UNIVERSITY OF BATH

My Semester Abroad

SPRING 2017: FEBRUARY TO JUNE
SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY
BEEDIE SCHOOL OF BUSINESS
My exchange at the University of Bath was the time of my life; it was so difficult to try and distill the entire experience to under 2000 words. I hope you find this report helpful! I can’t recommend spending a semester at the University of Bath more.

Early in the application process, I realized I had mutual friends going to Bath and met even more at SFU’s Exchange Orientation in the fall. Several of us ended up booking our flight and hotel together. Our flight flew directly from Vancouver to Gatwick and was with Air Transat. We arrived in Bath one day before accommodation opened and stayed at The Royal Hotel. We chose that location because it was immediately across the street from Bath Spa train station. We had taken the train from Gatwick Airport, switching at Reading to the train to Bath. The following day, we needed to attend a passport checking session on campus before picking up our keys to the dorm, so we paid the owner of The Old Station (a café across from our hotel) to store our luggage for a few hours. In return, he also gave us a discount on coffee. After going to campus, we went to the John Wood Building to collect our keys, then walked back to the café for our luggage. With our stuff we took the U1 service to Thornbank Gardens; the correct stop is the one just after the dark grey and pink pub called GPT Smokehouse.

Figure 1 Our first group day trip; in front of the Bodleian Library in Oxford

1 SIDE NOTE: Looking back, I would have booked the #403 Bus instead. It costs about 14 to 35 pounds (always buy it as far in advance as possible to save money), and it takes about 2 hours. It is also the best way to get to London from Bath as it stops there as well (takes 3 hours from Bath). When you use the National Express website to book them, you receive a 15 pound voucher for your next trip. That being said, if you plan on taking several trips to places in England, you will likely find they are more accessible by train. **Buy the 16-25 railcard**; it costs 30 pounds and requires a passport sized photo (you can do it online) but you can save that money after 2 trips. It takes 33% off the total of any trip you take via the train.

Figure 2 My friends and I under the umbrella display from the Bath Festival downtown
I am so glad I chose Thornbank Gardens. I got my own bathroom, and the complex was super close to the big Sainsbury’s, downtown Bath, and both the U1 and U2 routes. However, what made it amazing was the friendships made there. About 80% of my friendships were made with people at Thornbank. We had Bachelor/Bachelorette viewing parties, Taco Tuesdays, and more in the common room. Bond with your fellow neighbours and other students in the accommodation you choose because life over there becomes so fun when you can all just meet up downstairs at the spur of the moment and go downtown together. It doesn’t matter which accommodation you choose if you make friends with the people around you. Go to as many organized events as you can; they are all opportunities to get more friends and try new opportunities. This is especially true with events made for exchange students; everyone is nervous and wanting to make friends so it is the perfect environment to bond. Remember that you’re only here for four months, and try to take it all in.

It is important to know that the accommodation has very little in stock for you; while they do provide a duvet and pillow, you have to buy your towels, duvet covers, soap, etc. You can get cheap items for your room at Primark; this is located across from the Roman Baths downtown; it’s about a 10 minute walk from Thornbank. The school sells duvet covers and pillow cases for 10 pounds but I found them very cheap and uncomfortable. In comparison, I picked up a brushed cotton bed set for 5 pounds at Primark that was great quality. You will also want to pick up some food for your section of the fridge and freezer and your cupboard. I recommend going to the large Sainsbury’s to get your food as it is the cheapest. I brought a full package of my favourite vegan protein powder with me to Bath, so I didn’t feel as desperate. One thing it is important to note is that by Thornbanks’ housekeeping office you can find great dishes, pots, and cutlery left by prior students that are free; just wash them up to save your money for more important things (like travel!). A few things I wish I had brought with me were a light rain jacket, fancier shoes that are good to dance in, and cheap flip flops.

Europe in general is more credit card friendly than Canada; you can pay for 85% of things with your card without worrying about a minimum amount. You will need to be able to get out cash for things like afternoon tea and for a few of the pubs. The cost of living in general depends on how often you go out. You can save lots of money by cooking at home and buying only the groceries you need (don’t buy more than you can eat in two or three days) at the large Sainsburys as it is very close by. If you aren’t living at Thornbank, you can buy from the co-op store near Pulteney, Waitrose (more expensive and fancier foods), or any of the Sainsbury’s locals in Bath. If you are a meat-eater however, I recommend you buy meat at the large Sainsburys; I found that the prices are significantly cheaper than any other spot in Bath. Almost anything else is similarly priced at the Fresh Market on campus. If you need a hair straightener, you can buy a great one from Sainsbury’s for under 40 pounds (worth it).
Be prepared to lose almost half your money with the exchange rate; I would get about 280 pounds for every 500 CDN dollars I converted. Most things are not priced lower either; something that is $20 in Canada also costs around 20 pounds in Bath, except for grocery items. There are several options for bus passes; if you only have school twice a week, I recommend buying the 20 day pass option on the First Bus app. It is more cost effective to buy it on your mobile; you can only buy a 20 trip pass in person—this only covers ten return journeys. I bought the more expensive semester pass because I only had school two days a week and I knew I wouldn’t go to the gym if I didn’t buy a limitless pass (ended up going 4 to 6 times a week if I wasn’t travelling). They had run out of the 90 pound off-peak gym pass by the time I got mine so I bought the unlimited 3 month pass for about 100 pounds instead. Always remember to check for a student discount everywhere. Also note that you can go see the Roman Baths for free simply by showing your student card. Additionally, I recommend you bring Tupperware with you to school; you receive discounts and start to fill a punch card with every meal you buy.

I found school itself to be a lot easier than at SFU. Lectures really depend on the course—for one class I only had a 20 minute group meeting with my professor every week, while in another I had both a lecture and a tutorial. If I could tell myself one thing before going on this trip, I would assure myself that the course schedule would work out. The International Mobility Team at the University of Bath takes care of everything; you have a week to try out all the courses you’re interested in, and at the end you just tell them what you want. If you can find courses you need that occur within two consecutive days of the week, choose that option. It leaves you open for travelling and spur of the moment trips.

I explored England a lot while on exchange. I took a few day trips to Oxford, spent the afternoon relaxing in Brighton, and went to see Les Misérables on London’s West End. I also spent a few weekends in London, taking in the most popular sights, like Buckingham Palace, Notting Hill, Piccadilly Circus, Covent Gardens and Trafalgar Square. Be open to meeting new people and trying new things. I really recommend booking a free walking tour—the guides are fantastic and you get to learn a bit more about why these places are so important. I also travelled around Manchester and Liverpool; if you go to Liverpool, I definitely recommend visiting The Cavern (where the Beatles played regularly) and watch the impersonators perform.

The first city I visited outside of England outside was Barcelona. I brought my friend from exchange with me, and we met up with my other friend, a fellow Beedie student, who was working an international coop in Germany at the time. It was incredible for so many reasons; La Sagrada Familia is one of the most beautiful cathedrals I’d ever seen. We stayed at a party hostel and went with the fellow guests to a club on the beach. There was awesome music, and even an electric violinist. It was an incredible night. Next I went to Lisbon, Portugal. This was my favourite city in Europe; it was not touristy, had great food, was right on the water, and the weather was
fantastic, even in March. I went to Drogheda in Ireland during the first week of Easter break to visit my aunts, uncle and cousins—I was thrilled to see them again after seven years. Nine of my exchange friends and I took a trip to Italy together next, staying in an apartment in Rome. We had so much fun together. Only one of my friends had classes that started later in the week like me, so we stayed longer in Italy. We visited both Florence and Cinque Terre together. I loved Florence—it was much calmer than Rome, and I found the food to be even better. I’m not sure there could have been a better way to spend my vacation. My final trip outside England was to Wales and Ireland with my parents; we left from Dublin to Vancouver about 2 weeks after the exchange term ended.

Luckily I was prepared for the emotional journey home, and was actively working throughout my time abroad to stay in the moment and take mental pictures. If I hadn’t, I believe my transition home would have been more difficult. I also was sure to make lots of plans for when I arrived home to keep busy and to have things to look forward to. However, I think it is impossible to fully circumvent the emotions entirely and it is healthy to miss what you had over exchange. I hope you consider the University of Bath as your host institution—I’m sure you’ll have the time of your life as well.