Introduction
Hey there. If you’re reading this then you’re probably considering what your options are for an exchange destination. University of Bath in England, whether or not you’re a Business Administration student, should be on the top of your list. My name is Emily and I spent my exchange semester in Bath during Fall 2014, which has been one of the best experiences of my life. I’ve wanted to go on exchange since before I finished high school and I am so glad I did. If you’re still not sure whether you’re up for taking this risk, I strongly encourage that you do. I don’t know anyone who ever regretted going on exchange so take advantage of this amazing opportunity.

I chose University of Bath because I’ve always wanted to go to England, the location was great and the city is known for its beauty and history. Even more, University of Bath is a highly ranked school in the UK and it offers a wide range of courses, particularly for both of my majors (International Studies and Business Administration). The fall semester usually begins at the end of September and final exams finish at the end of January so that is something to consider as the academic calendar is different than that of SFU. As a Business student, I was able to take alternative assessments (extra papers and one early exam) but if you are pretty early in your university career, I would suggest staying until the end of January and taking advantage of travelling opportunities after that.

Preparation for exchange
I would definitely recommend reading other exchange reports and questionnaire as I found them the most useful in my preparation. At the same time, you can’t be prepared for everything and you will learn most things as you go so be open and be patient with yourself. Don’t hesitate to ask for help as both students and staff are very friendly. Do also explore the university’s website. I found the link below very useful as it gave me an idea of what to expect before I left:

http://www.bath.ac.uk/new-ug/international/index.html

Visa
As I was not going to be staying for more than 6 months and I’m a Canadian citizen, I did not need to apply for a visa. The University provides an entry clearance as Student Visitor, which is basically a piece of paper confirming your exchange semester dates, etc. I didn’t plan on working or doing anything besides studying, thus it was the most optimal choice for me. You are still allowed to travel in and out of the UK with the entry clearance but you need to make sure that you always bring the document with you as you’ll need to go through customs when arriving back in the UK.
Packing
In terms of packing, the climate is quite similar to Vancouver, at least in the fall semester. Make sure to bring boots, umbrella and a rain jacket. The weather may get quite cold and snowy come January so if you decide to go in the spring semester, pack some warm clothes. I would suggest bringing most of your clothes with you as buying clothing there can feel quite pricey when you convert pounds to Canadian dollars. However, there is a store called Primark that all of my girlfriends were raving about due to its low price tags and quite fashionable pieces. Nevertheless, I wasn’t impressed by the quality of the clothing but it may just do the trick for a semester! As for other things, you’ll be able to buy most of them once you arrive. I would just suggest bringing a versatile adapter that works for different countries in Europe so that if you decide to travel, you won’t need to buy a separate one for each different area.

Travel
My plane ticket cost about $1400 Canadian, leaving in early September and returning in during the second week of January. I booked it quite early and I suggest that you do the same if you are sure about your dates. Be prepared for potential delays – I was delayed on my outgoing and returning trips which were quite interesting experiences of their own. I would also suggest making some travelling plans for before or after your exchange semester. I spent about 3 weeks in Germany visiting family and sightseeing before beginning my semester on September 21st. Many of my exchange friends also travelled around Europe either at the end of the summer, during the winter break or after final exams. It’s a fantastic opportunity so definitely take advantage of it!

Finances
In terms of finances, I did not set up a UK bank account and mostly used my credit cards to pay for purchases. I also withdrew large amounts of cash a few times from my debit card. The withdrawal charge is about 5 dollars so it made more sense to take out more money only a couple times. You can withdraw money from pretty much any bank in the UK. Do check if your bank has a partnership with a UK bank as setting up an account may be easier or you’ll get to enjoy some other perks.

Costs
Finally, I would say that the costs of living are pretty similar to Vancouver. England is known to be quite pricey; it may feel especially so due to the exchange rate. I spent most of my money on necessities and travelling. In terms of rent, I paid about the same as I did living on Residence at SFU. Make sure to save money if possible and apply for scholarships and other funding as it’ll certainly help with the extra costs.
You continue paying tuition fees to SFU, which is great as you can automatically have a pretty good estimation for your budget. If you’re a Business student, you don’t need to pay the extra charge for Business courses which you normally do (yay!). Moreover, other exchange reports offer a pretty good idea of what costs to expect. Financial Aid & Awards also offers a nice budgeting template so check it out.

**During Exchange**

**Arrival and Orientation**
I arrived a day before the Freshers’ week (orientation for First Years) began. The University offers a free coach service from Heathrow Airport several times that weekend so I would highly recommend utilizing this resource as it’s free and takes you right to the doorsteps of your accommodation (if you’re living in University accommodation). Below is where you can find more information on the service:


Make sure to book pretty early in advance as seats fill up fast! I arrived quite late but there are all types of tours that run that weekend aimed at first year students which you should take advantage off as well. I also highly recommend doing the free city tour that meets pretty much every day in front of the Roman Baths. Try to do at the beginning of your time there as it’ll help you become more familiar with the city. You can find more information on that and what to do in the city, below:

[http://visitbath.co.uk/](http://visitbath.co.uk/)

The University orientation was a week long. As I said before, it’s aimed at the new students but you’re welcome to participate in the activities. I attended a general session for all exchange students and a few other activities for the School of Management. They are mandatory but most importantly, they’re a great way to meet other exchange students. I met some of my closest exchange friends during these activities.

**Accommodation and living**
I lived in Pulteney Court which is about a 5-10 minute walk from the city center. The location was fantastic and it was also great to have many other exchange students living in the same building. I had my own room and shared a bathroom and a kitchen with two other people. The flats range between 3-5 people. Beware that there are only two washers and dryers for the whole building (unless they’ve invested in more since then), and doing laundry is quite pricey. This accommodation was the cheapest option. Another residence, Thornbank Gardens, is newer
and offers individual bathrooms but the price tag is more expensive so weigh in on what you’re comfortable when deciding on which accommodation you’d prefer.

In terms of transit, there are bus stops near all accommodations, whichever you end up in. You may find the bus system quite weird as there are two bus companies and you can’t use one’s bus pass when taking the bus of another company. If you’re living in Pulteney Court, the First Bus would be the optimal choice. I strongly suggest that you invest in a bus pass for the semester. You get a 10 pound discount if you buy it during Freshers’ Week. I paid about 80 pounds for mine but seeing as individual return ticket is about 2 pounds, it was definitely worth it. You can also travel to Bristol for free on the weekends using the First Bus pass!

For groceries, I would recommend shopping at Sainsbury’s near Green Park station as it’s the closest to the city center and also the cheapest. There are local Sainsbury’s and Tesco stores which are basically small versions of the supermarkets but they can be a bit pricier than the big stores. There’s also Iceland, which is quite an affordable supermarket in the Southgate Center but the line ups are usually very long.

For kitchen supplies and other things for your flat, I also recommend checking out Oxfam in the Pulteney Bridge. You can get second-hand items like utensils for much cheaper than at other stores.

**Academic details**

I found that the course-load at Bath was much lighter than my typical semesters at SFU. I took 4 courses, each worth 6 credits (3 SFU credits) and had only 2 hours of class for each course. There are no midterms and my courses had about 2 to 3 different assessments (presentation, essay, final exam). Assessments will really depend on your area of study. I took a course from the POLIS department which consisted of a group presentation, essay outline and a final essay. My business courses had finals and a lot of groups work. The system is different than what we’re used to at SFU in that it requires a lot more independent work and they stress the importance of having an argument in your writing, presentations, etc. As my HR professor told me – it is not only about the ‘what’ but rather the ‘so what?’

The grading system is also quite different but it’ll be explained to you once you arrive. Don’t stress out too much. As long as you have a balance between schoolwork and having the time of your life, you’ll do fine. The professors are also really friendly and happy to answer any of your questions. I really enjoyed all of my courses at Bath and the professors were fantastic. I’m pursuing the Accounting concentration so my course choices were quite limited so I ended up taking business ‘electives’ like HR and Marketing. If you’re doing another concentration you’ll have a good variety of courses to choose from so take a good look at the available subjects.
As I said before, if you’re in Business and you’re not able to stay for the final exams, alternative assessments are possible so make sure to contact the International Advisor.

I only had to buy one textbook for the semester and all of my other materials were on Moodle (similar system to Canvas) so I could print them out if I wanted to. If you do need a textbook, I recommend ordering from Amazon as it gets delivered to your accommodation.

**Country information**

England is quite similar to Canada so you’re not in for a huge culture change. Nevertheless, it is fascinating country with an amazing amount of history and beautiful landscapes. There is a lot to see! I highly recommend visiting Stonehenge (there’s a bus tour running from Bath), Bristol (the trip is free on the weekends with the First Bus pass) and making a trip to Cardiff, Wales (a cheap 1 hour bus ride away from Bristol). London is an absolute must! You can get there either by train or the coach (National Express). I found the coach the most convenient and cheapest option. There is so much to see and do in London that it really depends on the individual so do your research and plan accordingly.

The university or the accommodation office often offer day trips to some of the locations I mentioned above and more, so make sure to read your Bath email often to have an idea of what’s going during the semester. My friends and I took a day trip to Oxford through the accommodation office which was a great escape from classes.

You will also undoubtedly explore all that Bath has to offer. I would definitely recommend checking out:

- Sally Lunn’s
- Roman Baths
- Bath Abbey
- Christmas Market (December)
- Pulteney Bridge (there’s a lovely café at the beginning of the bridge which serves a delicious full English breakfast for 5 pounds)
- The Royal Crescent
- The Circus

England is also a great location from which you can explore the UK and Europe. There are low-cost airlines such as EasyJet and Ryanair that make it really affordable to travel on a student budget. Make sure to book in advance to get the best deals! Megabus is also an option as it can be cheaper to bus but the trip may take a lot longer.
Social and extra-curricular activities
University of Bath has a lively student union which offers a wide variety of extra-curricular activities and societies. Sports are also quite popular and the university has an award-winning sports facility. During Freshers’ Week, there are usually different fairs (similar to Clubs Days) which all the extra-curriculars on display. There is something to suit everyone so do check them out.

Social life will of course be an important part of your exchange experience. Be open, have fun and be yourself. But also be patient and realize that it may take different people different amounts of time to warm up to others and so on. I found that travelling with my new friends was a great chance to get to know them better and become closer so I highly encourage you to make some travelling arrangements with the new friends you make.

Bath has a large student population and it’s also a popular tourist destination. There a lot of places where you can socialize and eat. Explore the city center and ask other students for suggestions.

Reflections and Tips
For me, going on exchange was truly a dream come true. Whether or not you feel the same way about exchange, it is an experience like no other and undoubtedbely, one that will change your life. I can’t say that my exchange was exactly like I expected it to be but I can say with confidence that it was everything and more. It challenged me in ways I did not really expect like experiencing homesickness, getting lost in completely unfamiliar cities, flight delays and striking a balance between school work and really immersing myself in the opportunity. More importantly, it made me more mature and more confident in my skills and abilities. If I can handle living in unfamiliar country far from home or finding my way in a city where I do not speak the language, surely I can handle pretty much anything! The wonderful people I met and the amazing places I’ve had the chances to see also contributed to my amazing exchange experience. It made me realize that there is so much more to life than we think there is. That there is a whole world out there that encompasses so much beauty, knowledge and life-changing experiences; no matter how minor they may be in the moment. I think you’ll understand what I mean if you’ve lived in another country or travelled. Even that piece of knowledge is absolutely worth taking the risk to embark on this adventure.

It may hard or challenging at times but as long as you are open, patient with yourself and others, and believe in yourself, your experience will be incredible. Be spontaneous and get out of your comfort zone but always keep in mind what you’re comfortable with. Travel and discover new places, whether it is in Bath or somewhere else.
But the best and the most important advice I can give is that if you have the opportunity, go on exchange. Don’t doubt it or second-guess yourself. It will be absolutely worth it.
Photos

Above: A typical room in Pulteney Court.
Above: The Roman Baths (free entry with your student card) and Bath Abbey right behind.