

**Otago exchange evaluation**  
**University of Edinburgh**  
**Semester 1 2017**  
**Bachelor of Commerce majoring in Finance**

Accommodation

I stayed in a university residence, Deaconess. Through the university you are able to apply to accommodation similar to the first year halls at Otago. There is a variety of different sorts of accommodation from self catered, to catered and options such as ensuite. Deaconess was a self-catered, ensuite. So every room had its own ensuite and you are split into pods of around five people with whom you share a kitchen. I was lucky and flatted with other international students of a similar age and had a fantastic time. The halls do generally cater mostly to first years and international students.

Deaconess is one of the best halls. It is in an old hospital, but modern on the inside, and there is a fully modern part to the building as well. The main university campus was only five to ten minutes walk away, Tesco metro two minutes away and many food outlets on Nicholson Street only two to five minutes away, the university gym Pleasance was also only two minutes down the road, Royal Mile ten minutes and Princes street 15 minutes. The accommodation is a balloted and you make a selection of your top three choices, I was lucky to receive my top choice. Whilst the flat mates do make a significant impact on the living experience, the university accommodation made it so much easier to not have to deal with issues such as power and internet set up, especially when there for only one semester.

University

The university has many old buildings and is a lot older than Otago, so that is a plus if you enjoy old architecture. However most classes will tend to be in the less pretty buildings. Despite this most of the classes for those under Arts are really close together, much like Otago, so getting between class is not an issue. Most sciences are on a different campus.

The classes are different to Otago. I took three papers, which is the standard full time work load. I was taking two year four classes and one year 3 class, which are all classified by Edinburgh as Honours classes. I had one two hour lecture a week per class. The assessment is very different for Finance. There was very little, in some cases no, numerical assessment. The University of Edinburgh is very focused on essay assessment. Most of my courses only had one essay and then the exam. The learning style is very different and focused on self-learning so the lectures are not very helpful and sometimes the assessment is hard to follow. However, the marking does not seem to be too difficult. 70 is an A, and for some classes you will not get above that. However, for other classes they do award higher. Passing is definitely easily achieved. My lectures were only on a Monday and Tuesday so I had plenty of time to travel.

The university gym was much better than Unipol. The gym is fully equipped, with the additional benefits of a rock climbing wall, archery shooting range and other amenities not offered at Otago. The classes are free with a membership, and there is a cheaper off peak membership if you want to save money and go to the gym in the mornings.

## The city

Edinburgh is a fantastic city. It far exceeded my expectations in all ways. Overall the exchange rate was in my favour for most of the time I was there and food and shopping, especially shoes, are far cheaper than in New Zealand.

There is so much to do in and around Edinburgh, most things can be walked to or a short bus ride. The city is filled with so much history. The castle is a great attraction and every time you walk down the royal mile you feel like you are hundreds of years back in time. Holyrood palace is also an official residence of the Queen in Edinburgh and has history going back to Mary Queen of Scots imprisonment. Holyrood park goes even further with ancient geological rocks and formations from old volcanoes, of Arthur's seat and Salisbury crags. These are relatively simple, not too long walks that I would highly recommend. The list is endless.

There are so many places to eat out in Edinburgh. Whilst I missed the great sushi bars of Dunedin and NZ, they have a wide range of cuisines at decent prices, and lots of wee cafes to hide away in the cold.

The weather is similar to Dunedin, but it hardly ever rained. It also never got particularly warm. When I arrived in the winter it got dark at 3.30, so that can take a bit of getting used to.

The best bit of Edinburgh is the pubs. There are so many historic pubs, and a pub meal is about 10 pounds and drinks can be as cheap as 3 pounds on a student night. There is so much fantastic scotch to try if you are a whisky drinker. I spent many nights just chatting with friends for casual drinks in the pubs.

Princes street is also equipped with great shopping and many major brands. You can't leave the UK without at least one trip to Primark. There are also fantastic events in the city, I went to a pagan fire festival on Calton Hill to celebrate the beginning of summer, and it was definitely a night to remember.

## Travel

Edinburgh is well placed for travel. Glasgow is only one hour away by train or bus. The airport is international and does flights to Europe and further afield. If you book well in advance you can get really cheap deals to Europe. Dublin can be as cheap as 40 pounds return.

The rail service is fantastic. You can train to most places in Scotland and the service is reliable and not too expensive. If you plan on doing lots of rail travel a 16-25 rail card is definitely worth it for significant discounts on all tickets. There are also buses, however these can be trickier to navigate in some areas. The highlands are fantastic. I went to a few key places, including a trip on the Jacobite steam train and a trip to the Isle of Skye, amongst other places. A lot of places are accessible with day trips.

The university international student's organisation does really good day trips on buses to places, and weekends around. There are plenty of these sorts of tours around Scotland and beyond. Most places have cheap hostels or bed and breakfasts, as well as fancier accommodation if you desire. I got some nice air bnbs with friends. Some parts of Scotland are definitely harder and more expensive to get to than others, but the landscapes and the history makes it all worth it.

There is so much to see and lots of hikes and museums, different options depending on your style of travel. I travelled around Scotland for a couple of weeks, I spent a week in Ireland and also a week to Paris. For a competition I even went all the way to Thailand, so the options are really endless. However, Scotland, as cliché as it sounds, really is a hidden gem, and I would highly recommend seeing as much of it as you can.

## Visa

The visa system on the internet can be confusing, but for non-EU/UK citizens going for six months, the visa system is so simple. All you need is a letter showing proof of study, such as your university acceptance letter, and potential bank account information to show funds (I never got asked to show this) and they stamp your visa in your passport every time you enter the country. This is redone when you go to Europe and enter back in. This visa does not allow you to work.

From top to bottom: Neist Point Light House, Jacobite Steam Train (Glenfinnan Viaduct), Edinburgh Castle.

