塔爾圖大學（University of Tartu）創立於 1632 年，由瑞典國王古斯塔夫二世建立，是愛沙尼亞的最高學府，也是北歐最古老的頂尖大學之一。作為波羅的海地區的學術殿堂，它在計算機科學、基因體學和臨床醫學等領域享有國際盛譽，高居世界前 1%。校園與塔爾圖市融為一體，古老的古典主義主樓、山丘上的教堂遺址與現代化科學樓交相輝映，孕育出獨特的學術氛圍，更在 2024 年獲選歐洲文化之都。

在這兩個學期裡，我受益最多的課程是愛沙尼亞語課。因為語言是了解一種文化的入門，只要學會基本的短句，已經能幫助我更快速拉近與當地人的距離。也因為這堂課我幫助，我在聖誕節時應徵上一份到當地家庭當聖誕老公公的工讀，體驗了當地獨特的聖誕習俗。

天氣是這裡最大的挑戰。8 月底剛到愛沙尼亞抓到夏天的尾巴，是舒適的 20-15 度上下。從 9 月中後開始，氣溫開始驟降到個位數；11 月中開始下雪，冬天氣溫最低達到負 20 度，而且日照時間每天只有 4-6 小時，會因此有冬天抑鬱(Winter depression)。作為亞洲人，我人生第一次買維他命 D 藥吃，也深深感受到，有太陽曬是多麼美好的事，明白了歐洲人為什麼那麼愛去海灘渡假。

交換/研修之具體效益：

1. 獲得獨自在各國處理各式行政雜務的能力

2. 英文使用能力全面提升

3. 擴闊世界觀和文化差異的包容能力

4. 脫離原生文化的束縛，活得更像真實的自己

5. 更了解自己國家的優勢和缺點

我認為海外生活困境視乎我怎麼看待那件事，對我而言沒有困境，因為每一次挑戰都是學習機會，我都樂在其中。當中孤獨感是我面對過最大的挑戰。這裡一年，我在愛沙尼亞塔圖遇過的台港中人，包括我自己，只有 5 個，所以有 95%的時間都是跟其他文化的人交流。儘管我可以每天每夜跟不同朋友吃喝玩樂，但要深入交流很難，感覺到有種「我不屬於這裡」的格格不入感。但時間久了，就會發現把「孤獨」理解成「獨處」，嘗試用這些獨自的時間來了解認清自己，比起盲目的大量無效社交，更能提升自己的心理素質，生活過得更悠然自得，更能隨緣安住。

文化衝擊方面可算是排山倒海，小如上廁所、保特瓶和快餐店蕃茄醬都要收費、人們吃早餐後才刷牙、握手是男性較勁的第一場合；大如歐洲各地區的文化差別 (如北歐、斯拉夫語系、英、法、德、意.... 各派不一)、男女約會的互動方式、沙發衝浪屋主直接給你鑰匙隨進隨出..... 一切都跟台灣香港很不一樣。我的心態是保持開放的面對，但也不要照單全收，感覺到不舒服，立馬停止離場就好。

最大的成長方面，我認為是擺脫了原生文化的社會規範。例如在台灣香港的文化中，人們很常互相批評，為了避免被批評，導致很多想法都不敢實現。去到國外，我就是他們文化以外的人，原生文化的社會規範也不存在，於是便有了機會去大膽嘗試各式各樣的事情。例如我開始

經營自媒體；一個人去了以色列、巴勒斯坦、烏克蘭和巴爾幹半島旅遊；一個人從葡萄牙騎踏車到愛沙尼亞，跨越了整片歐洲大陸，途中一路住在陌生人家或野營等等。

總體而言，我在愛沙尼亞交換，獲得大量跟世界各地的人交流、獨處，以及大膽嘗試的機會，活出更真實自在的自我。也透過了解各地人民的生活，獲得了對未來生活方式的理想模樣，不用只跟台灣或香港的「人生規劃」走。

最後想鼓勵大家，大膽的去拜訪歐洲朋友家，會有很不一樣的旅遊體驗。我之前在中山大學參加 Buddy program，認識了 3 位來自意大利、比利時和匈牙利的朋友，這次交換去了他們家玩；我在交換下學期，又去了在交換上學期時認識的斯洛伐克、捷克、波蘭、烏克蘭和愛沙尼亞的朋友家玩。他們帶我去鄉村阿嫲的田裡吃波蘭農家菜、在野外炊過節才煮的匈牙利馬鈴薯燉肉，以及感受在烏俄戰爭裡如何過日常生活。

如果你更大膽的話，可善用 Couchsurfing 沙發衝浪，我透過這平台，待在約旦、瑞典、西班牙、英國等十多個國家的當地人家裡，體驗到從東西南北歐到中東各式的生活樣貌，非常建議大家試試看，想知更多歡迎聯絡我。

如果你大膽又體力不錯的話，非常建議來一趟腳踏車旅遊，騎到鄉村小鎮，看看跟城市完全不一樣的人文風景。鄉鎮人們都非常友善及好客。我一個人從葡萄牙騎踏車到愛沙尼亞，跨越了 14 個國家、無數個鄉鎮城市，被十多個家庭招待到他們家吃住。騎過兩段朝聖之路、騎去策馬特看馬特洪峰，總共 5500 公里、爬升 42000 公尺。那份無與倫比的滿足感，必須經過讓人絕

望、心力交瘁的騎行後才能獲得，坐公車列車是不會完全體會到的。以上旅遊方式除了體驗更真實的歐洲生活，更省到住宿和交通費，像我這樣預算有限的同學可以考慮考慮。

The University of Tartu was founded way back in 1632, and it' s basically the top university in Estonia. It' s super famous for computer science and medicine, but what I love most is how the campus just blends into Tartu city. With all the old classical buildings and the cool church ruins on the hill, the vibe here is amazing—no wonder Tartu was chosen as the European Capital of Culture in 2024!

Out of all my classes over the two semesters, the Estonian language class was my absolute favorite. Learning a language is the best way to understand a new culture. Just knowing a few basic phrases helped me break the ice with locals instantly. It even helped me land a part-time job playing Santa Claus for local families at Christmas, which was an unforgettable way to experience their holiday traditions.

Honestly, the weather here is a huge challenge. I arrived in late August and caught the very end of summer, which was a nice 15–20°C. But by mid-September, the temperature

crashed. It started snowing in November, and winter got as cold as -20°C. With only 4 to 6 hours of daylight, I actually experienced winter depression. As an Asian, I had to buy Vitamin D supplements for the first time in my life. It really made me appreciate the sun and understand why Europeans are so obsessed with beach holidays!

Loneliness was another big thing. During my year here, I only met five people from Hong Kong, Taiwan, or China (including myself). This meant 95% of my time was spent hanging out with people from completely different cultures. Even though I was out partying or eating with friends almost every day, it was hard to have deep conversations, and I often felt like I didn't quite fit in. But after a while, I started looking at "loneliness" as "solitude." I used that alone time to get to know myself better instead of forcing myself into useless socializing. It really made me mentally stronger and more at peace with myself.

The culture shock came in waves. Little things caught me off guard—like having to pay for public toilets, bottle deposits, and even ketchup at fast-food joints. People here also brush their teeth *after* breakfast, and handshakes are like a mini strength competition for guys. But the biggest shock was seeing how much trust people have here, like Couchsurfing

hosts just handing over their house keys to a stranger. My mindset was always to keep an open mind, but if something felt uncomfortable, I' d just leave.

The best part of this journey was breaking free from the social norms back home. In Hong Kong and Taiwan, people criticize each other a lot, which makes everyone afraid to follow their dreams. But abroad, nobody knows those rules, so I felt free to try anything. I started making social media content, traveled alone to the Balkans, Israel, and Ukraine, and even did a massive solo cycling trip from Portugal all the way back to Estonia, wild camping or staying with strangers along the way.

This exchange completely changed how I picture my future life; I realized I don' t have to follow the typical "life plan" back home.

If you ever come to Europe, I highly recommend visiting your European friends. Because I joined the Buddy Program before, I got to visit friends in Italy, Belgium, and Hungary. In my second semester, I stayed with exchange friends in Slovakia, the Czech Republic, and Poland. They took me to their grandma' s farm to eat countryside food and showed me

what daily life looks like during difficult times.

If you’ re adventurous, use Couchsurfing! I’ ve stayed with locals in over ten countries, from Jordan to the UK. And if you have the stamina, try a bike tour! I cycled 5,500 km across 14 countries, stayed with a dozen local families, and saw the Matterhorn. The sense of achievement you get after a grueling, exhausting ride is something you can never experience on a bus or train. Plus, these travel styles save a ton of money on accommodation and transport, which is perfect for students on a budget.