Exchange Report: University of Bath

Introduction:

During Spring 2016 I attended the University of Bath, School of Management in England. Bath is located approximately two hours outside of London and is accessible by train, bus and car. I am a business major planning on concentrating in finance or accounting. The Spring semester, known as semester 2 at the University of Bath, ran from the first week of February with exams finishing in the last week of May.

Preparation for Exchange:

Packing:
Since the weather in Bath during the winter/spring is very similar to Vancouver it was pretty easy to pack. Just ensure you have a good jacket, many scarves and a number of layers to prepare for any temperature. One important thing to pack is an adaptor as you will not be able to charge your phone, laptop, etc. otherwise. Since you may want to charge more than one item at a time I would recommend investing in a few adaptors. Also, remember if you are going to be travelling elsewhere in Europe you will need different adaptors again. Since bedding is not provided, if you have space in your luggage consider bringing your own, that way you don’t have to run out and buy some immediately after your arrival.

Travel:
My flight was $1,180 and I flew in January and June. I flew direct from Vancouver to London Heathrow Airport the day campus accommodations opened. This is the easiest flight available and it wasn’t hard to buy a bus ticket from National Express to get to Bath upon arrival.

Financial Details:
Although some of the other exchange students chose to open a bank account in the UK I decided to just use my credit card and take out cash from an ATM when necessary (the majority of places take all major credit cards and there are ATM’s everywhere). Another important financial detail is a phone plan as some people had issues with this. If you are going to use you current cell phone it is important to ensure that your phone is “unlocked” from any provider before departure. I had my phone unlocked before I left then purchased a SIM card with a pay as you go plan and topped it up for the four months I was in the UK for.

During Exchange:

Arrival and Orientation:
During the week of my arrival I attended two orientation events. The first orientation took place the day after my arrival and consisted of a lunch with the other Management students, followed by a campus and city tour. The following day I attended an all day orientation that was for all exchange students. This included a campus tour and a presentation from a number of individuals
providing us information regarding classes, accommodations, student union, etc. Both were very informative and helpful for aiding in my transition. Not only were we told everything we needed to know about our next for months but it is also a great opportunity to meet the other students we would be spending the next four months with. As much as I tried to meet as many local students as I could, I became very close with the other exchange students because we have so much in common and in most cases I are living with many of them.

**Accommodations:**
I was chosen for on campus accommodations, however this was not common. There were seven other exchange students placed in accommodations on campus, as some full time students moved out after first semester. The rest of the exchange students were living in the city in Carpenter, Pultney, or Thornbank. They are all quite similar so decisions were made based on price range, private bathroom, and location. Living on campus was very nice for attending lectures as I was only a five minute walk away. It was also nice to be near the campus sports training village as I signed up for a semester pass when I arrived. Another benefit of on campus living was getting to know local students. I was living in a building with 11 other people sharing bathroom facilities and a kitchen. Over the course of the semester I was able to get to know my flatmates quite well and it was nice to learn about the school and the British culture from a local.

**Academic Details:**
Overall, lectures and teaching style was quite similar to SFU. Each week I had a two-hour lecture for each class along with a seminar for select courses. Most of my lectures were quite a bit smaller than those I have taken at SFU, but it depended on whether the class was an introduction or at a more intermediate level. I noticed that professors actively try to engage with the students and seem to be talking with us rather than simply lecturing to us. One thing that was very different from SFU is the course breakdown. The majority of my lectures consisted of one group report worth 30% followed by a final worth 70%. This put a large amount of pressure on final exams or papers that took place at the end of the semester. One interesting thing about the grading process at the University of Bath is that in order to pass a class you must pass all components that make up the grade. By this I mean that one pass the assignment and exam in order to receive full credits, it this is not accomplished there is an option to redo the assignment or the exam in the following semester. I thought this was an interesting way to structure courses rather than making students completely retake the class like at SFU.

**Country Information:**
The weather and culture of Bath, or more specifically England, is very similar to Vancouver. The temperature during the semester was between 5 and 15 degrees Celsius and got up to 25 in May. One of the major differences between Canada and the UK is the fact that they drive on the other side of the world. Although I was not driving during my time in the UK it is very important to know for catching the bus and crossing the street (thankfully they usually tell you which way to look on the road).

Bath is the most incredible places and I urge you to spend time exploring the city as well as the surrounding cities and sites during your exchange. A few nearby places to put on the list include Bristol, Oxford, Birmingham, Salisbury, Cambridge, and of course Stonehenge. Most of these places are only a short train ride away however if you are looking to take a weekend trip somewhere in the UK I would also recommend Brighton, Cardiff, and York.
Reflection After Exchange:

For me, the biggest challenge I faced was leaving my home, family and friends and travelling to Europe completely on my own. Without knowing anyone before my arrival I was faced with the challenge of figuring out my first couple days on my own and meeting new people when I could. Despite this challenge and my initial apprehension about exchange this experience was an incredible opportunity to push me out of my comfort zone. I gained a huge amount of confidence during my time in Europe and this is a skill that will help me greatly in the future.

I found that between the preparation tools provided by SFU and the University of Bath I felt I was very prepared for my semester abroad. One important piece of information I received from a fellow student was regarding arriving at the border in the airport upon my arrival in the UK. As I am a Canadian citizen and would be spending less that six months studying I did not need to apply for a visa and was to receive a “Short Term Study Visa” when I arrived. One important thing for others doing this is to ensure you have all required documents to make the process much easier. For me these documents include my official letter of acceptance from the University of Bath, confirmation of my accommodations and payment confirmation, details regarding my flight home and a screenshot of my bank account. The customs officials are just trying to make sure that you have the money to afford your time in the country and have a plan to leave in the near future. Once I made it through the boarder upon arrival I got a stamp in my passport and was permitted to study, however every time I re-entered the UK I had to show my letter of acceptance again and received another stamp.

One thing I wish I had brought is a souvenir from Canada to give my new friends and Canadian money to show them. Many of the full time students that I had met had never been overseas and were very interested in learning about North America and Canada.

My final piece of advice is to fully immerse yourself in the culture, university and country. Attend sporting events, go to the on campus bar, explore the city and the surrounding area and try to meet as many locals as possible. I have no doubt that these four months will be the most incredible time of your life and you don’t want to have any regrets.