

Rohan Datar – University of Birmingham (Semester 2, 2010 and Semester 1, 2011)

I had always believed that being an exchange student would be the best way to travel and experience a new country, the only question was when, where and how? I had dreamed of England for a very long time and so after a few months of thinking about where to go, the choice became obvious. From the first moment I arrived at Heathrow and took the London Underground to Piccadilly Circus, all my preconceptions started unravelling and I knew that I was in for the experience of a lifetime.



I originally applied to go to the University of Manchester however the only place that would accept me for a full academic year was Birmingham. Looking back I am really glad this happened because Birmingham has a rawer reputation and it felt more exciting to explore an area that is often overlooked by the rest of the country. I stayed in a hall called Alexandra House and this provided the backdrop to almost everything I did. The first few weeks really set up the rest of the year because everyone in the hall was going out to Freshers events together, hanging out in the common room and making friends.



Academically, and I can only speak for civil engineering, the University of Birmingham was not as comprehensive or as professional as UQ. Timetables are still worked out on pen and paper and lectures have about 30-40 people instead of 3-400 but after a few weeks I got used to it. Studying engineering outside of Australia really opened my eyes to how the world is connected and how global engineering skills are.

In terms of travel, I was lucky enough to be able to travel through the UK and Europe with friends from my hall. Travel in the UK is super cheap if you book a week or so in advanced with Megabus. Trips to Liverpool, Manchester, Leeds, London and Oxford could all be done for about £5 each way. I took the buses around Europe as well which made it way cheaper and made the journey seem more exciting as well. I went to Amsterdam, Berlin, Prague, Munich, Innsbruck, Barcelona and Paris and now I have a much better understanding of life in Europe

Financially exchange can be difficult but it is always worth it. I paid for my exchange by working at Coles and saving up for a while but I was also lucky enough to receive a grant from Engineering. I stayed overseas for about 10 months and my hall was £3200, flights were \$2000, food was about £20-30 a week and my trip to Europe was about £4-500. Takeaway meals are about £3, movies are about £4-5, a 4 pint pack of beer is about £4-5, hostels are about £10 a night, football games are about £15 and night clubs are about £3-5 to get in to. My favourite store was called Primark, it is like

Target/K-Mart except it only sells clothes but it is SO cheap, t shirts are £2 and warm winter coats are £20.



you can't go wrong.

All in all, I had the best year of my life. I have had too many amazing experiences to even think about, let alone write about. I have made lifelong friends from all over the UK. I have learnt so much about myself and the world that it seems silly to think back to what it was like before exchange. I really hope that everyone gets to experience what I have experienced while at university. Exchange is a once in a lifetime opportunity and needs to be taken. It will be scary at first but if you have the right attitude,

Top tips for going on exchange:

- 1) Never give up on the application process. If you receive bad news in an email or if you think something has gone wrong with the application do not give up, go and talk to someone at UQ abroad or email someone at your intended host university. They will provide you with solutions you may never have even thought of.
- 2) I would strongly suggest living in a hall. If you have arrived from another country, there is simply nothing better than having an entire building full of people that want to make friends, go out and have fun. (and you'll have an entire week of this before uni even begins!)
- 3) Make friends with locals. This is probably my single most important suggestion. In the UK, everyone moves to a new city to start university and this means that everyone is in the same boat as you. Most of the amazing experiences I had while on exchange wouldn't have even been possible without local friends.
- 4) Support your local football team: don't just pick Arsenal, Man Utd or Chelsea. I supported Birmingham City who along with Aston Villa make up one of the biggest derbies in English football. Being part of the English Premier League added so many amazing experiences to the year.
- 5) Try and find out what makes your host city unique. Birmingham was the centre of the industrial revolution and I found all the old factories and canals very interesting even if no one else did.



Photos

1 – League cup final, 2 – Nights out, 3 – Old canals of Birmingham, 4 – Playing football in the yard.