

Exchange experience fall semester 2017-2018

My study programme

I went to the University of Aruba for an exchange of one semester at the faculty of Law. To study abroad was something I always wanted to do. I even had already applied a year before! I gave it a shot again and applied also in the year after. Luckily this time I was accepted and I could finally have a small dream come true.

For my bachelor Dutch Law at the University of Groningen it was not mandatory to go on exchange and I had already finished my bachelor courses, but I wasn't sure what to do next. I had a fresh start at Aruba to give it some thought. I followed two courses at masters level and two courses at bachelors level. The level of the courses were a bit tougher than I expected beforehand. It's really similar to the Dutch level. There were a lot of Dutch professors and for one course the teacher was even flown over from the Netherlands for two weeks. In the first block I took the courses Intellectual Property Law (masters) and Arubaans Burgerlijk Procesrecht (bachelors). In the second block I took the courses Sanctierecht (masters) and Arubaans Verbintenissenrecht (bachelors). The classes are really different than what I was used to at the University of Groningen. The classes were really small (most classes were around 5 till 10 students) and you had to participate a lot by discussing with your fellow students and the teacher.

Language

The main language at the faculty of Law is of course Dutch, because the education is also taught in Dutch. Most of the students had a level of Dutch, like most Dutch people have in English. Overall it was good. But besides the university the language spoken is mainly Papiamentu and Spanish. There are a lot of people from South-America who cannot really speak English, but the local people were able to do so. It's not difficult to let people know what you mean, because there was always someone around who could speak multiple languages. The local people speak four languages; Papiamentu, Spanish, Dutch and English.

Culture

Aruba lives on tourism from America, so there are a lot of American influences on the island. There were also a lot of influences from South-America, because of the people who come from there to Aruba for a longer stay. And of course there are a lot of influences from the Netherlands (Aruba is still a part of the Kingdom). Overall Aruba has a lot of mixed cultures, which I really liked. I didn't expect so many variety on a small island. The local people are really warm and open to everyone. We had a classmate who took us on a few trips to experience Aruba from a local view.

Finance and other conditions

I advise students to go to Aruba to save some money before leaving because living in Aruba is a lot more expensive than in the Netherlands. In the first week I was shocked when I saw the prices in the supermarkets. But as I got to know everything a little better, I also knew where I had to go to find the cheapest things. A good tip; go to Save-a-Lot! What makes living in Aruba also a bit more expensive is that you need to rent a car. Do this with two or three persons. In this way you can split the costs and it will be around 150-250 euros a month. Luckily that gasoline is really cheap!

What I also really recommend is to get your driver's license if you don't already have one. I don't have one, and I wasn't expecting that it would be so difficult in Aruba without. Everything needs to be done by the car. Bicycling is dangerous and there are almost no buses going. Keep this in mind!

Housing

I rented an apartment with the other student from the same faculty at the University of Groningen who got the second spot to go to Aruba. We stayed at Montana Park Apartments. This was the cheapest option for 2 bedrooms, 1 living room with kitchen and 1 bathroom. By coincidence almost all the other exchange students from the university were also staying at the same place. This was really fun because you could always hang out with people and there was always something to do if you wanted to.

Preparation and contacts with the faculty before, after and during my stay

The preparation before going to Aruba was some work, but it's was not too much. The contacts with the faculty were really smooth from the start. It would take one day to get an reply and they were really friendly and helpful. There is one person who arranges almost everything for the exchange students and that is Rushella. She welcomed us with open arms. She even picked all the exchange students from the airport. The university also organized two introduction days for us. The faculty coordinator was someone else, who I didn't spoke to a lot. But everyone tried and did their best to make sure we were feeling welcomed and had a good time.

Free time

During the week I had to spend almost every day at the university, but in the morning we didn't have classes. The classes for the faculty of Law only start after 2 in the afternoon. The nice thing about Aruba is that every free time you have, you can spend on the beach. Sometimes we would go do fun things if we were free in the morning or in the afternoon. On the weekends we usually went out and did stuff with a big group of exchange students.

Travelling

Aruba is really close to North-America and South-America. I went on a trip to Miami in the very first weeks I was on my exchange. I also really wanted to go to Curacao because it's really close and I wanted to see the differences between the islands. So I also went there. After my exchange period I went on to travel for 6 weeks. First I went to Panama and after that to Colombia. I was so close to so many countries I had never been to, so I really wanted to seize the opportunity.

I really enjoyed my time in Aruba, which is called one happy island for a good reason! The beaches were beautiful and I met so many great people, who became close friends during my stay. I definitely recommend to go to Aruba for a semester.