

Exchange Report – the University of Exeter



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2017 Spring Exchange

Monthly activity log

January

University of Exeter started school on 16/1 and I arrived at London 6 days before the start of semester, trying to get used to the environment and exploring the country. I went to Exeter on 15/1 by train which took me around 2.5 hours. The hall I lived in is James Owen Court, where almost all exchange students reside, so you could easily meet new friends from all around the world. The nearest Tesco is within 1 minute walk and the city center is in 10-minute walking distance so it is convenient to get daily necessities and go shopping. But it is quiet far from the campus, which takes around 20 minutes to walk uphill.

The first day of school is the orientation day. The university organised campus tour and talks to let us get familiar with the school. We also got the student card on that day after documentation check and we could enrol and change our modules throughout the day.

There was not too much workload in the first month of school, so I did a bit travelling on the weekend and day offs to Paris and London.

February

After half month of school, I discovered that the assessment style in Exeter is quite different from that in UST. We are assessed by different assignments and areas in UST like class participation, group project, examination and homework. However, all of the courses I took do not hold mid-term examination and only two of my courses require doing group projects. The other two are assessed 100% based on final examination which are essay-type questions. Also, in order to have deeper understanding of the topics and perform well in examination, there are a lot of required readings to gain more knowledge. Yet, the workload was not that heavy even though there were a few deadlines. I went to the Netherlands and some cities nearby. The most enjoyable thing I have done is watching musicals. I think this is the first item in the to-do-list in the UK and also Europe.

March

This is the busiest month in my exchange life in Exeter. There were a number of meetings every week for the group projects because the students are hard-working and strive for perfection. They have so much enthusiasm in their majors and courses so they

put a lot of effort in studying. They also maintain a good balance between personal life and school work. I have learnt a lot from them. Time flies and this is the last teaching month. I spent most of the time at school, exploring different parts. I also cooked a lot with the new friends I met in Exeter, treasuring every moment with them.

April

This is the month I have been waiting for so long since the start of the semester. It is a one-month spring speak without caring much about studies. It was the time that I have grown up a lot and be more independent because we had to plan the whole trip by ourselves and overcoming the unknown obstacles. There are always problems with the planes, trains and buses and we do not know why that is the case so it is a new adventure every day. But still it is fun to travel to different countries, enjoying traditional cultures especially the food! It is also very rewarding when I could manage to plan the whole trip with my friends and most importantly return to Exeter safely! Among the countries I have been to, I love Austria the most because the Mozart Museum is so great that I would like to visit again! You must try the famous Viennese beef soup too.

May

After the relaxing trip, it was the time for assignments and studying. Although people said it is easy to get a pass, it requires hard work also. The essay-type questions in examination emphasise the links between different topics so it requires a deep understanding of the topics. In addition, there is a need to have proper referencing in the essay. I have spent a lot of time reciting the years and authors of readings. After the examination, I travelled to France and Monaco and returned to Hong Kong at the end of May.

General Exchange Information

1. Visa procedures

Hong Kong passport holders do not need to apply a visa to study in the UK. But you will get a stamp for “Short Term Study Visa” which is valid for six months when you enter the UK border. Remember to show your acceptance letter (and bank statement just to play safe) when you arrive at the UK airport and whenever you travel to other countries because you will need to show the letter and get a new stamp while entering UK again. (For your information, you could also apply the visa online before your departure but it costs around HKD800 and I personally think that getting the visa at the airport is absolutely fine so I did not get it in advance.)

2. Orientation Activities

A number of activities will be organised in the first week like quiz buffet and British cream tea. You will receive an email telling you how to register the events. There is a campus tour to let you get familiar with the campus but Google map is always my friend as the campus is too large.

3. International Services & Activities

There are many clubs and societies in the university and you could find some of them having promotion counter in the first week of school. It is recommended to join if you want to meet new friends!

4. Accommodations

The university will provide accommodation to exchange students and it is usually the James Owen Court which is close to the city centre and also the supermarkets. It costs around 2800 pounds for one term and all rooms are en-suite. There is a kitchen for all people on the same floor to share. You could also rent other flats by yourself and it is cheaper. If you decide to live in the hall provided by the university, make sure you complete the application procedures on time (as instructed in the email and the email is sent after the acceptance notice so keep track of it).

5. Courses Registration

You need to submit the study plan form while completing the application on the university website. The maximum number of courses that you could take is four but you could write down up to eight courses on the form and they will be allocated by the university staff. You could change it afterwards in the orientation week but it takes up a lot of time because you cannot amend it using online systems like that of UST. You need to meet the counsellor (the queue is usually

very long) and seek for approval but it does not guarantee that you could change the course because the waiting list could be long.

One important thing to note is that make sure you receive an email confirming your courses around one month before the start of term. The course timetable should be available in the Exeter app. Please send an email to the university staff if you do not receive the email and timetable because I was quite panic when another student and I seem to be the only ones having no courses registered and need to go to different faculties to register courses.

6. Teaching & Assessment Methods

I took 2 management courses, 1 sociology course and 1 geography course. 3 of them hold final examination of which the grades of 2 courses are calculated 100% based on the final examination. All of them are about writing essays and usually there are 5-7 questions and you need to choose 2 to answer. You need to prepare the recommended readings for the examination. The teaching method is similar to the one in UST, but the lesson is quite short, just 2 hours per week and there are tutorials sometimes.

7. Sports & Recreation Facilities

There is a gym room but it is quite expensive. You could play table tennis in the courtyard of James Owen Court and it is free. There are also music rooms with piano and you need to register it in advance on the Exeter website.

8. Finance & Banking (including currency / expenses)

There are different banks including HSBC and Santander in the city centre and you could apply the local bank account with the letter issued by the university. It can be taken at the student service counter located in the Forum. It is more convenient to use the debit card to pay at the supermarkets and shops and service charge could be saved when doing online shopping. About the budget of exchange, you could expect 90K to 120K as the costs of living is quite high in the UK.

9. Social Clubs & Networking Opportunities

You could know more about different clubs from their Facebook pages. There are different classes and gatherings so you could easily meet new friends. Your flatmates in accommodation are usually of different nationality and cultures also. There is no worry that you will be alone.

10. Health & Safety

Exeter is a safe town so you do not need to worry that much about your safety but it is always better to be cautious.

11. Food

There are a number of restaurants in campus so you could have a range of choices. The meals are not expensive, usually costs 4-5 pounds. The Grove is recommended and its breakfast is the best. There are different types of restaurants in the city centre like sushi and Nandos. You could expect an average of 15 pounds per meal if you dine out. Many students cook at the hall as it is the cheapest option. You could find Tesco within 1-minute walk from James Owen Court and there are larger supermarkets like Iceland and Sainsbury if you walk further. There are also 3 Asian markets in 5-minute walking distance which sells different Asian food like cup noodles, fishballs and Korean sauce. You could easily get different ingredients if you miss Asian food suddenly.

12. Transportation

People seldom take public transportation within Exeter as you could go almost everywhere on foot. There are bus stations, train stations and even airport so it is convenient to travel to other cities and countries. It is recommended to buy the coach card and railcard if you travel to London and other cities often because it saves 1/3 of fares in every purchase. You could apply the cards online.

13. Climate

It could be quite cold in January and February so it is better to prepare a thicker coat. It always rains in the UK so water-proof jackets and shoes are recommended. The weather starts to be warmer from April.

14. Communication

There are a number of service provider and 3 is a common one. You could get a sim card easily at the shop and the price is reasonable ranging from 5 pounds to 25 pounds depending on the data usage and it could also be used in a number of European countries with no additional cost.

15. Cautionary measures

Though UK is regarded as a safe country, there were a number of accidents happening in the previous months so please be careful always especially when you travel to London. If you would like to travel to other countries, remember to purchase insurance and it is recommended to buy it before departure as it is quite difficult to find insurance plans that cover non UK residents online. Also, the International SOS app is recommended to be downloaded just in case anything happens.

Items to bring

1. Passport
2. Cash
3. Acceptance letter, bank statement
4. Clothes (waterproof jackets recommended)
5. Charger
6. Laptop
7. Medicine
8. Adaptors for travelling
9. Small suitcase for travelling (which fits the size of the cabinet of the plane)
10. Camera

You may also bring pillows and bed sheet if you want but it is easy to get them from Wilko. Actually almost all daily necessities could be found in the supermarkets nearby including pans and even rice-cookers so you will just need to bring the most important things with you if your luggage does not have extra space.