



## My Exchange Evaluation

### Basic Information

<i>Host University</i>	University of Edinburgh
<i>Semester &amp; Year of Exchange</i>	Semester 2 2018
<i>Otago degree(s)</i>	Bachelor of Science
<i>Major(s)</i>	Zoology

### Academics/ course load

*Which papers did you take whilst on exchange?*

Course title	Language of instruction	Otago equivalent	Otago credit value
Evolution in Action 2	English	Evolutionary Biology	24
Principle of Ecology	English	Ecology of Communities and Ecosystems	24
The Green Planet 2	English	Unspecified ZOOL 200 paper	24

*Any comments about these papers?*

These papers consolidated my understandings and deepened my knowledge on the courses I am studying (Zoology & Ecology). Each of these papers offered interesting perspectives and allowed me to explore individual topics in depth. It had also built a solid foundation for taking third-year papers in University of Otago. The papers that I have chosen in Edinburgh were structured quite similarly to the papers in Otago. Each paper was a combination of wide selection of related topics and practicals such as laboratories, workshops and field projects to strengthen hands-on experience. The papers above consisted 10 ECTS each so I needed to take three papers in Edinburgh as a full course per semester to obtain 30 ECTS which is equivalent to 72 Otago Credits.

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

The style of teaching in University of Edinburgh was not very different from Otago. The workload was almost the same while I was taking 3 papers in Edinburgh compared to 3 or 4 papers in Otago if I were to get the same credits. For Evolution in Action 2 paper in Edinburgh, it only consisted of workshops as practicals and an open book test at the end of every workshop which was something I

found different from Otago, but nonetheless the workshops consolidated my understanding of this course.

## **Accommodation**

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

I stayed in a catered student hall (Ewing House) in Pollock Halls of Residences. It was a student residential compound comprised of several student halls and a common dining cafeteria. This residential compound was located right under the foot of the famous natural landmark – Arthur Seat. The natural view and the atmosphere around the halls were spectacular, and it was the only catered student accommodation of University of Edinburgh. Highly recommended for students who are coming for exchange for one or two semesters. The only con for me was that the location of this residential compound was a bit far from the two main university campus and the city centre. It was still accessible to any places by bus, but it would cost more time and money.

## **Money matters**

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

The cost for my accommodation for one semester was approximately £3473 per semester including 2 meals per day. I spent around £50 - £80 per week for food, transport and miscellaneous. It costed about £300 to £400 to travel from Singapore to Edinburgh. I applied for the Short Term Study Visa, which was free.

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

I have opened a UK bank account to access my finances as debit card and cash are commonly used here. It would be recommended to open a local bank account (Bank of Scotland, Santander Bank etc.) if you are staying in the UK for more than one semester.

## **Visas & Insurance**

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

I applied for a UK Short Term Study Visa at the border custom of Edinburgh Airport which allowed me to stay in the UK for six months. I needed to prepare necessary documents for the inspection of the officer at the airport. It was a good option for students who were on exchange for one semester as it was free, but it was more bothersome to travel in and out of the UK. It bore the risk of rejection at the custom if the documents prepared were not detailed enough or did not meet the requirements. You might also be questioned sometimes at the airport regarding the visa to enter the UK.

*Did your host university have a mandatory insurance?*

No, they do not have a mandatory insurance.

## **Extra-curricular/Social Activities**

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

There were several organised activities such as ceilidhs, parties (Big Cheese) etc. during the orientation week. Events and extra-curricular activities were available throughout the semester organised by university clubs and societies. University of Edinburgh had a sport centre with very well-equipped gyms and several activities halls. It also consisted an indoor rifle range and an archery range (which was awesome!). I joined the Rifle Club during my exchange there and it was a one of a kind experiences! It has also equipped with indoor rock-climbing facilities which I highly recommended for students to try it out. Day trips or weekend trips organised by some student associations was a good option to explore around Scotland or even the UK as they were usually very reasonably priced.

*What was the university/ city like?*

The University of Edinburgh was a vibrant and an intriguing university attracting people from all around the world. At the same time, it had upheld its reputation of being a prestigious tertiary institution which offered high standard of teaching and good quality of academic environment. Edinburgh was a fascinating city where one could easily immerse themselves in the history of the city where dozens of historical landmarks decorated the Old Town of Edinburgh. The landscape overlooking the Princes Street and where the Edinburgh Castle stood tall gave the city a unique scenery like no other places. It was a beautiful city where olds meet news and a melting pot of different cultures and everyone was friendly to each other too.

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

There were plenty of tourist attractions worth visiting in Edinburgh. Edinburgh Castle and Arthur Seat offered amazing views overlooking the landscape of the city. I personally liked to relax myself in the Princes Street Garden and admired the skyline of the Old Town of Edinburgh. The Scotch Whisky Experience and Mary Kings Close Tour provided great experiences for people to get to know the local cultures and histories. It was recommended to join a weekend-trip out to Scottish Highland where the famous natural scenery lies. The majestic landscape of Isle of Skye had imprinted deeply in my memories for a lifelong and the opportunity of seeing a Highland Cow closely in person was absolutely tempting. There were dozens of excellent yet affordable restaurants catering different types of cuisines around the university campus, such as Café Andamiro and Kampong Ah Lee. If you wanted to experience the local pub cultures, The Bow Bar and The Standing Order were among some of the good places to go.

*Any tips for future students?*

Edinburgh is a lovely city with its own unique brand of charm and the university life here is equally amazing and unforgettable. The weather in Edinburgh is quite unpredictable and it can get very windy sometimes. It showers frequently in Edinburgh, so it is recommended to bring warm, waterproof and windproof apparels for unpleasant weather. It is also advised to bring some coins

with you for public transport (bus) as they only accept exact amount of bus fares (unless you purchase a bus pass).

### Overall Experience

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

I had a wonderful semester at the University of Edinburgh. I made new friends from all around the worlds and spent an invaluable time with them. I had even got the opportunities to meet up with my friends who are studying in London and friends coming to exchange in the UK as well. Apart from the academic progression and the knowledge gained while studying there, I took the opportunities to expand my vision by visiting different places and countries and immersing myself in the local cultures. I gained both good and bad experiences (my phone got stolen in Brussels) and they will undoubtedly become memories that worth recalling in my life time. The Otago Global Student Exchange was a life-changing experience, which allowed me to broaden my horizon. I'm so glad I went on exchange!

