

**Introduction:**

My name is Jessica. I am working on completing my BFA with a combined degree in Visual Arts and Computer Science. Last spring semester, I participated in the UVic Visual Arts exchange to Robert Gordon University (Gray's School of Art) in Aberdeen, Scotland. I was abroad for just over four months, from January 22 until June 5, 2013.

**Before Exchange:**

One issue I had before my exchange was how delayed the application process was for my particular university. I was accepted to the UVic exchange program in mid February 2012, but couldn't complete my RGU application until the beginning of October, and left in January. So that was a tad stressful. With the application process being so delayed, applying for a Visa would've been impossible. Luckily I was only going for a semester, so didn't need a full Student Visa. On that note, better communication on Visa requirements would've been helpful. I had a run in with the RGU exchange office regarding Visas and Enrollment, two days before I was supposed to leave. The UK Border Agency website was helpful, but I kept getting conflicting information about what exactly I needed. It all worked out in the end thankfully.

As far as packing, I basically just packed all of my warmest clothing. I tried to bring things that were interchangeable and would be appropriate for multiple situations, since I could only bring one suitcase. I made sure I had a fair bit of cash handy in case anything came up financially (didn't end up being necessary but good to be cautious). My flights were a bit hectic - try and make sure you have more than a half an hour layover, especially in Heathrow airport!

**During Exchange:**

I signed up for an RGU representative to meet me at the Aberdeen Airport. It wasn't completely necessary information-wise, but it was really nice to have someone there to meet. I opted for a taxi to my accommodations just for ease of use. I highly recommend taking advantage of University Accommodations if they're available, again just for ease. Also a great way to meet people. My accommodations were clean, and close to both the city centre and campus.

General Orientation and enrollment were well laid out and fairly organised. This was just to get a student card and submit all the necessary paperwork. The first day of classes I had a meeting with the heads of my program which was more useful for getting specific information about what my semester was going to look like. All of the staff and my fellow studio mates were so friendly and welcoming, which really made me feel hopeful and confident.

The art school was set up very differently from UVic, as well as from other faculties within RGU I think. I was given a studio space to set up in. We had one, one-hour lecture on art theory a week, one all-day drawing day on Mondays, then a short meeting one on one with our tutor (instructor) every week to check in on our progress. The rest of the time was our own. I found this flexibility awesome since it gave me a chance to go travelling a lot since I wasn't restricted so much by lecture times. The grading was fairly simple as well - so long as we showed up and worked and got all our work/projects done by the middle and end of term, it was fine. We had an end of term assessment, at which time the tutors viewed all of our work as a whole and gave us a grade based on a set rubric.

The weather and culture in Aberdeen were very similar to Victoria - wet and windy.

Transportation was never an issue. The buses were quite expensive but I managed to find a bike for the semester which was definitely the way to go. As I said, pretty much every person that I met was very friendly. There were a lot of amazing things to see in and around Aberdeen, but once I got the travelling bug I didn't stick around much. It was also a

great place to be situated in terms of travelling, because it was fairly central. There were a lot of bike routes to surrounding towns which my friend and I took advantage of and a lot of bus/train/ferry routes to the rest of Scotland. I had a friend to travel with (also from UVic doing Arts) and it was great to have a buddy to share planning, costs, and ideas. A lot of the other exchange students had different schedules and my Aberdeen friends were in school mode, with no extra time and money for travelling. Aberdeen also has a huge student population, so the days/evenings when I wasn't travelling, there was always fun cultural and social activities to go to. It was also useful at first, to join the new student and exchange student facebook pages to get info on events happening.

**After Exchange:**

Having been back now for a few months, it all seems like a bit of a dream. All of the challenges I faced were mostly travel or documentation related, which really taught me how to be more relaxed as a person. Adaptability was a huge part of my experience for sure. I think the unknown is the worst part of embarking on such a journey but I came home with a much better understanding of myself, other people and other cultures. Every person you talk to beforehand tells you how amazing and life changing travel will be, but you really have no idea until you experience it for yourself. I think the best thing I've taken away from this trip, is meeting people and hearing their stories. I made some truly lifelong friends and feel like I got to fully experience Scottish culture because of those friends.

I think the absolute best advice I got before I went was to never say no (within reason of course). If someone invites you to something, be it to an event, for dinner at the pub, to a concert, on a trip...whatever - just do it! you never know what it will add to the experience and chances are good it won't detract from it.

Photos:

-Me, posing with the cover of Lonely Planet Scotland, at the same spot.



-My tutors and I at my end of term assessment



-Participating in an Exchange student photo challenge, posing with a couple locals in the oldest pub in Aberdeen



-Cycling in the Scottish countryside



-Birthday Celebrations with my close Scottish friend



-Haggis (delicious)



-RGU Accommodations - my kitchen and living space



-The studios (I think we were there for a meeting)



-one of the few sunny and warm days we had, closer to summer, walking along the river  
Dee

