHH this year, and the school had to double the number of habitants in the buildings by putting two people in rooms that were meant for a single person. I, as well as many others, were shocked by this, since in the housing application I applied for a single room with *no* shared bathroom. Ultimately, I needed to take the double occupancy room since I had no other housing option. When I arrived in Bergen, I found that I would be sharing a room with another student, and there would be another room in the unit that housed two boys (the opposite gender of me). I was not particularly pleased by this discovery, however, us four make it work and have become quite close over the course of the semester. So, for the whole semester there are four people sharing one bathroom, and multiple people sharing one kitchen (there are two kitchens per floor). The bedroom that I share with my roommate has one bunk bed, one wardrobe, and one desk, but we make it work. My rent is 3,400 NOK (\$450.54 CAD) per month, and I use my debit card or Wise card to make the payments. I find the Wise card is better for big purchases because the conversion can be drastically different the more you are paying. Instead of 450.54 CAD being charged to my debit, I would be charged 3,400 NOK to my Wise card which converts to \$429.31 CAD.

## **Budget**

### *Plane Ticket*

My mother and I went to a travel agency to purchase my plane ticket since we needed 3 sets of tickets (one for me, one for my sister, and one for my mom). We were trying to find a way for all of us to get on a flight together while also having different departure dates (my mom and sister would leave early August, and I would leave at the end of my exchange). If this was not the case, and they did not come along, I would have purchased it online. A one-way ticket was too expensive (almost the same price as a round trip), so I purchased a round-trip ticket and changed my departure date to the actual time I would be leaving. My round-trip ticket was \$1,427 CAD (not including the money it took to change the return flight).

### *Groceries*

Prior to coming to Bergen, I was prepared for the expenses I would occur. However, one night when my mom, sister and I went out to get something quick to eat, we stumbled on a fast-food chain. When we were ordering I was looking at the prices, trying to familiarize myself with them. However, when my sister paid and she checked her bank account, three combos came up to \$97 CAD! This was my first indication of how expensive things were going to be for me here. Fortunately for me, I do not frequently eat out (except for the weekly coffee/matcha and pastry ☺) since I love to cook and bake at home. I chose to keep my *weekly* grocery budget to \$65 CAD (~ 515 NOK) (not eating out, just grocery store runs). This is what works for me since I meal prep 1

to 2 meals – protein (such as chicken or fish), carb (rice, pasta, potatoes), and veggies (avocado, broccoli, zucchini) – and buy snacks (protein bars, fruits, cashews and pistachios, etc) or other things that I eat (milk, cheese, oats, sauces). Granted I tried my best to stay within budget, but of course there are some weeks that I enjoy myself more and end up spending more than budgeted for. I also look for alternatives for where I could buy my favourite things (for example, Normal – a department store – sells a variety of protein bars for 20 to 30 NOK [\$2.52 to \$3.80 CAD] each, rather than 40 NOK [\$5.05 CAD] at the grocery stores). Spar, Rema 1000, and Bunnpris are also some of my favorite, and affordable stores to do my shopping at; Meny is known for being on the pricier side.

### *Eating Out*

When it comes to eating out, the most I do is grab a coffee and matcha with an occasional pastry (when I first came here, I was addicted to boller!) I do not have a particular budget for this category, I just stay mindful of the number of times I grab a drink throughout the week. I can only remember eating at a restaurant no more than 5 times since I have been here. When it came to getting alcohol at the clubs or parties I attended, I would get one and it would cost about \$9 to \$12 CAD. Since I am not the biggest fan of drinking, buying drinks is not an often occurrence for me.

### *Bus Pass*

For the bus passes, we use an app called “Skyss Billett” and “Skyss Reise” for the bus routes and times. Since I live walking distance from the school and grocery stores, purchasing a bus pass is an expense that is not mandatory for me. However, being realistic, I do travel to the city centre many times and go see my friends in Fantoft, so I will purchase a weekly or monthly pass depending on how often I think I will be taking the bus. Also, since I am only staying within the Bergen area I changed my “Valid In” option to Zone A so I was not charged more than I should have been. The bus passes are \$20.51 CAD for 7 days, or \$61.03 CAD for 30 days.

### *Textbook*

I only needed one textbook, and it was for my Norwegian language class. The textbook was \$53.86 CAD. Professors provided any cases or further readings.

### *Phone plan*

My sister discovered an E-Sim app called “Airalo”. I use it for data, and it has good coverage and was easy to install. The only down-side is that I could not call Norwegian numbers, and I am only able to use it for data. I purchased the 30-day, 5 GB plan for \$18.50 CAD, and the 5 GB of data is the perfect amount to last one month (sometimes it lasts 27 days).

Plane Ticket (round trip)	Groceries (weekly)	Housing (monthly)	Bus pass (7 days / 30 days)	Textbook	E-Sim – No calls, only data (30 days)
\$1,427	\$65	3,400 NOK (\$429.31)	\$20.51 / \$61.03	\$53.86	\$18.50

\*All prices shown are in CAD unless stated otherwise\*

## **Further Comments & Recommendations**

### *Walking*

There is a lot of walking that I do on a regular basis (15k to 20k steps each day). Coming from someone who is active in the gym, the walking was an adjustment for me in the beginning. I can't say that it was hard, but it was something new that I had to mentally and physically get over. Over the months I've been here, I have fallen in love with walking and enjoy it so much. Back home I would typically get 6k to 9k steps (sometimes barely even 3k), but now I am doing 13k to 15k *minimum* each day! One thing for sure that I will continue to do when I go back home is walk a lot, and hopefully find some trails or paths that I can hike.

### *Weather*

It rains so much here! Please bring a proper rain jacket because you definitely will need it. Bergen is the rainiest city in Europe, so come equipped with thermal undergarments, a rain jacket and a good umbrella, but do not count on the umbrella to keep you dry because when the wind picks up it may get blown away or flipped inside out.

### *Food*

One food that I love here is boller. Boller translates to "buns" but the boller here are like the Norwegian version of cinnamon buns (without the frosting and half the sweetness). They are so soft and are a must have! My personal favourite is the mandelbolle (almond bun) from Godt Brød, but the classic skillingsbolle (cinnamon bun), which you can find anywhere, is good too. Another thing about the food in Bergen (and I suppose all throughout Norway), is that it is not too sweet. If you are used to the sweet drinks, pastries, and foods in general, there is not much of that here. Something that shocked me was that reindeer, whale, and elk are common meats here. There is a hotdog stand called Trekroneren (address: Kong Oscars gate 1) that sells reindeer hotdogs as well as other hotdogs.

### *People*

The people here are very reserved. I was warned by many that the students at NHH would not be talkative and are apparently not receptive towards international students (I'm not sure how true this is, but from what I have seen it's not accurate). One of my group members is from Bergen and he said, "it's easy to feel like an outsider here". So, when I felt left out or awkward around Norwegians, I tried not to take it personal. Another thing, people do not say "excuse me" or "sorry" when trying to get by you. I find it common in Canada for someone to say something when they are trying to walk past you, however, in Bergen it was a strange adjustment for me to see people not say anything.

### **My Experience**

Although my exchange is not finished yet, my experience so far has been far from dull! I have been loving every moment of my time here, and I cannot fathom that I am in Norway having this amazing experience and meeting new people and trying new things. I remember one time I was

outside taking in the view, and it hit me that I am living such a unique and beautiful experience that I should be immensely grateful for. The locals here are quiet and reserved, but the friends that I have made my time here so much better. I truly think this is the most social I have been in all my life, and the most spontaneous I have been. I have hiked, pet goats, partied till the morning, baked with friends, and had lectures and information sessions that have given me insight on useful information. I am so pleased that I chose Bergen and would not give up this experience for the world!