

Introduction

Breanne

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Partner university: University of Essex

Country: England (U.K.)

Major: Computer Science

Dates/term(s) of exchange: October 2012 – June 2013

Preparation for exchange

Information you would have found valuable when planning your exchange:

I really loved going on exchange and would recommend it to anyone, it's the best year of your life you'll ever have! It is a different experience than to be at UVic, but you have the opportunity to travel all over and meet new friends without losing any time working towards your degree! I've only been home a couple of months and I miss it already.

When planning, make sure you apply for your visa early in case anything goes wrong (there were some issues with mine). Apply for accommodation early as well, and plan out what type of accommodation you want (party building, quieter, etc). Make a budget for how much you're planning to spend, and how you're going to spend it. When picking which university to go on exchange to, keep in mind how far it is from the nearest airport, especially airports where budget airlines fly, if you want to travel while abroad. I got the International Student Identity Card, and basically never used it.

Packing, what to bring

Make sure to bring a camera, convertors, and a travel bag (like a large backpack or something for weekend trips) ! Only pack a basic amount of clothing, as hard as it seems, because you will buy quite a bit while you're abroad. Pack photocopies of your passport, health information, banking information, etc in case you need it. Pack photos to decorate your room or other things like that, it really helps with any homesickness at the start. As a rule of thumb, only pack it if you need it right when you arrive, or if you can't buy it abroad.

Travel and transportation

At Essex a bus pass was not included so I didn't buy one. I took the bus into town when I needed, or if there was a group of people, a taxi was usually about the same price sometimes cheaper. Trains are actually more expensive than I thought they would be, but a 16-25 railcard is a must-buy if you're going to be traveling by train, it saves you 1/3 of the price every trip! I used coaches to get to the airport to come home or go on trips, so I also got a Coach Card, also worth it. I also used coaches for two trips to Europe. Fly with Ryan Air or Easy Jet, so cheap if you book ahead. Just keep in mind how far the airport they fly into is from the city, and the cost it will be to get into the city from that airport, when calculating the cheapest route to a destination.

Financial details (i.e. cash/credit card based society, cost of living as compared to Victoria)

Books - per term: \$10 – I only bought one book second term, they don't really use textbooks there or they get you to take them out from the library :D

Accommodation - per month: I paid about 80 pounds a week, so about \$500 a month

Meals - per month: I went out to eat more then I would here, but on groceries I spent about \$200 a month, probably less! Also budget for food when traveling, unless you cook everything at a hostel it will add up as well.

Local transportation - per month: I took a cab back and forth to rowing once a week for about \$8, the bus is about \$5 for a return trip into town, and a return trip into London is about \$40 without a railcard or about \$29 with a railcard. A day pass for transportation in London costs about \$8 or \$10 without a railcard.

Health insurance - per term: UVic health care covered this, I think it's \$144 a term?

Personal spending - per term: The shopping here is so good, and you will go out a lot, so I'd say about \$200? Plus traveling? But this could be a lot more or less depending on you.

Communications (phone, etc.) - per term: I paid 10 pounds so about \$15 a month for my pay as you go phone, and the phone cost 15 pounds.

During Exchange

Arrival and orientation

I had friends of friends pick me up at the airport and I stayed with them for a few days before they helped me move into university. I would recommend getting there a few days early at least if you can to acclimatize yourself to the country before moving onto campus. However, I know quite a few people who took the coach that Essex provided from the University, and would definitely have taken that if I hadn't had the opportunity I had. I wouldn't recommend using public transportation yourself right after stepping off the plane unless you have to, although it's super easy to use once you've figured it out!

The orientation was a general one for all first years with some extra info sessions and meet and greets for international or exchange students, and it was good enough!

England isn't super different from Canada, but it is more different then you would think! I think I adjusted pretty quickly, but everyone is different. It helps to make friends from North America who are going through the same things and miss the same things to talk to, otherwise there is a student support centre on campus.

Accommodation and living

There are various styles of housing available and so there is something for everyone. You can move in the day before Fresher's week starts, and then classes start the next week, so it's ample time. There are no meal plans, you get self-catered residences, but there are food outlets like little cafes and pubs on campus if you need food, as well as a shop where you could buy basic groceries if needed. The university is pretty small, so most residences are super close. South Towers are closest I think. Quays are way off campus, like a 20 minute walk, so I wouldn't want that at all. I was in South Towers, it was cheapest, but it's very loud with lots of first years partying all the time. It's also fun though!! North Towers is almost the same. My floor flooded near the end of my exchange so I also got to stay in South Courts, the nicest one, and it was nice to have an ensuite then. If you want to meet lots of people go with the Towers (even if you don't want to party all the time, just buy some earplugs and it's still good!), the Houses and South Towers have less people (about 6 compared to about 14 in the Towers) and have ensuite, so they're a bit quieter.

Academic details (lecture format, schedules, grading, etc.)

Smaller classes, but same lecture/ tutorial style. Mostly less assignments and more emphasis on tests. Much less class time. They grade more difficultly but a 40% is a pass so it evens out. I would recommend taking a class you wouldn't be able to take at Uvic while abroad, a friend told me this, and I think it's great advice.

Country information (culture, weather, places to visit, etc.)

England is a great place to travel around, I didn't see nearly as much as I wanted to! So make sure in between traveling all over Europe you save some time to go around England too :) The weather is very similar to Victoria in Essex, a bit rainy, humid. I would make sure to visit London as much as possible, there is SO much going on there, there is always something you haven't seen. My favorite experience is walking across Waterloo Bridge, it has great views on either side of the city skyline, it's just magical. Go to the free museums there, Oxford Street has amazing shopping, Camden is such a cool area, etc. I also loved Bath, get afternoon tea at the Jane Austen Tea Room. However I thought Cambridge was a bit boring. Trains and coaches are a great way to get around. Near the Uni is Wivenhoe, and it's a super cute town to walk around!

Culture wise, it's sort of similar to Canada, but with lots of different quirks as well, like different words, different foods, etc. Try bakewell tarts, they're delicious!! The language is fun once you figure out what some of their slang means. You can get anything you'll ever need at Tesco.

Social and extra-curricular activities.

Sports clubs and societies are a big deal in the UK. There is a club for everything, and everyone is part of one. They do so many social activities in the clubs, so I would 100% recommend joining one you like!! As well, all sports teams are recreational, so anyone can join. I had never rowed before and I joined rowing. I don't even like sports that much and I really stress joining a team for the social experience!!

The Brits also love to drink. There are two clubs on campus, and this is normal in the UK, and everyone goes out on campus really. It's convenient and super crazy fun.

Reflection After Exchange

What you've learned and the challenges you faced

I've learned that I can handle situations on my own, and how to go with the flow. I also learned that it's not hard to meet friends if you put yourself out there a bit.

What you wish you knew before you left

I wish I knew how fast it goes by, to make sure to enjoy every second! And go for a Cream Tea (scones) at the Wivenhoe House on campus, best thing you'll ever eat and you feel like you're in a house straight out of *Pride and Prejudice* ;) Also, try to stop automatically converting to CAD, otherwise everything seems super expensive, this took me awhile.

Words of wisdom for other students

Make sure you make local friends too! Lots of exchange students stick with other international students, but you get much more cultural immersion hanging out with Brits. It's nice to have some North American friends who are going through the same thing as you though. Don't be afraid to be different, or to be brave, or to have fun, because that's what your year is all about. You make amazing friends and see amazing places, and grow as a person. You also find out how incredible Canada is, be proud to be Canadian!

Photos



Colchester High Street



Afternoon Tea at the Wivenhoe House on campus



Rowing



Traveling