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Every time I try to explain just how fabulous going on exchange was, I end up jabbering away like a gibbering git, fortunately, all the people I’ve been trying to explain to up to this point have either been exchange students themselves (who consequently understand my predicament) or family (who have to love me). I’m not entirely sure what I’ll do once I get home, although there doesn’t seem to be any pending danger of that at the moment! After being on exchange, I’ve discovered there is so much more I want to, can do and WILL do before I come home.

Experiencing snow for the first time.....

1. **Take courses that are about the local culture, history or languages**
   I am enrolled in a Bachelor of Arts and am in my third year. I studied both courses that contributed to my majors (History and German) and electives while I was abroad, which meant I was able to study quite a range of subjects. I would really recommend taking any courses offered that are about the local culture, history or languages, as these were some of my most enjoyable courses and was a great way to get to know people. While I won’t be wowing everyone back home with my newly learnt Gaelic skills, I can now say ‘Is mise Hannah’ (I am Hannah) and competently ask the bus driver for a ticket to Dun Laoghaire (Dun Leary). Some of the courses (such as Irish archaeology) also had fantastic field trips to archaeological sites (read tourist attractions!!!), which was a good way to see the countryside. Joining sports teams or going on any organised trips were also great ways to meet friends that you could later travel with.

2. **Stay on campus if possible**
   I stayed on campus while on exchange and found this an absolutely invaluable experience. I truly made the best friends ever and loved that there was a constant buzz about the place. It also took the hassle of having to figure how to actually GET to uni in a city I didn’t know my way about out of the equation and meant that I was able to meet friends very quickly. Quick tip: in Belgrove apartments at UCD, choose Bedroom 3. It’s usually considerably bigger.

Friends and myself in my apartment on campus (Furtherest left is me)

3. **Make decisions on where you want to travel. THEN DO IT.**
   I don’t regret anywhere I went and loved just about every minute. I wasn’t quite so thrilled about a 5am flight to Belgium the day after St Patrick’s Day, but wouldn’t have missed it for the world and was in good company, as about 3 million other people in
subdued spirits also seemed to be there. I’d always wanted to see Gallipoli, but had sworn I’d not go on Anzac Day as it’d be far too busy. However, SWOTVAC fell on the week of the 25 April and all my friends were going. I followed and I am so, so, so grateful that I did. The landscape was breath-taking. The dawn and memorial services were very respectful and drew people from different nationalities together. Had I not been on exchange, I would NEVER have been there. Everybody will have different dream/accidental destinations. JUST MAKE SURE YOU GET THERE.

4. If studying at UCD, the local Tesco offers home delivery. Get a group of friends and bulk buy. It saves so much time, hassle and effort. It might not rain as much as everybody says it does in Ireland, but inevitably it will when you have to walk to the shops. It pours when you have to then walk home with all your purchases. The rest of the time, the weather’s beautiful.

5. If it seems like there should be an easier way, there probably is. Just ask anyone and everyone you see until you figure how to do it. Not once did I read a map in Dublin and I found all the students and lecturers I came across were only too happy to help out. If they weren’t, they hid it well. There is no sense in spending any longer than you have to on figuring out the mundane things, like HOW to actually find a book in a new library or WHERE the bus stop that was there yesterday has disappeared to.

Exchange could have been just about anywhere, but for me it was Dublin and I have the BEST memories from this experience. There will be times when things seem tough, like after having been at the Garda Immigration Office for over 8 hours and STILL waiting to become a legitimate student (I was ready to throw my head back and howl away with the best of the wailing babies), realising there was an electronic button to open the gate after having spent a month climbing the fence when coming back after curfew or realising you’d inadvertently enrolled in a course that seemed miles above your league because it was indeed, miles above my league. Exchange was AMAZING and I have never been so happy before this experience. I lived it and I loved it.

Having a picnic in Merrion Park (I am third from the left)