



My Exchange Evaluation

Basic Information

Host University	University of Edinburgh
Semester & Year of Exchange	Otago Semester 2/Edinburgh Semester 1 2022
Otago degree(s)	Bachelor of Arts and Science
Major(s)	Chemistry and Economics

Academics/ course load

Which papers did you take whilst on exchange?

Course title	Language of instruction	Otago equivalent
Modern Middle Eastern History A: Domestic Transformation and International Challenges	English	
Scottish Studies 1A: Conceptualising Scotland	English	
Structural Transformation in the Labour Market	English	ECON301: Labour Economics

Total Otago credits gained: 54 points 72 points 108 points _____

Any comments about these papers?

I enjoyed all my papers and although I went on exchange primarily to travel I was surprised by how much I enjoyed the academic side of things. Scottish Studies was a great paper to learn about Scottish culture and history and to also meet other exchange students so I would especially recommend that one.

My labour economics papers was very interesting however I would caution any Otago economics students considering taking Edinburgh 300/400 level economics papers. The level of maths required is very high and much higher than Otago expects and teaches (even the Otago “mathematical”

economics papers don't prepare you). They require you to have done at minimum first year calculus and statistics maths papers to be accepted onto their courses but despite having done these at Otago (and receiving high grades) I found myself behind Edinburgh students and exchange students from Europe. This was ok in the end but I had to do lots of work to catch up which was stressful at times and I would have rather been doing other things! So my advice would be to do your economics papers at Otago and then do optional papers on exchange.

How did the academic experience/ workload/ style of teaching differ from Otago?

The structure of the papers was very similar to Otago with lectures and tutorials. Both my History and Scottish Studies papers were first year so were very manageable and there was lots of support. Both of those papers also had take home exams which was nice. My economics paper had a take home midterm but then had an in person exam on the 17th of December which was quite annoying because it meant I couldn't travel in the exam period like other exchange students could.

Overall I had a great academic experience. There is a much bigger emphasis on independent learning with the majority of study being expected to be completed in your own time. Readings were actually compulsory and were examined even if when they didn't come up in lectures. I would say Edinburgh is more academically rigorous than Otago with higher expectations about standard of work but all my lecturers were very approachable and happy to answer questions. In general Edinburgh students are quite engaged with their studies and due to it being an academically selective university the average student is quite smart. Students asked lots of questions in lectures and many went beyond assigned readings for things like tutorials. I really enjoyed this aspect of my exchange and made some great friends in my papers.

Accommodation

What accommodation did you stay in? What were the pros and cons of your accommodation?

I stayed at Haddington Place which was a privately run hall that is contracted by the University of Edinburgh to provide accommodation to students. Haddington was a mixture of flats and studios and also had a cinema room, common room, study room and gym onsite. It was definitely one of the nicer halls. In general I would say there is a larger range in hall standard (both better and worse) than Otago. But the prices of the halls also differ considerably, I stayed in one of the more expensive options but there were lots that were cheaper if you were happy to share bathrooms/live in an old building. When applying for accommodation you put down 5 options but you couldn't rank them in terms of preference so it's a bit of luck where you end up. I had friends in other halls and on the whole most people were happy enough with where they lived. In general halls in Edinburgh tended to not really have hall cultures and it felt like flatting. The only exception would be Pollock Halls which are catered so are more expensive and had a reputation of attracting English first years interested in partying.

At Haddington I was in a flat of 6 and we all had our own small ensuites attached to our bedrooms. We then shared a kitchen/living room which had two ovens/stoves and two fridge freezers which was more than enough room for 6 people. I was actually the only exchange student in my flat but I quickly became very close friends with two of my flatmates and we did loads of exploring together and numerous flat dinners/movie nights. Unlike at home the hall didn't really offer any activities it was very much just a block of flats which made it hard to meet others. A slightly annoying thing as an

exchange student was that the hall didn't provide any bedding or kitchenware so you had to buy it all which felt quite wasteful as I was only there for a semester. I was lucky that my flatmates let me borrow lots of their kitchen stuff but I did feel guilty throwing away things at the end of the semester.

Haddington Place was a 25 minute walk from the main uni campus in George Square. However it was in the centre of Edinburgh itself and was close to Princes street for shopping and New town with loads of cute brunch places and parks. I actually really enjoyed the walk to uni from my hall as you walked through the old town and the Royal mile which was a stunning way to start and end the day! If you didn't want to walk there was a bus that went directly to the university but I hardly used it.

Money matters

Please detail your basic costs, e.g. accommodation, flights, visa, food, insurance

Unfortunately my exchange was very expensive. Part of this was due to COVID uncertainties meaning I wasn't sure if my exchange would go ahead so I had to book my flights relatively late (booked in May for August departure) and demand was very high due to lots of people wanting to leave NZ. Also the UK was in a cost of living crisis and inflation was at 10% so food costs etc increased a lot even within the 4 months I was there. In general Edinburgh is quite an expensive city so I would highly recommend to save as much as possible before your exchange so you can make the most of it!

Flights: Dunedin to London return: \$6,000 NZD (this was very eek, normally it's not this much!)

Accommodation at Haddington Place for one semester: \$5,500 NZD

Insurance: \$650 NZD

Groceries: £50 GBP per week doing a main shop at Lidl (discount supermarket) and then eating out a couple of times.

What means did you use to access your finances? What would you recommend? (Credit card, Cash passport, foreign bank account, etc.)

I used Wise. This was a debit card that you can load as many currencies as you want onto which was good when travelling to other countries. The exchange rates are fair, the fees are low compared to other travel cards and they have an app that is very easy to use. I had no problem using my card everywhere and hardly ever needed to use cash. I think since COVID nearly everywhere accepts card and some places didn't take cash as all.

Visas & Insurance

Did you have to apply for a visa? What was the process?

No, as I wasn't there for over 6 months.

Did your host university have a mandatory insurance?

Don't think so. I had my Otago recommended exchange insurance anyway.

Extra-curricular/Social Activities

What organised activities were available to students? What extra-curricular activities would you recommend to future exchange students?

The number one organisation I would suggest any exchange student to join is the Erasmus Society. This is a volunteer run organisation which takes its name from the European Union university exchange programme, however any exchange or international student can join. They organise trips and social activities every week of the semester. I went on 6 trips around Scotland with Erasmus. 5 were Saturday daytrips and went to places throughout the Highlands and beyond including Loch Lomond, Glencoe, Glenfinnan, Oban, Inverary, Inverness, Loch Ness, Dunnottar Castle and St Andrews. I also went on an overnight weekend Erasmus trip to the Isle of Skye which was incredible. The Erasmus trips are run by a student tours company so you travel in buses with a guide and I found them to be very well organised and really enjoyable. I didn't know anyone when I showed up for my first trip but you quickly make friends on the bus as everyone is in the same boat and are keen to meet new people. It was a super fun and affordable way to see Scotland and meet other exchange students, would 100% recommend. The Erasmus trips are very popular and sold out very fast (e.g within minutes for some of them!) so make sure you keep an eye on their Facebook and Instagram for info on when tickets are released. They also run lots of other events including board game nights, pub crawls, day walks near Edinburgh etc so a great way to meet others and have fun.

There are lots of other clubs and societies at Edinburgh, Freshers fair was a really good way of finding out what's on offer and most offered some kind of trial session/event to see what they were about. I went to a number of events for various clubs and they were all welcoming. I didn't properly join any clubs other than Erasmus as I found myself too busy doing other things but I heard good things from lots of friends.

What was the university/ city like?

I loved Edinburgh as a city. I think it was the perfect size as it was big enough to have everything you need and lots to see and do but was compact enough to be able to walk to lots of places. I really enjoyed exploring the history of Edinburgh especially the old town, castle and palace. I felt very safe walking around on my own including at night-time as the streets were well lit and there were always people about. There was also great pubs and nightlife so I would really recommend the city for a young person.

The University of Edinburgh had a main campus in George Square and then several other campuses elsewhere. I had all my classes either at George Square or the Old College which is the really pretty part of the university that they put in all their promotional photos. I would recommend studying in the law library in the Old College as its very pretty and atmospheric! There is also a great pub on the George Square campus called the Library bar which is run by the students association and has discounted drinks and meals and is in a really pretty old stone building.

Any recommendations for things to do, places to visit, places to eat etc.?

Definitely explore what's on offer in Edinburgh. I would especially recommend exploring Newtown, Deans village and the old town. The National Museum of Scotland, portrait gallery and national gallery are all really good and free to go too. Edinburgh castle, Holyrood Palace, the Georgian House and Gladstones Land are also really great but they have admission costs. I also did the Real Mary Kings Close tour in the old town which was good but quite pricy. The open top bus tour was free in freshers week and a good way to learn about the history of Edinburgh and work out your way round the city. Make sure to walk up Arthurs Seat for a great view of the city. The Pentlands regional park is just outside Edinburgh and a great place for day walks and can be accessed by bus.

I did day trips to Glasgow and Stirling Castle which were both worth a visit. I went on several Erasmus organised trips to the Highlands including the Isle of Skye as well as to Dunnottar Castle and St Andrews on the East Coast which were all really good. I would definitely recommend seeing as much of Scotland as you can, especially the Highlands as they really are beautiful.

I would recommend going to a cèilidh at some point which is a Scottish dance night where you do traditional dancing to a live band. Several student groups organise them and they are lots of fun even if you are a terrible dancer like I am!

I found eating out in Edinburgh to be really expensive compared to home. However I still managed to find some good places. I would recommend Salut near the main campus which is a super cute family run café that has really good students deals for lunch, their Chai Lattes were actually incredible. The student association owned Library bar was super cute especially at Christmas as they had loads of decorations and Christmas themed drinks and cocktails. As well as drinks they also served food and had lots of daily meal deals. Ting Thai Caravan was a great thai restaurant that is really popular with students and wasn't too expensive. For a traditional Scottish meal I would recommend Makars Mash Bar in the old town which serves traditional food including haggis and was really good. S Luca is a really good independent ice-cream and chocolate café.

Any tips for future students?

Apply for a "Young Scot" card even if you are only there for a semester. You can apply online and its free. If you are under 22 the card means you have free bus and tram travel throughout Scotland which will save you lots. Even if you are over 22 the card still gets you big discounts including £1 entry into lots of tourist attractions like Edinburgh Castle, Stirling Castle and National Trust for Scotland properties which saves you lots of money.

If you will be taking trains around the UK you can buy a railcard for £30 (you can get them cheaper on sale at the start of the semester) which gives you a 33% discount on all your train tickets. If you take a few trains you will definitely save a lot as tickets can be quite expensive.

A general tip I would have is to make sure you actually explore Edinburgh and Scotland as there is so much to do and you will be living in an incredible place. I had a number of exchange student friends who went away to other countries nearly every weekend of the semester and got to the end of their exchange and realised they hadn't done lots of the things they would have liked to in Edinburgh and hadn't explored Scotland. If you can I would try and save most of your international travel for either before or after your exchange semester so you can really make the most of immersing yourself in a new country.

Overall Experience

Please write one paragraph (or more) about your exchange experience. Please include some photos!

My exchange was by far and away the highlight of my time at university. I was really nervous before I went and it was hard starting from scratch and not knowing anyone but it was so worth it. I visited amazing places and got to explore a brand new city, country and culture as well as travel to other countries before and after my exchange. I made lots of close friends and learnt about their cultures and where they came from. It's important to remember that it won't be super fun all of the time and at the start when you don't know anyone it can be really hard but as cheesy as it sounds you do really learn a lot about yourself from those moments and I feel much more confident and resilient as a result.

If you are in any way considering going on exchange then do it, I promise you won't regret it! I feel so lucky to have been able to spend a semester in Edinburgh and I will look back at my exchange with such fond memories for a very long time to come.