

Falmouth University
2015 S2
Bachelor of Music (MusB)
Majoring in Composition

Overall Impression

I have greatly enjoyed my time in Falmouth and the other parts of the United Kingdom I managed to visit. Seeing as I had never previously been to the UK or Europe this was very exciting, though I was informed by people I met over there that Cornwall and the South West of England are somewhat different and not really representative of the rest of the country. As opposed to somewhere like London, there is more of a small-town and rustic feel, with lots of narrow streets and rows of cottages packed tightly next to one another. It is slower paced and less industrial. Many people who attend the university live out of town, in a similar manner to how people in travel from different parts of New Zealand down to Dunedin for study. For me studying in the arts specifically, there was a noticeable difference studying at a university that specialised in the arts. You are surrounded by more like-minded individuals in a smaller, more focused setting. There always seems to be a constant buzz of creativity happening around you; people working on music projects on their laptops in the common room that doubles as a cafe, groups jamming in the practice rooms, others recording in one of the various recording facilities. It's all right there and it is very exciting for those involved in the creative industries.

Accommodation

At first I thought accommodation was going to prove difficult to organise from afar, but once I discovered the Facebook group 'Find a Student Housemate - Falmouth' (<https://www.facebook.com/groups/265438586884717/>) this worked out quite smoothly. I posted a notice and was able to find a student who was also going on an exchange for approximately the same time as me and was able to fill his room. I also used facebook to have a chat with my UK flatmates to get an impression of what living with them would be like, and they all turned out to be very welcoming and friendly. I managed to find a flat that was close to the town centre, but as Falmouth isn't very large you are never too far away from the shops. One thing to note would be rent is usually paid monthly over there. Also, with the property agency I was dealing with, as I did not have a UK guarantor, I had to make 4 months of rent payments all at once, but I will talk more about this in the financing section. The staff at the Property Agency were helpful and understanding in accommodating my situation.

Financing

This was the part I was most concerned with prior to making the decision to take up the exchange program. The main issues were ensuring I had enough money to pay for flights, and that I had enough to pay for rent. Due to the fact that the exchange rate is ~2.2 New Zealand dollars to 1 British Pound, this means living can be more expensive than it may at first appear. For example, rent for the average property can vary from roughly 350 - 450 pounds per month. Which works out to be 87.5 - 112.5 pounds per week. 87.5 seems on the cheap end, except in NZD this works out to be \$192.39, which is definitely on the more expensive end for student properties in Dunedin. As Studylink does not factor in different currencies and is still capped at approximately 250 NZD per week, one would need to budget very frugally, or more realistically, have a decent amount of money saved up before departing. That being said, food from supermarkets works out to be roughly the same price wise, whereas food in local restaurants is a bit more expensive (e.g 6 pounds/13 NZD for Chinese takeaways). Food from larger fast food chains works out to be almost the same, and alcohol in some cases is cheaper. If you are on an exchange for the full year, it may be worth looking into applying for a Visa that will allow you to take up part-time work whilst abroad (usually if you are traveling for 6 months or less to the UK a Visa is not required). I'm sure with once the appropriate Visa has been obtained, you could then get in touch with the university to see if they can assist you with finding part-time work. In my case I was able to find some full-time work over the summer break (Nov - Feb) and used this to cover my flights. I was not able to secure temp work in the mid-year break before leaving the country (June - Sep), so was not able to save as much money as I would have liked. To supplant this I applied for a special tertiary student overdraft with my bank, which gave me access to an additional 2,000 NZD, and I also had some financial assistance from my parents.

Academics/Course Load

The course load was manageable and challenging enough to keep me engaged without becoming overwhelming. This was probably helped by the fact that I was doing a 2nd year course at Falmouth, whereas prior to this I was taking 3rd year papers in semester 1. Time management skills are a must, as some assessments are to be worked on throughout the entire semester, whereas others are due on a weekly basis and leave not much room for procrastination; although if students are 2nd or 3rd year and are serious about organising an exchange I am assuming they will already have decent time management skills. The layout of the course is a bit different to Otago, and instead of taking 'papers' you take a number of modules. Two are full-year modules (though it is possible to complete just the first half as I did) and the others are like intensive 6 week modules. There is more of an emphasis on group creative work and collaboration, so it definitely pays to be a bit open-minded and to get out of your shell, which may not always be easy for more introverted musicians. With some of the assignments it is only *recommended* that you work in a group, whereas it is still entirely possible to take on the task solo.

Transportation & Weather

Public transport in London is very efficient and relatively straightforward to follow, making it easy to get from the airport to wherever you need to go via bus, the underground network, or train. Since I stayed a few extra days in London, I found my own transport down to Falmouth, but the university does offer a cheap shuttle service from Heathrow terminal to Falmouth for incoming exchange students. I took the train down, which cost roughly 60 pounds and was a relaxing journey. It takes about 5 hours from London to Truro, then you can either get the uni bus or another train to Falmouth (these run regularly during the day). The buses to and from university leave every 10 minutes during the day and cost 1 pound each way, for a journey of approximately 20 minutes. They go less frequently by night time, but late buses are still going after 10pm. They depart from Falmouth town and stop at the university. There is also the option of getting the train from Falmouth to the Penryn campus. It is fairly easy to get around Falmouth by foot, but to get to the neighbouring town of Penryn it is best to grab a bus. Buses and trains are also available if you want to travel and explore further out of town and around Cornwall, for example the North coast or the nearby cities of Truro and Redruth.

As I came when the season was going into winter, naturally the weather was somewhat gloomy. Since it is the southern part of the country the temperature did not get too cold, nothing more severe than you would expect in New Zealand (no snow unfortunately). The Falmouth winter features much cloudiness and drizzle.

Eating, Things to do & Places to visit

Eating out can obviously get expensive due to the exchange rate, so buying groceries from supermarkets such as ASDA and Sainsburys (both in Falmouth) is a better option. These can be bought online and delivered for a small fee for greater convenience. Otherwise you have the usual suspects for takeaways/fast food etc - there is a McDonalds, KFC, Dominoes Subway as well as many great local restaurants in a range of cuisine styles. The best places to try would be the Fish and Chip shops, which Falmouth specialises in. These are some of the best I've had, with locally caught high quality fish. There are also plenty of 'pasty' shops. Pasties are a famous Cornwall specialty, and are a mixture of vegetables and meat wrapped inside pastry, though vegetarian options are available. These can be found almost literally anywhere (including on campus) and are a must-try.

Places to visit would be the infamous 'Club I' (Club International) which is along the

main road and the most happening club in Falmouth. It's not exactly the Ritz, but mandatory if you are wanting to experience the night-life. Otherwise there is the main art gallery in the town centre which is free, along with Gillie beach and Pendennis Point for some more scenic outings. There is also a castle at Pendennis Point, beyond the Falmouth Docks, worth checking out.

Tips for future exchange students.

I can only recommend based on what I've studied and experienced. I am not sure what the university is like with the other subjects, but for music I found it incredibly interesting and it offered amazing facilities and friendly staff. The music equipment and recording facilities at Falmouth are very high quality and inspired me to extend my creativity to new heights. The staff members were incredibly knowledgeable and presented musical ideas that were new and challenged me. I would highly recommend the university to anybody wanting to travel abroad and further their contemporary music studies. I would say be sure to plan your finances well out in advance - the earlier the better as flights are cheaper at this time. Make sure you have enough money saved or have enough financial assistance so this isn't something you have to worry about whilst you should be concentrating on your studies and social life.