

Michaela - University of Strathclyde

Introduction

- Partner university, country, your major/faculty, dates/term(s) of exchange.

From January to June 2013 I did an exchange semester at the University of Strathclyde in Glasgow. I am in the Faculty of Humanities at Uvic, and while abroad I took courses in History and Sociology.

Preparation for exchange

- Information you would have found valuable when planning your exchange

At first it was a little unclear whether I needed to get a student Visa and health insurance for my term abroad, but I did some research online and found out that since I would be in the UK for under 6 months, I did not need a Visa (I classified as a "Student Visitor"). Additionally, since I was a Student Visitor, I was not covered under the National Health Service and was required to buy health insurance before I went abroad.

- Packing, what to bring

I definitely overpacked for my exchange. I didn't count on doing so much shopping while I was abroad, and as a result I had to bring an extra bag home with me. Looking back, I realize I should have left some room in my bags for bringing things home.

In terms of what to bring, since Scotland is known for being fairly cold and rainy, I would recommend packing plenty of cozy sweaters and a good winter coat (waterproof). Also, sturdy rain boots are a necessity. Even in May, Glasgow wasn't particularly warm (some days felt like January) so I didn't find myself wanting to wear shorts or summer dresses. If you're planning a

trip to a warm destination on spring break or at the end of your exchange however, those are clothing items you should bring.

- Travel and transportation

I barely ever used public transport in Glasgow because it is a very walkable city. There is a subway that goes around the city in a circular route, but I only ever used it if my friends and I were going to the West End and didn't feel like walking for 35-40 mins.

When you arrive at Glasgow International Airport, there is a shuttle that can take you right to the city centre, just a few minutes walk from Strathclyde. A cab into the city would be about 25-30 pounds and the bus is 8 pounds, so it's definitely cheaper.

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

I found Glasgow to be fairly cheap for buying groceries and basic necessities. At the pound store (Pound Land) you can buy packs of toilet paper and paper towel rolls for one pound each, and other things such as dish soap and snacks. I did most of my grocery shopping at Sainsbury's and found the prices to be very reasonable. I probably spent about 40 pounds a week on groceries. Both cash and credit are accepted pretty much everywhere, but I found using my credit card more convenient.

During Exchange

- Arrival and orientation

I think there were two orientation sessions when I first arrived in Glasgow. We were just given basic info, like how to

sign up for courses, where to go for academic advising, good resources for international students, etc. It was moderately helpful so I would recommend going to any orientation sessions you can.

- Accommodation and living

I lived on campus in Birkbeck Court, which is the cheapest group of buildings to live in on campus, and which houses many international students. Each flat in Birkbeck Court had 6 bedrooms, 1 common area/kitchen, one toilet room and one shower room. All of my roommates were international: 2 other Canadians, 2 New Zealanders and 1 American. We all had different schedules so sharing one shower between six girls wasn't really an issue, and we all got along really well. They turned out to be my best friends on exchange and I did lots of traveling with them.

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

Academics in the UK are quite different from Uvic. A full course load is 3 courses, and lecture/grading style is very different. A 40 is a pass, and an 80 is basically unattainable. I received a 70 on one of my papers, and that is considered a very good mark in the UK. Instead of textbooks we were given reading lists for books that we could find at the library, and there was less emphasis on learning from the instructors in lectures, and more on doing research and reading on your own time. Also, my courses had only two pieces of work that we were graded on -- generally for Humanities courses it will be a paper that is worth 40% and a final exam that is worth 60%.

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

The culture in Scotland wasn't shockingly different from Canada, but one thing you will definitely have to get used to is the Glaswegian accent. It sounds like an entirely different

language when you first hear it! Also, there is much more casual/social drinking in Scotland; I found myself having a drink about 3 times a week (usually out for dinner or at a pub with friends), as opposed to less than once a week here. The Scots are SO friendly so make some Scottish friends if you can!

During spring break my boyfriend came to visit me in Scotland and we rented a car and did a 6 day road trip, of which our time was spent mostly in Glencoe and the Isle of Skye. Both places were so beautiful, and we did lots of hiking and sightseeing. Additionally, there is a company in Glasgow called Student Tours Scotland that does tons of day trips to destinations in Scotland including Edinburgh, St. Andrews, Loch Ness, Isle of Bute, etc. The tour guide, Gary, is really knowledgeable and funny so I would recommend doing as many tours with him as you can!

- Social and extra-curricular activities.

There are international student pub nights every week where you can go and meet other international students and there are usually costume contests and pub quizzes.

Also if you buy a gym pass, exercise classes are included with the price of the pass so it's a really good value. About 50 pounds for the whole semester. There are spin classes, yoga classes, aerobics, etc. and it's a great way to stay active.

Reflection After Exchange

- What you've learned and the challenges you faced

I learned to take advantage of any travel opportunities I get. When you're living in Europe it's so easy to take amazing trips, even if it's just for the weekend! I had some incredible weekend trips, including Dublin, Paris, London and Belfast. RyanAir and EasyJet have some really good rates. School work and studying is important, but also try to have lots of fun and make the most of your time abroad.

My biggest challenge was missing people at home, but Skype and Facebook make it easy to keep in touch, plus my roommates became almost like family to me, so they were a great support system. The exchange semester flies by so quickly, so try not to spend too much time on the computer talking with all your friends back home.

- What you wish you knew before you left

I wish I knew I would be taking a two week long trip to Greece at the end of my semester so that I would have packed some summer clothes -- I ended up having to buy all the clothes for my trip! Just be prepared for any last minute trips you decide to plan.

- Words of wisdom for other students

Try not to get too hung up over money/a budget. Sure, you want to come back with some money still in your bank account, but don't pass up too many dinners/nights out or travel opportunities because you're trying to save your money. You might regret it when your exchange is over!









