

University of Edinburgh
2016 Semester two
BSc (Geography)

Accommodation

I ended up opting to find a flat with other international students, as opposed to going into the halls. There is no single “international/exchange” student hall so if you choose to go into the halls everyone is basically mixed in with other internationals and first years (but also some post graduates - the PG scene is big at Edinburgh).

I found my flat off a Facebook page called “Edinroom” after I arrived (this is the main flat page for the uni) but other good websites include: spareroom.co.uk, Gumtree.co.uk. Luckily I had a friend’s couch to sleep on for the first week or so while I found the flat. It did take a bit of time, but was worth it as my flat was amazing and a lot cheaper than the halls. I lived on Leith St in New Town, but the majority of the student quarter is around the Meadows in Bruntsfield. Most Edinburgh students are a bit like Otago student in that they all organise their flats pretty early on, so generally if you are finding a place in a flat you are filling in a room of someone who has left.

Money

Edinburgh is pretty expensive compared to other areas of Scotland. Eating out isn’t thaaat cheap, but it’s not ridiculous either. Post-Brexit exchange rates were a big help in sustaining my ongoing culinary experience in Edinburgh, but generally I tended to cook my own food and go out more for drinks. Coffee is 3-4 pounds ish. Rent for me was relatively expensive (\$170ish a week plus bills) but I had a three and a half month contract and was happy to pay that and not have to deal with finding someone to take over my room. Our flat was actually a hybrid of a long-term air Bnb/short term rental lease agreement.

Academics/course load

I was finishing off my geography degree. I only had three papers, which was pretty mellow in terms of contact time however there was a big emphasis on work outside of contact hours – i.e. a lot of readings. I really enjoyed all of my papers (had picked pretty cool ones), so I was happy to do these and found them pretty interesting.

Transport

Best thing about Edinburgh is that you can walk EVERYWHERE. It’s a big little city, and so accessible by foot or bike. Much nicer than having to Tube everywhere in London etc. and I found it meant I was able to get a grasp of the layout of the city pretty quickly (also helped by the fact all the street names are basically the same as in Dunedin – i.e. main shopping street is George Street/Princes Street, which goes onto Queen St...)

I used buses (Lothian Buses) occasionally - mainly when heading out to the airport (about half an hour out of town). Scotland’s airport is also a pretty cheap airport to fly into/out of. I did a lot of travelling around Europe (before, after and during my exchange). There’s also sometimes sub-20 pound return flights to London to snap up.

Weather

I had heard soooo much about how bad the weather can be in Edinburgh before I arrived, and literally experienced the complete opposite!! The end of summer that I caught was amazing, as

was the ensuing Autumn that followed. Such fantastic weather. However I think I lucked out for my time there, as all the locals kept going on about how they couldn't believe how good it was. Since I've left they have also had a bit snow, so I definitely left before the worst of winter had set in. But for me, my time Edinburgh will always bring to mind clear blue skies and gorgeous sunrises.

Eating/drinking

Did a lot of this. Great café scene in Edinburgh, with things opening up all the time. I followed some pretty cool pages/instagrams that always kept me up to date with cool pop-up food markets and stuff. Favourite cafes were The Milkman, Wellington Coffee, Machina Espresso, Lovecrumbs, Artisan Roast, Filament, Fortitude and the van at the Stockbridge Markets (Sundays). Cool places to eat were Dishoom, Ting Thai Caravan, The Edinburgh Larder, Union of Genius (soup)

Drinking-wise, there is (as you can imagine) as excellent pub culture in Edinburgh. Pubs left right and centre throughout the city, and 9/10 they will be packed full. Whiskey is the drink of the nation, and there's a really fun club at uni called the "Water of Life" society which is the whiskey society. There's also a lot of good local craft beer (both Edinburgh and wider Scotland-based) and Edinburgh is famous for its gin. My favourite cocktail bars have to be Panda and Sons and Hoot the Redeemer – put these on your list, they are so groovy. I also joined the Wine Society at Uni, so had weekly wine tastings that were so much fun and a great way to meet people.

There's heaps of pubs/bars/clubs in the city, and the Uni has "The Big Cheese" which is a bar on campus that would always go off. Cowgate was always good for a night out, or anywhere along George St. Teviot House is the big student house on campus, where heaps of activities are held and there's a cool library and sports bar and food served all day.

Things to do/places to visit

There are SO many great things to see and do in Edinburgh. Arthur's Seat was my regular running track, and was my "Mount Maunganui away from home" and is this amazing huge green space right next to the city. Old town and the Castle are simply beautiful. It always amazed me how the place would always make me feel I had been transported back in time. I hired a car (with a company called Arnold Clark) with a kiwi pal who came and visited me and we did a big roady all around Scotland and went to heaps of castles, lochs (lakes), glens (valleys) and munros (mountains). It was amazing, and best way to see Scotland is by private vehicle. Scotland is great in that it's small enough that you can cover a lot of it in a short amount of time. We stayed in a croft/bothy and did day trips everywhere. I also joined a hiking (or as the Brits call it, 'hill walking') club, so got to explore a lot of the western highlands (Glencoe, Loch Lomond etc.) with them which was epic.

Other things I did/enjoyed doing –

- Exploring/hiking the Western highlands, and the Cairngorms (park in centre Scotland)
- Trip to the Isle of Sky (Old Man of Storr, Fairy Pools, Dinosaur footprints etc.) – stayed at a cool colourful hostel here
- The Edinburgh Castle/any other castle in Scotland (I did a cool roadtrip up the East coast to Glamis castle, Dunncotter castle, Cawdor castle, Haddo House etc.)
- Stockbridge and Castle markets on the weekends
- The many Museums (Scottish, Edinburgh and Writers' Museums)
- The National Gallery and the Portrait Gallery (amazing art collections)

- Calton Hill
- Pentland Hill Park (about 45 min outside Edinburgh via bus – good walking/running tracks)
- Princes St gardens on a nice day
- Trip to St Andrews, esp if you can pre-book and play a round (also there amazing St Andrews Uni there i.e. Kate and Wills meeting ground)
- Alllll the Harry Potter stuff in Edinburgh (they love it) – i.e. the Elephant House Café where JK wrote the first book (go into the bathrooms for all the cool graffiti)
- Edinburgh Street of Light and Christmas markets/celebrations = AMAZING
- Comedy shows (weekly, lots of places)
- Edinburgh Uni Student gym = super good (also has climbing wall, squash courts etc.)
- Visit and tour around Scotland’ Parliament
- Going to the multitude of public talks at/by the uni – I got very into these, and went to some epic public debates/talks about Brexit, Scottish Independence, the EU, Trump and climate change. These were always super interesting, stimulating and because Edinburgh is the home of the Scottish Parliament there would always be these huge names at the talks, which made for high quality and informative discussions etc. I found out about these mostly off Facebook
- The Fringe Festival (in August) – soo huge for the city, a massive and popular event.
- Trip to Glasgow (make sure you go to Bakery 47 for brunch/food, Kelvingrove gallery and the University of Glasgow)

Tips for future students

Edinburgh was the best choice I have made. It’s truly the most beautiful city, and is a mixing pot of cultures as well as providing a quintessential “Scottish experience”. The University is world class, and as a result there are so many international students that there you do not feel out of place in the slightest. The Clubs and Society scene in Edinburgh is both huge and amazing. There was a Harry Potter Society, Wine Society, Yoga Society, EU Political Union Society, Hillwalking Society, societies for any sport – there’s literally everything and anything. Best way to meet people. Scottish people are fantastic too, and actually reminded me a lot of NZers. For me, not knowing another language meant being in an English speaking country was a huge help in terms of being able to meet people and make friends.

I had the time of my life in Edinburgh. I can’t wait to go back. I would 100% encourage anyone to go on an exchange there. It’s beautiful with its old architecture, it’s a small but big city with plenty going on all the time, and it’s full of history and is filled with friendly people.



Urquhart castle ruins on Loch Ness



Old Man of Storr, Isle of Sky



Hiking in Glencoe



Old Town streets, just below the Edinburgh castle