

Student Exchange Evaluation

Basic information

Otago degree: BA, with a double major of Classics and Art History

Host university: University of Edinburgh (Edinburgh, Scotland)

Date of exchange: first semester 2018 (January – June)

Academics/course load

Course title	Language	Otago equivalent	Otago credit value
Roman Architecture (CACA10036)	English	CLAS300	24
History of Art 1B (HIAR08011)	English	ARTV100	24
How to Make Italian Renaissance Art (HIAR10114)	English	ARTV300	24

A full course at Edinburgh is considered three papers, as opposed to the four papers at Otago. They recommend for visiting students, if it is possible, to take only two Honours-level papers (third and fourth year) and then one first- or second-year paper. A note on choosing papers: at least for my subjects, the courses filled up very quickly, so try to choose them as early as you can.

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

My academic experience didn't differ greatly from Otago. Blackboard was used, and it was similar in terms of teaching hours: three lectures and a tutorial for the 100-level course, and then at 300-level it was two hours per week per course. The Honours-level courses were smaller, and participating by answering questions was encouraged (but class engagement wasn't marked). Of the three, only the first-year paper was recorded. It differed slightly in that there was only one internally assessed assignment (an essay) and then the rest of the grade comes from the end of semester exam (about 50-50). I think the marking is a bit tougher: 70 and above is an A grade. My grades did drop lower than they tend to be at Otago – but then I was also travelling more, and conscious that it's only a pass or fail mark recorded on my Otago transcript!

Accommodation

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

There is a variety of accommodation available for visiting students in Edinburgh. The university owns and/or has contracts with a variety of accommodation types (see accom.ed.ac.uk/for-students/search-for-accommodation/), but there is also the option of staying in a private flat, or a privately-run student hall of residence.

When applying for Edinburgh University, you have the option of selecting your five preferred university accommodation options, and then (in theory) you should be offered a place in one of them. Once offered, it's a take it or leave it situation – if you don't like the offer, then you have to find alternative accommodation not run by the university. I was offered a place in a hall that was not one of my five options, and after reading reviews I decided to turn down the offer as it didn't sound that great, and I had the back-up option of staying with a relative nearby.

When I got to Edinburgh I decided it might be worth seeing if there were any private flats available – there were plenty but a good majority were either very expensive, only for long-term rent, far from the university, or just not very nice. I wasn't looking at the best time: looking for and arranging flats should be done months in advance of the start of the university year (September), rather than halfway through it. I decided to ask the university accommodation centre if they had any spaces left in their accommodation – they got back to me quickly with a number of options, and I ended up staying in Murano, a university-run hall of residence on Leith Walk.

Murano was great; unlike many of the other halls, it's very modern (built 2015), and all the rooms have an ensuite bathroom, complete with shower. I stayed in a four-person flat, which, given we each had our own bathrooms, meant sharing only a spacious kitchen/living area, which comes with a 40" flat screen TV. (Flats can range from 3 to 6 person, or you can choose the studio option, where it's a one-person flat). Like other uni accommodation, it comes with appliances like fridge, Hoover, oven, iron, kettle, microwave, bed, desk, chair etc., but not crockery, cutlery, or bedding. There are plenty of op-shops on Leith Walk to supply these – or even better, the Free Shop, held at the beginning of semester at uni – where items that past students (deliberately) left behind are laid out for current students to take. Not only is it great because it's recycling, it's

also completely free! Budget-friendly new homewares can be topped up at Primark (on Princes Street), at Tesco or the pound-shops down at the end of Leith Walk.

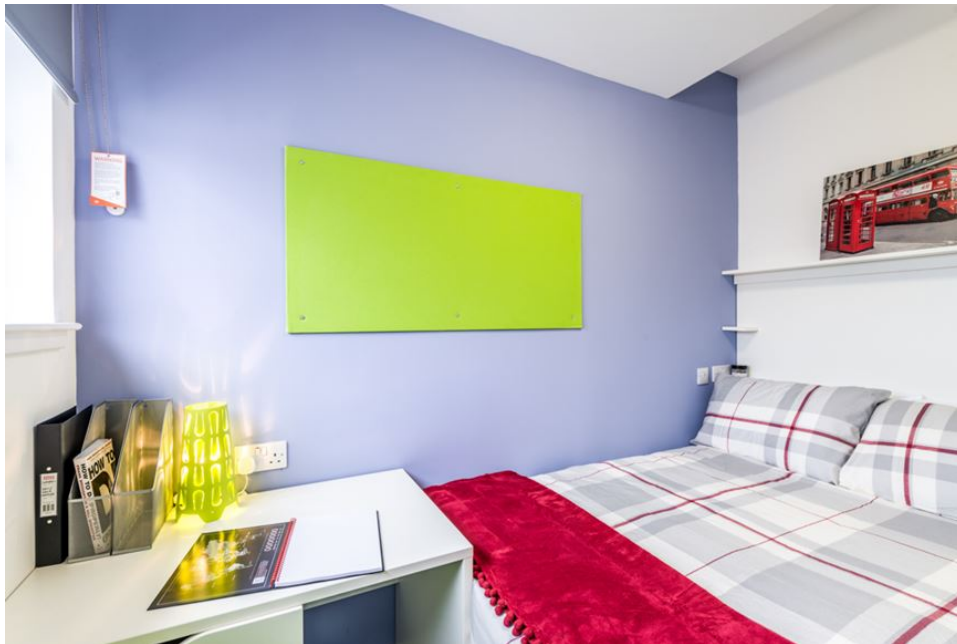
Murano also includes a common room, a laundry (card-operated), helpful staff and RAs, as well as a cleaner who comes weekly to clean the communal areas of the flat. There's a bus stop right outside, which can take you directly to the uni in about 20 minutes, or you can do the 30 minute walk if you're feeling energetic (or just do it back from uni, as it's downhill all the way). In terms of daily living, it's very conveniently located: "express" versions of Tesco and Sainsbury's within two minutes walk (and a large Tesco a ten minute walk down Leith Walk), and lots of cafes, pubs, and other shops nearby.

I think really the only downside is the expense: I stayed for about four and a half months in total, for the cost of just under \$6000, so c. \$320 a week. However, considering that the price does include all utility bills, internet, a weekly clean of the kitchen, secure grounds, warm rooms, contents insurance, ensuite bathroom, a support system, and good location, I think it would be very difficult to find a flat with all of Murano's advantages for anything less than that price in Edinburgh. For more information, see:

accom.ed.ac.uk/property-details/55/murano-murano-amphion-lane-edinburgh/;

libertyliving.co.uk/student-accommodation/edinburgh/liberty-village/





(Not my photos – they're from the accommodation website to give a rough idea of Murano).

Money matters

As mentioned, I spent about \$6000 on accommodation for the semester. The next big cost was travel: I went from Auckland to Glasgow with Emirates for about \$1300 – as I booked about six months before I left (trying to avoid an increase in prices as it got closer to January) I wasn't able to book a return at that time as the flight dates weren't released at that stage. For my return flight I booked through STA, as through them I could access a student discount as well as my travel insurance. The return flight (London to Christchurch with Emirates) was \$1000, and for the travel insurance you have a number of different options, (I went for the comprehensive cover at just under \$500). In summary, expect to spend at least \$2000 on air travel costs (depending on airline and at what time you book), and then another couple of hundred for the travel insurance.

For food costs and other household necessities, I'd say I spent between \$60 and \$80 per week (I have to eat gluten free which raises the cost a bit; side note, there are so many gluten free products available in the UK!) Another frequent cost was transport; as I used the bus a lot (at least in winter when it was cold), the most cost-effective option was to buy a monthly bus card for about \$98, which gives you unlimited travel on all Edinburgh buses and trams for four weeks (lothianbuses.com/tickets/). (Another side note: the public transport in and around Edinburgh is fantastic). Train tickets to visit family outside of Edinburgh were under \$20 for a return. Speaking of trains, if you want to take the train down to London, make sure you go through Unidays so you get a 40% student discount – it's then just about the same cost of flying down – and so much nicer with the scenery, and none of the tedious security, waiting, and travel to and from airports (myunidays.com/GB/en-GB/partners/virgintrains/view/online).

In terms of paying for things, I went with a Loaded for Travel card (loadedfortravel.co.nz), which you load up from your NZ bank account with any currency you want, and then just use it like an ordinary bank card. I used it mostly for the rent payment instalments. As a UK citizen, it was easy enough to set up my own bank account when I got there – I went with the Bank of Scotland and just needed my passport as proof of identity. Visiting students who aren't UK citizens can also set up an account – if you're staying in university accommodation, a letter for proof of address is provided, as well as the list of banks that will accept you.

Visas & Insurance

As a UK citizen I did not need to apply for a visa – and, I may be wrong, but I don't think NZ citizens need to apply for a visa either if they're staying for less than six months. Insurance was recommended by Edinburgh University (but not enforced). I got travel insurance through STA (statravel.co.nz), which covered all of Otago University's requirements – go in and see them, they are very helpful!

Extra-curricular/Social Activities

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

The university has a number of clubs and societies, and organises loads of events for students (ed.ac.uk/studying/undergraduate/student-life/clubs-and-societies). I went to a ceilidh (you have to try it at least once!), tried salsa dancing, and went on one of the International Centre's trips. They have many throughout the year to locations around Scotland, sometimes just for the day, some over the weekend (edinburghisc.com/trips/). I went on a two-day, overnight trip to the Isle of Skye. I would definitely recommend doing at least one of their trips: it's great to have a little break away from uni and the city, and it's so easy as everything is organised for you. The fee includes coach travel, tour guide, overnight accommodation, and a packed schedule of sights to see. Just be sure to buy tickets as soon as they're released online as they go quickly! I also attended art classes at the Leith School of Art (not associated with the uni), which were fantastic (leithschoolofart.co.uk/course-types/short-courses).

What was the university/ city like?

What I love about Edinburgh is the architecture – Medieval alleys and buildings, cobbled streets, elegant Georgian terraces, castles, and gardens throughout. It's got a rich history, and a nice feel to the city. In terms of activities, there's something for everyone in Edinburgh, whatever your interests may be. There's an abundance of great cafes, bars, and restaurants for socialising, theatres and cinemas (showing recent releases, and smaller ones showing avant-garde or classic films), big chain stores and smaller quirky shops, parks and gardens, and of course all the classic tourist spots like the Royal Mile,

Edinburgh Castle, and so on (advisable to do before the peak tourist season over summer). My recommendations:

- For a rainy, cold day (of which there were many!): explore the great museums and art galleries (as well as their respective cafes and gift shops);
- Want to relax? Try the world's (unofficially) comfiest cinema seats at the Vue Cinema in Ocean Terminal Mall in Leith;
- Feeling peckish? great coffee (and lovely building) at the National Museum, or brunch at the Printworks down in Leith;
- Want to be creative? Take a weekend workshop at the Leith School of Art;
- Make the most of a nice day: stroll or picnic in the Meadows or Botanic Gardens;
- But also get out of Edinburgh! Visit the stunning countryside nearby, other cities of the UK, or make the most of being so much closer to Europe (or even beyond) and travel further afield.

Overall Experience

I chose to study in Edinburgh for a number of reasons: I had liked the city when I had stayed for a couple of days a few years prior; I have much of my extended family living in and around the area; the academic reputation of the university; and its location, with easy access to the rest of the UK, and beyond. I came to love it for the beauty of the architecture and the surrounding landscape, the people, the opportunities it provided, both in terms of activities, and also to become more independent, resourceful, and confident. Like (hopefully) every other exchange it was a rewarding experience to learn about the world and myself, and was exciting, challenging, and very enjoyable. To other students going on exchange, just make the most of your time there, try different things, and enjoy it as much as you can. Mì-àdh!



The Shore, Leith, Edinburgh



Medieval house, Edinburgh



Snow at sunset in Fife (area just to the north of the city of Edinburgh)



Isle of Skye



Eilean Donan Castle