

Jodie Lilley – CoScan report

I vividly remember the day I got the email from my University telling me that my application had been successful, and that I would be coming to Lund University to undertake a research project in the Evolutionary Ecology department. Applying as a Biology bachelor's student from the University of Manchester, I wasn't sure what to expect from my placement year in Sweden. Would I make any friends? Would I live up to the high standards expected of me? Would I be able to cope with the colder days and shorter daylight hours? The one thing I knew for certain was that I was determined to make the most of this opportunity, and to travel as much as possible.

Waving goodbye to my family at the airport, I was filled with equal parts anxiety and excitement - but my anxieties quickly melted away when I arrived. Immediately, I was taken aback by how beautiful the city



Hiking around Söderåsen in my first week



A trip to the nearby village of Dalby

was. Quaint multi-coloured cottages lined every cobblestoned street, and there were lush patches of greenery left, right and centre. With the sun shining brilliantly, it couldn't be more opposite of what I was used to in Manchester, but it was a very welcome change. My first week was jam-packed with social activities aimed at getting international students integrated into life in Lund. It did a very good job! A lot of the people I met that week went on to become some of my closest friends.



A very windy boat ride through the fjords in Norway

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My first introduction to the Swedish lifestyle was when I asked a stranger in a supermarket what the term 'lagom' meant in a 'lagom ägg', which Google translated as 'so-so eggs'. He was amused that I had somehow managed to ask him about the most quintessential Swedish word; one that doesn't have a direct translation to English. Lagom means 'just the right amount'. It can be applied to so much more than just eggs – it's the Swedish way of living. It's something that I have really valued and appreciated here, especially in the workplace environment. Whilst Swedes are very hardworking people, it isn't so common to see people staying late in the office, pouring all their time and energy into their work. Hobbies and rest time are highly valued here, and I am very thankful for this as it has meant that I have had the flexibility to spend time travelling around Scandinavia.

Once I had gotten settled into work, my first adventure destination was Norway. My inner geography-geek was thriving the whole time, but particularly as we went hiking up Jostedal glacier. Sliding back down in a re-purposed kayak, I felt overwhelmed with how lucky I was to be able to have such memorable experiences like these. We travelled on to Bergen, Oslo, and eventually Voss, rounding off the weekend sampling the local delicacy of brown cheese.



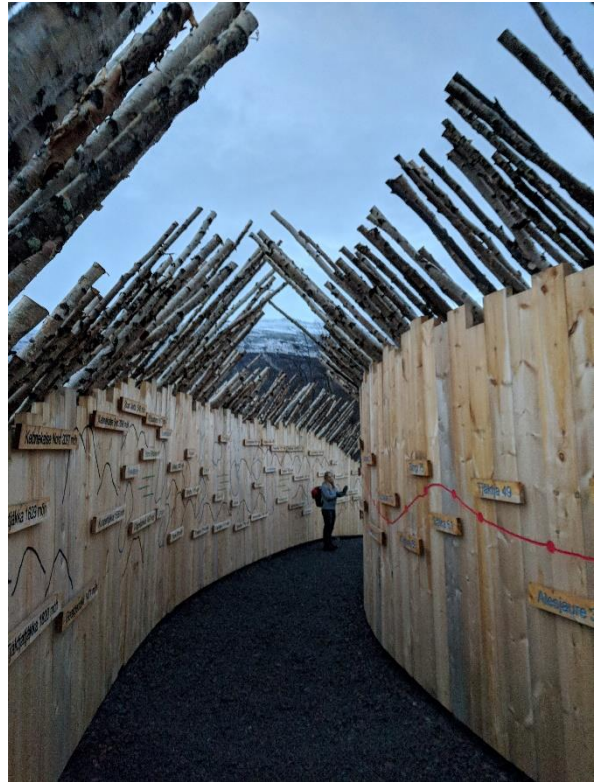
Walking the plank in Norway



Success after reaching the top of Jostedal glacier

My next stop was Kiruna, in Swedish Lapland. Some friends and I stayed in a wooden cabin in the thick of the forest, surrounded by huskies in training to become sled dogs. The highlight of this trip for me was driving a snowmobile over a (barely) frozen lake – I don't think I've ever been so focused in my life as I was behind the wheel of that snowmobile! Although the ground was treacherously slippery, we were determined to go hiking. After reaching the top of the trail in Abisko national park, we realised that we had to somehow get down. It was then that my backside really could have used that re-purposed kayak...

Continuing on with my adventures, I journeyed over to Helsinki for a weekend. Like a true Fin, I found myself plunging into an ice-cold Baltic sea pool, unsure as to why on Earth I had made this decision (although the feeling of ecstasy afterwards was worth it!).



Gorgeous views at Abisko national park

Next, I went to Iceland, visiting all the obligatory geological places of wonder, such as waterfalls, geysers and active volcanoes. The week ended in enchantment as we were lucky enough to spot the northern lights from the hot-tub outside the Airbnb we were staying in, glass of wine-in hand. This was absolutely an experience I was able to tick off my bucket-list.



Waterfall-hopping in Iceland



Bathing in a geothermal hot spring in Iceland



A glimpse of the Northern Lights

When I'm not adventuring, I spend my time working on various research projects at Lund University. I am a part of the plant-insect interaction group, and my specific project looks at the contribution that grey moths (a floral parasite which both lays eggs in and pollinates its host) make to the fitness of its host, woodland star plants, in different populations. It has been an invaluable experience to work alongside scientists and gain insight into what their day-to-day life is like. Weekly departmental seminars give me the opportunity to learn about topics within ecology being studied all over the world, and I have found them truly inspiring.

I feel incredibly fortunate to have been able to combine work, study and pleasure in such a dynamic, adventurous way, seeing parts of the world that I never would otherwise have had the time or opportunity to visit. It's crazy to think that my time here in Sweden began almost eight months ago, even crazier to think it will be over in only three. The time that I have spent here, as cheesy as it is, has genuinely been the best time of my life. I am extremely grateful for CoScan and would like to thank them for supporting me with their generous Travel Grant. I have found a second home in Scandinavia – I'll be back in no time.