

I attended the University of Aberystwyth for one term and absolutely loved it! At UVic I'm a Linguistics major, but I mixed things up in Aber by taking two English modules and an awesome Medieval Welsh History module. Their terms are different from UVic terms, so I started lectures on January 28th and the exam period ended June 2nd. We had 3 or 4 weeks off for Easter break (end of March until mid-April) which is useful for catching up on your studies, but also provides a fantastic opportunity for travel.

University of Aberystwyth campus



I had planned to travel around Europe over Easter Break with friends that I made in Aber, but I ended up getting appendicitis right before the break started, and needed emergency surgery. That was a huge, terrifying shock, but it all turned out well. I called the 24-hour residence helpline and had the porters drive me to the hospital where I was cared for very well. My insurance company didn't even get charged for the surgery, it was completely free since I was a resident of Wales! I even had time after my recovery to enjoy a fun-filled week in Ireland with two fellow exchange student friends.

I lived in Carpenter Hall, an apartment-style building in Seafrost Residences. It was a great location for socializing and shopping for essentials because I lived downtown. The only potential downsides to living in Seafrost Residences are that it's a steep walk up Penglais Hill to get to the university campus, and it can get very windy by the sea... I would definitely recommend a good raincoat for all the rain rather than an umbrella. In any case, the roaring wind can make for entertaining stories, walking to campus is good exercise, and being so close to the beach, clubs, and pubs is very worth it.

Seafrost residences



bedroom in Carpenter Hall



kitchen in Carpenter Hall



Aberystwyth is great for student life. There is always something fun going on, and the drinking culture encourages going out any night of the week! Even on Sunday nights, my friends and I would have a blast doing Karaoke at the Royal Inn-on-the-Pier. You will make tons of friends with other exchange students, and joining clubs at the

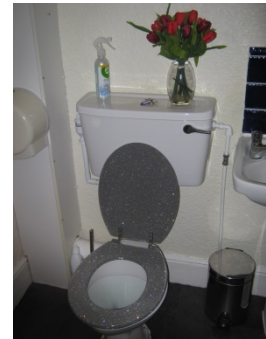
Freshers' Fayre (which should be fairly soon after you arrive) is a good way to connect with UK students, as is getting friendly with your flatmates and with people in your seminar groups.



A good tip before you leave on your exchange would be to buy some essentials online from www.click2campus.com. I bought a bedroom essentials pack (with a comforter, sheets, a pillow, pillow sheet, towels and clothes hangers) and added some electronics in order to get free shipping. Pre-ordering from this site is wise because they will deliver your purchases to residences so that you have bedding when you arrive, and don't need to immediately head out to buy some. Furthermore, you may have the same situation I did, in which you need to arrive in Aber to register before you will be able to move into your residence building. If that's the case, the Maes-y-Mor is a great place to stay for a few days. It's downtown and reasonably priced. My room and the shared bathroom were clean and nice, there's a kitchen you can cook for yourself in, and the owner is very friendly.



Maes-y-Mor



In terms of academics, I really enjoyed the system at Aberystwyth. In addition to lectures, once a week you have a seminar for each module. You'll be divided into smaller groups for seminars and will engage in in-depth discussions of whatever material you've been focusing on in lectures that week. Your seminar tutor will have specific questions for you to discuss with a couple peers, and often will bring in supplementary material (articles, etc) to help contextualize module material. Seminars are mandatory, useful, and aid in befriending people in your program.

Aberystwyth is a small town full of friendly people and fun activities. If going to pubs and clubs isn't your cup of tea, the Commodore cinema plays movies and sells ice cream, and the Arts centre gets good plays, ballets, etc, and plays films as well. There are also very nice walks and hikes in and around Aber. Down by the water there is Constitution Hill which you must hike up before heading back to Canada. It's not a strenuous walk and has a lovely view. Another great hike if you're up for a long walk is the 3 hour (accounting for time to take lots of pictures!) walk to Borth. It's a cute tiny town and the walk there is beautiful. I would also recommend taking the train to Devil's Bridge for some refreshing scenery, including a waterfall, as well as a visit to Tal-y-llyn.

Aberystwyth Castle ruins



On the walk to Borth



Tal-y-llyn



Try to make some Welsh-speaking friends if possible. I heard English spoken more often than Welsh, so you by no means need knowledge of Welsh to get by; however the language is an important and interesting part of the country's culture. I only managed to learn a few phrases while in Aberystwyth, but it seems to be a challenging and beautiful language. It's helpful to even learn about the pronunciation of certain letter combinations so that people will understand you when you talk about different town names, or even buildings.

On a related note, I would highly recommend taking a Welsh history course. The history of Wales is fascinating, and of course it's always a good idea to have some knowledge of the past in order to gain some understanding of the present.

If you're having some doubts about going on a university exchange, try not to worry about it too much. I second-guessed myself many times in the months leading up to my departure for Wales, but in the end, going on this exchange was honestly the best decision I've made in my life so far. It's amazing to live in a different country for a while, and you end up not only learning about other cultures, but also learning a vast amount about yourself. I had so many new and wonderful experiences while abroad, and made friendships that I know will last a lifetime.

Brace yourself for the goodbyes to family and friends here, and for the goodbyes to the close friends over there that you haven't met yet; get your application process dealt with, pack your suitcase, and prepare for the adventure of a lifetime!

Laura