University of Sussex, England,
International Studies/Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences,
Spring term Jan-April

Preparation:
Preparing for my exchange was a whirlwind experience. I found that, at first, everything seemed to be going at the pace of molasses, and then, suddenly, I was on the plane to England. The one thing I wish I had been more organized about was my course schedule, I found out very last minute that my schedule had classes running at the same time so I had to find an alternative- which meant returning to the head of the department here to receive permission.

What to pack:
Pack lightly! I brought one large suitcase plus my school bag and I was fine. Shopping is abundant there so whatever you need I guarantee you can buy it there for the same price or more likely, cheaper. Also don’t bother bringing electronics like hairdryers etc because it’s safer just to buy them there so you don’t have to worry about finding a converter (converters can be pretty finicky sometimes). Make sure to bring a backpack that you could travel with for the smaller trips you may want to take (having to do baggage claim at multiple airports becomes tedious after a while). Also don’t bother buying school supplies either because you can find them cheap there as well. When I went it was really cold so DO make sure to pack warmly (think sweaters, jeans, boots etc). Also try to pack clothes that are packable and don’t require ironing etc, it will make your life easier. If you can try not to bring outfits that show the dirt easily either because doing laundry is very expensive as well. I recommend bringing tons of undergarments to avoid frequent trips to the Laundromat ;)

Travel and Transportation:
EASY! There is a train station right at the airport and from there the train ride is aprox. An hour to Uni of Sussex. The stop is literally about a 10 min walk from the campus and is easily accessible.

Definitely take advantage of how easy it is to travel in Europe, you can find cheap flights/bus / or train rides. If an opportunity for a weekend (or longer!) getaway rises just go! You will not regret it, it is so cheap to travel that I’m sure that everyone who is intending on going on an exchange can afford it (I travelled for 3 weeks for around 2000 Canadian including airfare and accommodation).

Financial details:
England is a pricey country, but I found that you could find everything you need for a reasonably cheap price. Groceries are expensive as well, especially fresh produce but if you buy them in town instead of on campus you can save a lot of money. The lifestyle in Brighton is probably on par with Vancouver in regards to cost (pricey) so be wary when going out for the night. Trust me- saving some of your cash for trips is much more worthwhile then a night out in town.

Arrival and Orientation:
I found that the welcome orientation at Sussex was less about being orientating you with the campus but more an opportunity to network with other exchange students. Those that I met during those welcome events became my closest friends abroad with whom I had many spontaneous trips to Italy, Spain, Portugal, London, Ireland, Amsterdam, France and Greece. I can’t explain how priceless those friendships were, and still are to me. Furthermore, the day trips offered were great and also money saver, I did not go on all of them but looking back, I wish I did. The ones I went on I thoroughly enjoyed (including the Harry Potter tour, Stonehenge etc). I know it feels like a lot of money at the time but keep in perspective that you may never get the opportunity to visit these places again, especially with friends and people your age.

Accommodation and Living:

I lived in Park village in my own room and I very much enjoyed my experience there. Yes, the shower was smaller than my closet and the kitchen was less than appealing, but are you there to experience your own home cooking or a spa? No! So don’t dwell on it and just let it roll over you.

I enjoyed my on-campus experience, the residence isn’t too far away from classes and my backyard was a national park which was great for afternoon strolls (you can walk through pastures of cows, really spectacular). I highly recommend living on campus because otherwise you will end up spending a lot of time and money commuting to classes from Brighton. Furthermore, there is a great social side to living in dormitories and living off campus would feel very isolating (I had a friend who did this, and about a month in he moved on campus).

Academic details:

Lectures are very similar to those at home, with a traditional “lecture” and “tutorial” hour(s). The only difference is the grade break down. Your grade is based off your final paper usually due 90% of your total (while the other 10% is from participation and essay outlines). This can be both a blessing and a curse. It makes it very easy to travel and manage your time without having to worry about smaller assignment etc but it can also provide the perfect opportunity to procrastinate. DO NOT DO THIS!! Especially if the class you are taking has an exam, leaving everything to the final weeks because there wasn’t any prior assignment or quizzes is a BAD IDEA. If you know that you will do this, try to look for courses with final take home essays.
**Country weather:**

Very similar to Vancouver weather. Expect rain and wind but also nice sunny days.

**Culture/Places to visit:**

I highly recommend spending a few nights in London. It is one of my favorite places in the world and one will never get bored while visiting there. I’ve spent over a month there and I still haven’t seen/done everything London has to offer. Definitely go see a musical or play, there are usually smaller plays with famous actors/actresses starring in them (I saw a play with Danielle Radcliffe in it AND got his signature afterwards!). Furthermore, make time to have a drink at famous pubs such as: Ye Old Cheshire Cheese (Charles Dickens visited this pub frequently back in the day).

The Harry Potter day trip is definitely worth the money as well.

Hampton court is beautiful and full of interesting history and culture

I could rave and rave about London, there is honestly something for everyone and it only takes an hour to get there! GO!!!!

Also you can find great deals online for plays or afternoon tea as well.

Take the opportunities to visit Scotland and Ireland, they are so close and reasonably cheap. Isle of Moher in Ireland was breathtaking and Arthurs Seat in Edinburgh gives you a great panorama.

Don’t hesitate to join a tour and spend a little bit of cash to enter museums etc, it’s worth it.

**Extracurricular:**

There’s tons of clubs and they have a big club day to showcase them all. For example if you are an avid skier or snowboarder there is even a club that goes to the Alps for a weeklong trip. There is also the walking club (great way to see the country side) ultimate Frisbee, drama etc.

Lessons Learned/ Challenges faced
Do NOT eat junk food despite its cheap price, not worth it. DO go to the manor in the national park by Sussex for a Sunday roast, worth it.

Be wary of who you travel with, go with people you can trust and have similar interests as you. This is important so that neither one of you feels like you’re dragging the other around to certain monuments. Keep the group numbers small as well to avoid this (no more than 4-5 I’d say)

Say yes to every opportunity! It is worth it, the trips and outings you experience with your friends is what will make this trip. You will find time to study so don’t sweat it, don’t let that interfere with your opportunity to really experience England and all it has to offer.

Make sure to carry extra copies of your passport (if on your phone as a pdf or printed out), furthermore travel light so you can avoid the hassle of luggage pick up and carrying it around to your hostel from the train/bus station (Which may be very far away).

This exchange has by far, been one of the best experiences of my life. I loved every minute of it. Don’t worry too much about staying on budget, money comes and goes but this experience is once in a life time. PLUS travelling is fairly cheap, I visited: France, Spain, Ireland, Italy, Scotland, Portugal, Brussels, Amsterdam and London while staying under budget (which was not big let me tell you). You can find cheap deals on sites like: Hostelworld etc (just make sure to look at the reviews and the location of the hostel before booking).