My Exchange • University of Bath

City: Bath, England
Degree: Joint Honors Business Administration & Economics (Finance)
Residence: Thornbank Gardens (around $150 CAD/month)
Courses taken: MN 20211 (Advanced Corporate Finance), MN 20073 (Marketing), MN 20291 (HR), MN 30209 (Investment Banking)

Bath is a city of Georgian architecture. Cities with similar architectural style would include Cambridge and Oxford. Although the city is small, there is an abundant variety of shops to meet all your needs and numerous corridors littered with souvenir boutiques, savouring sights, and delicious eats. Some famous landmarks throughout would be:

Alexandra Park • Gives an amazing view!
Bath Abbey (left) & Roman Baths (right) • 2 old architectural beauties

The Royal Crescent • Great place to picnic on sunny days

Packing:
Do some research on the weather for the term that you will be in Bath. It doesn’t rain as much as Vancouver, but with the University on a mountain – it was chillier than in the town centre. There are numerous shops in the City Centre where you can pick up clothing you are missing for a few £: pajamas, pillows, sneakers, flip-flops, etc. No voltage transformers or converters needed, just stock up on travel adapters (both for the UK and the rest of Europe). In Thornbank, there were about 4 wall plugs; if you need more, I recommend a power bar.
If you have room in your suitcase, bring bedding. Most shops in the town centre close around 5/6pm. This will make settling in that first night much easier. If not, you can purchase some (£10) at the John Wood Accommodation Building when you pick up your keys. Try to ensure you can move-in within their hours of operation, otherwise you’ll have to wait until the next day to pick up your keys. You are supplied with a duvet and pillow when you move in.

Travel:

I flew direct with Air Canada from YVR to LHR. Since we are not given our exam schedules until mid-April, I would recommend first purchasing a one-way ticket. I am a little bittersweet that I could not stay long after my exams ended as I had to fly back for co-op, but a lot of the other exchange students usually continue travelling until late July/early August. In addition, look at flying into different airports in the UK (Gatwick is the cheapest), when you first move-in. You can save quite a lot, compared to flying into London Heathrow.

If you can, bring some wallet-sized pictures of your face. This will help in getting your 16-25 Railcard, if you are planning to travel quite a bit on the GWR (rail) within the UK. Check out ‘www.trainline.co.uk’ for routes available. The rail usually refers to the train, whereas the coach refers to ‘busses’. I ordered my Coach (Young adult) card online, and had it shipped to my house before I arrived in the UK. There are usually coach routes between all the major cities and airports.

Financial details:

I would recommend exchanging a lot of cash (£ or €) before leaving. The Canadian rates available in Bath and within the UK were horrendous (as CAD is viewed as very weak in the EU). I signed up for the CIBC Prepaid Visa, for both Euros and Pounds. This made it easy for me to load my Visa to use, and I could also withdraw money from ATMs (no transaction fees). My friend looked into other non-fee transaction credit cards, such as the Amazon Chase MasterCard, with bonuses. This will help a lot if you are planning to travel frequently, as you can earn points and cash-back on booking hotels, meals, travel expenses, etc. Most places in the UK accept Visa, but some smaller stores/restaurants in the rest of Europe may only accept cash.

During Exchange

Arrival and orientation:

I missed orientation as I booked my tickets prior to receiving the e-mail with the orientation details. I would recommend waiting until you receive this e-mail before booking your flight. In orientation, you receive a University tour, meet other exchange students, and also register for classes. The International Mobility Team is great at putting on events throughout the year, so make sure to keep an eye out for those! They are your first stop for support in multiple areas ranging from enrolling in classes, hosting exchange events, and answering inquiries about emergencies.

Accommodation:

I received a spot for Thornbank Gardens in the City Centre. To confirm your place, you have to pay the full amount in £. You can pay online with a credit card, or pay in-person when you arrive at the University; though the former is preferred. In Thornbank, I had my own washroom. There is mixed or single gender floors. I shared the kitchen with 7 other girls.
Thornbank has a mix of graduate and exchange students, so not everyone on your floor will be an exchange student. I also liked that a lot of the other exchange students were in Thornbank with me as it was fun being able to cook, eat, and study together as we were in such close proximity. It is also only about an 8-minute walk to the City Centre and Railway Station.

I would recommend bringing an individual set of utensils to use (1 spoon, 1 fork, 1 knife, etc.), as the accommodation does not provide it. There are shared utilities such as the kettle, microwave, toaster. The rest you can buy very easily.

**Academic details:**

You are likely enrolled in the classes indicated on your exchange application, but during the first week, you can try out other classes. The first week has ‘taster sessions’, in which you can sit classes and decide if you want to switch. There is not a central online system for registering classes, and all switches will have to be submitted to the International Mobility Team, either by paper or e-mail.

If you are concentrating in Finance, there are a wide variety of classes to pick from, and the lecturers are top-notch. Lecturers do not follow the textbook as closely as SFU professors do, so it’s really up to you to search for more resources when needed, or ask for help. With the teaching style more focused on classroom discussions and incorporating real-life examples, I felt that I had a clearer and deeper understanding of which careers would suit me in the field of Finance.

Most of my classes were based on a 100% final, with one a mix of 30% essay and 70% final. Make sure you check your exam dates when they are published to ensure you have enough time to plan your study schedule accordingly for revision.

**Arriving at the border:**

Since I was only studying in Bath for 4 months, I did not need to apply for a short-term visa. When you have been accepted to the University of Bath, they will send a notification for you to register for a special number. This will be attached to your Passport, and every time you are at the UK border, you only have to complete a landing card and show proof of student status to regain entry. I requested a student status letter from University of Bath’s Registry Office, which listed my permanent residence address, occupational status (student), and length of stay in the UK; this made crossing the border very easy.

**Tips:**

I would recommend going for the phone company ‘3’s 12 GB Pay-as-you-go data plan. It allows you to roam with your phone in most countries in Europe. For grocery shopping, the big Sainsbury (on Green Park Rd.) had the greatest selection of fresh produce. There were deals in smaller shops (24 eggs @ Iceland for £1.60 or 8 toilet paper rolls @ Poundland for £1). It was definitely cheaper to cook your own food, than to eat out.

Most meals eaten out were around £10-£15. There may be a service charge (table charge per person) at some restaurants. However, I would recommend trying some of the finer restaurants in Bath. Might as well make the best of your time there, right?
Some of my favourite restaurants/cafes in Bath would be:

- **CUA** (best steak ever!)
- **Cote Brasserie** (authentic French dishes)
- **Sally Lunn’s** (oldest tea house! Their ‘sandwiches’ are delicious!)
- **Tasty Restaurant** (Chinese hotpot and spicy delicacies)
- **Society Café** (great for study sessions/coffee dates)
- **Boston Tea Party** (great tasting drinks)
- **Peri Peri Chicken** (open until 3am!)
- **Chili House Noodles** (spicy, spicy noodles; well-worth the sweat!)

Some apps I used while on exchange were:

- **Skyscanner** (great for looking up cheap flights); **Google flights** is good too
- **Go Euro** (compares prices for buses, trains, and flights from destination A to B)
- **Vist a City** (includes itineraries for major cities and tips on how to have a great time)
- **Lonely Planet** (used this to learn more about the city)
- **Google Translate** (don’t underestimate the usefulness when you are conversing with hosts whom do not speak English!)
- **Uber** (great for when there is no local transit; not available in all cities though)
- **City Mapper** (shows you where all the transit routes were)

**Travelling around Europe (outside the UK)**

There are a lot of beautiful cities to see in Europe! I would recommend making a list of which ones are at the top, and trying to build your travel schedule around that. You won’t be able to see all the cities you possibly want (if you had 20+ like me...), but you can try to knock off a huge chunk in 4 months. Most of my classes were on Monday and Tuesday, so I had the rest of the week off to travel. For the most part, I found 2-3 days in one city would be enough for me.

Bear in mind, I am someone who likes to pack my days with things to see, so I get the most out of my time there. Some cities I have visited would include: Barcelona, Copenhagen, Amsterdam, Munich, Salzburg, Warsaw, Krakow, Prague, Paris, Rome, Florence, and Pisa.

Know that flying from the UK to the rest of Europe is very, very cheap. Some noteworthy flights would be: Bristol ➔ Warsaw (£52 one-way during peak season) and Gatwick ➔ Barcelona (£61 return). There are also bus and train options between cities within Europe.

I absolutely loved getting bike rides in the cities I visited. I would recommend this as it is a great activity to do with friends, but also a quick way to explore the city’s main sights. There are also (free) walking tours that are available in the larger cities; this is a great way to learn about the histories of the different cities and famous landmarks.

**Travelling around Europe (inside the UK)**

Although I was not in the UK a lot as I was mostly travelling, some noteworthy cities to visit are: Oxford, Cambridge, Brighton, and Bristol. Oxford and Cambridge are University towns, meaning the colleges are scattered throughout the city. Their architecture was astounding, and I felt myself getting lost within the quaintness that surrounds the town. It is also very accessible to travel to northern UK cities or even Scotland by train.
Reflection after exchange

My friend who had encouraged me to go on exchange with: “I’ve never had a friend who had gone on exchange, regret it one bit.”. I can proudly say, that is what I feel about these past 4 months, and more.

Exchange, though in the beginning was a bit scary and lonely as I went without really knowing anyone from SFU. I realized it’s by being unfamiliar with where you are, that you really push yourself to go outside of your limits; to befriend others whom you might normally shy away from. Tell yourself “Why not?” when you are invited to events, nights out, or even just meeting random strangers on your travels. Your exchange term will fly by before you know it, and you don’t want to have any regrets. Keep in mind, not everyone will want to be your friend – and that’s okay. Take time getting to know people, and know you’ll eventually find your crowd 😊

I was someone whom had never really travelled outside Canada for great lengths of time, before this exchange. By living independently and figuring out my life in a new city, new culture, new University - it was a different, but valuable experience. You learn to notice the special and unusual things in this new city, things that the locals may not realize, recognize the diversity of the students in your classes, and build upon the multiculturalism in opinions of the people you encounter.
If you are looking for a Church in Bath on exchange, I would recommend St. Bart’s. They are a truly supportive and friendly community, that hosts a slew of international events throughout the week – in addition to Fellowship on Tuesdays and Service on Sundays. I am grateful that I was able to live similar to a local by creating my own presence in the community, as well as travel in Europe on the “long” weekends. Exchange is how you decide to make it, and you’ll realize how much more fun it can be when you truly take advantage of it.

Piazza del Duomo • Florence, Italy

Charles Bridge • Prague, Czech Republic

Old Town • Warsaw, Poland
I am very happy I had chosen Europe as the opportunities to meet new people and discover wondrous cities were boundless. In planning for and balancing your travel and academic life, you’ll realize how much you are capable of doing. Studying abroad not only defined, but also promoted my curiosity in enjoying the unearthing of another country’s culture across the world. It made all that preparation and stress endured leading up to that flight, more than worthwhile.

One thing to stress is to always look after your belongings. I know of people whom have had their passport or wallet pickpocketed while on exchange. Unfortunate situations are rare if you are a careful and cautious traveler, but know that all experiences are worthwhile as they teach you lessons along the way. Place your safety first – above all else. Some partner institutions are also not as lenient with missed deadlines or finals, so be cautious when travelling.

All in all, the pursuit of developing a broad and sophisticated worldview definitely made it easier to form partnerships and work effectively while remaining culturally aware. I feel more confident as I have learned to “fend” for myself these past few months, conversed with people of all backgrounds, and ultimately rediscovered my identity and passion for Finance. I hope my tips & tricks from my international experience has encouraged you to realize and partake on the valuable opportunities that academic exchange presents.