For my Study Abroad period I was fortunate enough to attend the University of Nottingham in the United Kingdom. I arrived in September 2017 and stayed for two semesters, and left in May 2018. U of N has a great website that is easy to navigate and has all the information that you could need, including options for student accommodation, how to pay for accommodation and a module course catalogue from previous years so you can assess if there are enough modules you are interested in. For myself, there were more than enough History modules to keep me happy, but I met exchange students who were participating in many different departments and they all seemed pleased with what the University offered.

Before I left for the UK, I was unsure of how to pack as I did not know what the weather would be like while I was there. As it turns out, the climate over in Nottingham is similar to Vancouver; unpredictable and often damp. Always carry an umbrella, and dress in layers, as your phone might say that the skies are clear that day, but then there you are, walking back to your flat from lecture, and it starts pouring rain. It did not get too cold, but do bring some warm clothes as it did snow around the end of November and a little bit in January. My greatest fear was over-packing, and at the same time not packing enough. It was comforting to have a Sainsbury’s right across the street from me, as I could buy not only food but all things I needed in the kitchen and in my room, such as bed sheets and blankets. Therefore, I only packed the necessities and bought what I needed there. It wasn’t expensive to buy, which is also a comfort as I left almost everything for my flatmates to use when I returned to Canada.

Travelling to the University is easy; all you have to do is fly into either Gatwick or Heathrow, and take a bus with the
National Express, which will take you straight to the University of Nottingham. I stayed for two semesters and needed to get a visa (British Residence Permit). I apply well before I left, as my passport was taken for a few weeks. I had to pay almost $500 for this. On the topic of money, it was easiest for me to open up a bank account with Santander on my first day at the University. For the International Students Welcome Weekend, I went to a meeting where they helped us set up the account, walking us through every step. It took a while, and the bank account opened a week after I submitted the papers, but it was worth it because then I didn’t have to constantly worry about charges on my credit card and the exchange rates. It will depend on who you bank with, but for me this was less of a hassle and made it easier to manage how much I was spending.

The welcome events for International Students are very informative as you can tour the University, set up a banking account and meet with a Peer Tutor that will be assigned to you. You will also have a Personal Tutor, who is a professor of the University. Both of my tutors were really helpful and supplied a lot of help and advice during my time in Nottingham. During the welcome events you are also able to move into your accommodation and you can take a free cab from Cripps Hall to your accommodation so do not worry about having all of your bags with you when you get there. In terms of modules, I tried to take modules I did not think were available at SFU, two of which were Medieval History modules. I was thoroughly interested in all of my modules, and all of my professors were knowledgable and passionate about what they taught. Keep in mind that as an exchange student you might be able to write coursework instead of sitting the final exams. I did this because I wanted to be home to do a summer semester with SFU and get back to work, if this is something that you are interested in, ask your professor!

Additional to my modules I also joined the Women’s Football Union and took advantage of the train system. The University had a clubs week, where you can go around and sign up for the different sports teams and unions, but if you are not sure if you want to sign up you can always join later. For
me, the biggest concern was that I wanted to travel on weekends, so I decided not to join IMS football, playing only on Sunday nights. This gave me plenty of time to hope on a train and go anywhere in England. When you are there, take advantage of the trains. They will take you everywhere. My favourite place was definitely Edinburgh, but Bath and York were high on my list as well. Get a railcard if you plan to travel within the country, as it does end up saving you money in the end. Many of the cities in England can be visited in an overnight trip.

Overall, my exchange experience was the best eight months of my life. Living alone actually helped me to be healthier, and more efficient with my schoolwork. My flatmates were all lovely girls who will be my friends for life, and I was able to travel to cities that I probably never would have gone to had I not been over there already. I was nervous before I left, but I have never been so happy about pushing myself out of my comfort zone. England is full of history, so it was the best place for me to enrich my education.