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London, United Kingdom

Part 1 Monthly activity log

Sep: First, in September, I flew to Frankfurt and spent time traveling in Germany from September 8th to September 18th. During this trip, I explored Germany's Romantic Castle Route on my own. After that, I entered the UK through Scotland, where I visited the Highlands and Edinburgh. Following my time in Scotland, I took a train to London and began my exchange life there. The cost of living and property prices in London are extremely high, especially in the area where I stayed, which was hard for me to adjust to at first. However, I discovered that even the prices at the most upscale supermarkets there are cheaper than in Hong Kong. Plus, the food is incredibly delicious, so I would definitely say that if you visit the UK, you should try cooking your own meals!

Oct: The UK is very close to Paris, separated only by the English Channel. At the time, I decided to take a bus to get there, which was very affordable. It turned out to be quite a unique experience because the journey involved taking a ferry across the Channel. It was raining heavily with strong winds during the crossing, making it an unforgettable adventure. The bus drove onto the ferry, and after the crossing, it drove off again to continue the trip.

In October, I also attended some operas. Some of them were quite boring because they were included in the course package. I found that the operas I chose and paid for myself were generally more interesting. However, the ones arranged by the university, though old, had cultural and historical significance, so I needed to appreciate them with a more focused mindset to complete the course. This was quite challenging to adapt to, as it required a lot of concentration to fully understand the operas, and some of the language used was so archaic that even Americans found it difficult to follow.

Nov: In November, the aurora season began, and a few friends I met there and I traveled to Tromsø, Norway, to see the Northern Lights. The scenery in Norway was breathtaking, with snow-capped mountains and charming little cabins. Unfortunately, the clouds were quite thick that day, so we only caught a glimpse of the aurora. Despite that, we were still very content with the experience.

In November, I visited several regions in the UK. First, I went to Oxford, a city with a rich academic history, where I explored some of the Harry Potter filming locations, which were absolutely stunning. I also visited Cardiff, the capital of Wales, a coastal city with one of the rare seaside views in the UK.

Additionally, I traveled to Seaford, a place overlooking the English Channel. The dramatic cliffs there made me feel as if I were standing at the edge of the world. Since most of November was a holiday period, I spent the time traveling to different parts of the UK.

Dec: In December, it was almost time to say goodbye. There were lots of activities that month. After finishing all my exams, I attended a farewell party where I played table tennis and chatted with all my Asian friends. We also tried a real-life Monopoly game as a group. It was a team-based

activity where we had to play games, buy properties, and invest in houses. Our team ended up winning, probably thanks to a few brilliant minds who carried the whole team.

However, I noticed that the Europeans had a much more relaxed attitude toward the game. They didn't care much about winning or losing; they just wanted to have fun. On the other hand, we were very focused on winning right from the start. I think this is something we could learn from them—games should be played for enjoyment, not just for victory.

Part 2 General Study Abroad Information

1. **Visa Procedures:** As a Hong Kong citizen, there's no need to apply for a special visa to visit the UK. However, we can't use the EU E-Gates and have to queue with everyone else. So, if you're in a rush to catch a flight or enter the country, make sure you plan ahead and allow extra time, as the lines can be quite long.
2. **Orientation Activities:** First, I went to the Thames River, where the university rented a boat that was set up as a club. It had the usual club atmosphere, but with the added bonus of stunning views of the Thames. I got to see Big Ben, Tower Bridge, and the London Eye, and I took lots of beautiful photos. That day, I also met many freshmen who, like me, were new to the university. On the day of the boat party, London was very cold, and we were expected to dress formally for the event. This caught me off guard since I hadn't brought any formal attire with me. I had to rush out to buy something suitable, so here's a tip: always pack at least one formal outfit for such occasions! That day turned out to be a great experience. The scenery from the boat was stunning, and it felt refreshing to chat and sip red wine while dressed formally on a boat. It was truly a unique and memorable event.

Additionally, I attended the society fair, which was quite different from how it's done in Hong Kong. Here, students actively approach you, and you can play lots of games. This contrasts with Hong Kong, where societies usually set up booths, and you have to approach them yourself. Some sports societies even gave live demonstrations—I tried MMA and learned some boxing techniques. Finally, I also joined the volleyball team.

3. **International Services & Activities:** I borrow the calculator from the exchange office. They keep reminding is the change in the government policies.
4. **Accommodation:** In terms of accommodation, I stayed in the university dormitory. It was a shared flat with five individual rooms, a shared bathroom, and a shared living area. There were no additional facilities, and meal plans weren't included, so I had to handle my own meals. Considering it was in central London, the price of £40 per week was quite reasonable.

Since the university only offers a limited number of dormitory spots, I emailed them as soon as I received my offer to secure my place. I didn't bother searching for other accommodation online because renting a place in any part of London would have been beyond my budget.

I would recommend anyone planning to come here for an exchange to secure a spot in the university dormitories. If you live further away to look for cheaper deals, the cost of transportation would quickly add up and outweigh any savings on rent.

5. **Courses Registration:** The course registration process there is quite similar to my home university. The rules and requirements are the same, and many of the courses can directly transfer credits back to my home university. We also have priority when enrolling in courses, so there's no need to queue. Usually, once you sign up, you're guaranteed a spot in the class.
6. **Courses that I have taken:** I took four courses while I was there: Accounting, Econometrics, Performing Arts of London, and Historic London. Overall, I found the cultural modules—Performing Arts of London and Historic London—especially interesting. Not only did we attend these classes with other exchange students, but they also took us on tours around the city. For £60, the course included tickets to various performances, such as musicals, operas, plays, ballets, and even Swan Lake.

I believe experiencing these cultural events is a must when in the UK, making this course perfect for those who won't be staying long.

As for the workload, it was quite light. Instead of traditional exams, the assessments were replaced by simpler assignments. Most of the time, we just had to do presentations, write essays, or complete quizzes, which were often multiple-choice. This made the courses very manageable.

7. **Finance & Banking:** The course registration process there is quite similar to my home university. The rules and requirements are the same, and many of the courses can directly transfer credits back to my home university. We also have priority when enrolling in courses, so there's no need to queue. Usually, once you sign up, you're guaranteed a spot in the class.
8. **Weather:** The course registration process there is quite similar to my home university. The rules and requirements are the same, and many of the courses can directly transfer credits back to my home university. We also have priority when enrolling in courses, so there's no need to queue. Usually, once you sign up, you're guaranteed a spot in the class.

9. Health & Safety: I never use health services. However, there are some districts which are more dangerous in East London. Pickpocketing is quite common in the UK, so I recommend keeping your credit card and passport in a waist pouch for safety. Additionally, try to avoid carrying physical cards when going out—using Apple Pay on your phone is much safer and more convenient.
10. Food: When it comes to food, there are several supermarkets in the UK. Waitrose is the high-end option, offering the best quality food. Then, there are other lower-tier supermarkets, but I mainly bought items from the pricier ones because, even so, groceries are generally cheaper than in Hong Kong. The quality of ingredients, such as British beef and Scottish salmon, is exceptional and something you can't easily find in Hong Kong. That's why I believe it's a must to try these products when you're in the UK. Additionally, these supermarkets have their own branded products, like cheesecakes, which are delicious. I highly recommend exploring local supermarket brands to truly experience the unique food culture of the UK.

As for dining out, restaurants in the UK are quite expensive, so I rarely ate out. If you're visiting the UK, I would recommend cooking at home instead.

11. Transportation: I highly recommend getting a Railcard if you're studying in the UK. It usually costs £30, but I got mine for £23 through a promotion on Trip.com. With a Railcard, you can get a 1/3 discount on train fares, including London's Tube.

Additionally, make sure to apply for an Oyster card. Only with an Oyster card can you link it to your Railcard and enjoy discounts on London's rail system. Without it, your Railcard will only apply to National Rail (intercity trains).

12. Communication: the dormitory provides you with a giffgaff card that includes a UK SIM card. It offers 60GB of data per month for just £10 and comes with a UK phone number. All you need to do is activate it, and you're good to go.
13. Sports: The university has a sports center located in central London, just a 5-minute walk from my dormitory—a very convenient location. The facilities include a gym, though I didn't use it myself. The membership cost was £40 for three months. At the time, I played volleyball instead, which typically cost £2 per session.
14. Social Clubs & Networking Opportunities: I personally didn't participate in too many social activities, but I believe sports activities can also count as social events. There were many social activities available, usually costing £2 per session, where you could meet lots of different people. These weren't focused solely on sports but more on chatting and getting

to know others. Additionally, I found that even online classes were a great way to meet people, especially since some courses were exclusively for exchange students. Since most of us didn't have many local friends, it was natural for us to bond and connect with each other.

15. Cautionary measures: Their culture is quite conversational, and people often enjoy chatting with you, even casually. Sometimes, when working on projects with Muslim classmates, they may leave at noon or around 4 PM for prayers. It's important to respect their religion and accommodate their schedules. Other than that, there's not much else to be mindful of.

Part 3 Items to Bring

First, remember to bring your offer letter, as you'll likely be asked many questions during immigration.

Second, bring two phones, as it's quite common there to rely on smartphones for various tasks.

Third, pack both summer and winter clothing, as the temperature can vary significantly between September and December.

If you plan to visit snowy regions, don't forget to bring snow boots.

Remember to bring a travel bag for short domestic trips—it'll come in handy.

Part 4 Useful Link and Apps

Travelling: Trip.com(buying discount railcard), Trainline/Omio(comparing train price)

Groceries: Waitrose&Partners, Tesco

Social Media: Snapchat(It's more popular than instagram there)