



My Exchange Evaluation

Basic Information

Host University	Cardiff University
Semester & Year of Exchange	Autumn semester, 2019
Otago degree(s)	Bachelor of Arts and Science
Major(s)	Politics and Environmental Management

Academics/ course load

Which papers did you take whilst on exchange?

Course title	Language of instruction	Otago equivalent	Otago credit value
Mobilities: Travel, tourism and communication	English	GEOG 300 level	18
Global Environmental Politics	English	POLS 300 level	18
Be the Change: Governing Without the State	English	POLS 300 level	18

Any comments about these papers?

3x 20 credit papers at Cardiff are equivalent to 4 Otago papers.

I found all my papers really interesting and similar to the topics of the equivalent Otago papers. The global environmental politics paper was a bit repetitive from the content I had already learnt in my papers back home.

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

The lectures and style of teaching were quite similar to Otago. My papers all had a couple of lectures per week plus a seminar (basically a tutorial). The workload seemed a bit lower than Otago considering I was doing 300 level equivalent papers- I only had 2 assessments for each paper (they were all internally assessed). The grading is harder though, a 70% at Cardiff is considered a really good mark.

There were strikes for a couple of weeks when I was there. They are quite common in the UK, but it didn't really affect me as I didn't have many lectures and had planned to travel then anyway.

Something I found a bit frustrating was that the academic departments at Cardiff were very separated from each other, because students only do papers from one department. Since exchange students usually do papers across subjects, it makes it really hard to do all the papers you want because there are often timetable clashes. So be prepared to have to change papers from what you initially chose.

Accommodation

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

I was in Talybont South, which is the biggest hall made up of lots of houses. All the uni halls differed slightly, but Taly South was self-catered. We shared a kitchen and everyone had an ensuite in their room. My house had 8 flats (each with 8 people) so it was cool because I met lots of people from the UK. The locals in halls were all freshers, but I didn't really find that an issue because I got along really well with my flatmates and you don't really notice the age gap. Most flats in my house had 2 exchange students which was a good mix of different people, so I ended up making some of my best friends in House 16. The walking distance to uni is kind of long from Taly compared to other halls (15 ish mins) but you get used to it.

Money matters

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

If you plan ahead you can probably get flights for around \$1500 return, but I decided to go on an exchange really late so paid closer to \$2100. A big tip is to book through STA travel and pay an extra \$150 for your flight home to be a flexi flight- that way you can change your flight back to NZ as much as you want, and will be more likely to be able to travel before coming home.

I found food to be quite a lot cheaper in the UK, so didn't spend a lot on my weekly shop. There was a massive Tesco close to Taly which was the best place to buy groceries.

I got insurance with STA travel, it was about \$400 for the 5 months I was away and there was no excess for my claims, so was definitely good value.

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

I just used my visa debit for everything, even when I travelled to Europe and it worked perfectly. Just make sure you tell your bank where/when you are travelling otherwise they will block your card! I'm with ANZ and they don't have ATM fees, so was pretty much like using my card back home.

Visas & Insurance

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

The 6 month study visa for the UK is kind of confusing. You definitely need to get a visa if you don't have a UK passport! You can get it on arrival to the UK (it's free, but you have to get it re-stamped every time you re-enter during your study). Or you can apply for it in advance which is what I did. It cost about \$180, and was supposedly meant to make entering the UK easier/quicker each time, although I still got. So I would say just get one on arrival, as long as you travel with documents proving you are studying, then you should be fine when travelling to Europe.

Did your host university have a mandatory insurance?

I'm not entirely sure, but I got an NHS number when I enrolled at a GP so ended up getting free healthcare.

Extra-curricular/Social Activities

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

What was the university/ city like?

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

Any tips for future students?

There are a heap of clubs/societies you can join. Lots of the clubs have socials each Wednesday night and then go out to the Student's Union afterwards. Clubs are a really good way to meet locals, and at the start of each semester they do sessions where you can try the sport/activity for free. The Student's Union runs give it a go day trips near the start of semester, which is probably the best way to see places in the UK because it's cheap and includes transport.

Cardiff reminded me a lot of Dunedin, it's quite a student-oriented city. It's quite a humble city in terms of not being that big, but it's big enough that there is always something to do in or around it. The city centre is really nice and the shops you need are all in one place. There are also some good parks, markets and the bay area is cool too. Cardiff is really close to a lot of places in the UK like London, Bath etc and you can get really cheap buses with National Express/Mega Bus, or take the train.

One thing I was not expecting was how quick and cheaply you can travel to Europe from the UK. My friends and I got £15 (\$30) flights to Portugal during reading week with a budget airline, which always have sales. Definitely make travel a priority over uni work. Just plan your trip first and you'll figure out a time to do assignments after. The UK is a really good choice for an exchange if you are wanting to travel!

Overall Experience

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

Even though Cardiff isn't a super different city from what you might find in NZ, it had a brilliant student vibe and was a really good place to study/come back to after travelling to more exotic places.

I 100% recommend doing an exchange! There will never be a semester where you get to go to a completely different country, travel as much as you want and don't have to worry about your grades. You will meet lots of people in exactly the same situation as you, so there is always someone keen to do things or travel. I really loved my semester at Cardiff so I highly recommend it for an exchange!

