

Exchange Report

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In this report I will describe my experiences, thoughts and learnings on studying one semester abroad in London, England during my 5th semester of the programme Architectural Technology and Construction Management.

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Introduction

The decision to study abroad was always simple and definitive. However many factors play in. Firstly, to simply to make the most of my time in this programme, take the possibility of getting an, in my case, English education as well, get to know the way they teach and learn. Secondly, because moving to London will never be as easy ever again. The chance to move to a city like London and actually be able to enjoy it to its full extent with a flexible schedule, is granted few people.

I expected, with enthusiasm, a stricter and more academic approach to the teaching and coursework, which I honestly sought after doing two occasionally very practical years in Denmark. However, it was outside of university I had great expectations as London is a Mecca for everything current and creative, such as bars, restaurants, art galleries, movies and music. I was more than impressed.

Experiences at the host university

I took three modules at University of Westminster's Faculty of Architecture and the built environment. Design Studio B was very much structured like a typical semester at KEA, however only covering and focusing on the RIBA stages 0-3. We went on a few visits to galleries and museums for being able to do a feasibility study. I believe that was very helpful, together with the tutorials we had with the teachers. We also had a designated high quality space to ourselves in the school with access to all the equipment one could need for everything from programming, drawing and model making. Aside from the tutorials that were given upon your own initiative the teaching was next to non-existing and the work highly individual. The project at focus was given without any design idea, opposed to at KEA, so the main task during the semester was to develop a coherent and synthesising design appropriate to the context given.

The context was also the very core of the second module, Site Production Studies. This module revolved around construction management and its different aspects. I experienced it to be the most difficult and different to the subjects we had been taught at KEA. Nevertheless, it turned out to be the most interesting and from which I actually felt I learned the most. This was due to great teachers, one Adam Clemens in particular, as well as various site visits where we had the opportunity to speak with people in the business about the constraints and opportunities in construction. 90% of the coursework was individual which was highly appreciated after the amount of group work I had had in KEA. It was quite useful to get into writing reports and rationales again as this has been completely missing from the coursework in my previous semesters. In this module, where I found myself lacking a bit of background knowledge regarding construction management, the library was extremely useful. The library at the Marylebone campus was really a treat. Two silent floors with all the books you could need on the subjects Architecture, buildings, construction and so on and so forth. I will also take the opportunity to mention not only the academic quality but also the seating quality. They had chairs with extended back parts that surrounded you so you could really have your privacy while studying. I found this very valuable and spent a lot of time in there.

The third module was Construction Technology 3, which I noticed from the other student was a core subject to students doing Construction Management, Architectural Technology and Building Surveying. This module was, similar to Design Studio B, structured

like a semester at KEA, whereas here there was also given a design to be moderately altered but with focus on the choice of construction. This module had, compared to Design Studio, lectures every week. Though it was to some extent a repetition of the teaching in Copenhagen. Here we worked in groups and it was a quite mixed experience. Though I felt the level was somewhat even, the participation was very low until the very last days before submission, as most student were working half to full time. Not very unlike the way it was at KEA. However, it was interesting to get to work in group with some locals as they also had some input and experiences to share that I was yet unaware of.

Social and cultural experiences

I had two main reasons for choosing London for my exchange semester. Firstly, I already had family and friends who were there working or studying. Consequently, I had no barrier to moving over, socially or practically, as I had my accommodation set as well as people to be with outside school. Some of the people I already knew, however I also got in contact with friend's acquaintances that lived in London, which broadened my network.

The second reason I went to London above any other possible city was because I am an anglophile. I love the culture of the English and of the Londoners. I visited both north, South, East and West London frequently and lived in the central in Marylebone. I do believe East London had me most when it comes to pubs and the music scene, where I also met some interesting characters.

One lovely observation in London is that despite the considerable size of London, you are always near a big green area or park. Taking the time to go to Richmond Park to the west or Victoria Park to the east was worth every minute on the, sometimes packed, underground. On the subject of nature, taking a daytrip down to the coast was absolutely amazing. The cliffs from Eastbourne to Brighton looks to be carved with laser and you have endless possibilities when you get to Seabourne or Brighton to have a pint, a bite to eat, see the fun park on the pier or just a drinking chocolate.

On the subject of leaving London, I also made to other trips, as one cannot undervalue the proximity to the rest of Britain or the very many flights going out of London every day. For less than 80 pounds I flew to Berlin and for around 100 pounds I went by train to Edinburgh in Scotland for hunting. The environment is absolutely amazing and I wish I had gone to even more places.

Practical experiences

Being Swedish I flew from Stockholm with a SAS youth ticket to London and did not go back until the end of the semester, hence a quite cheap travel expense. I lived extremely central as I got a room in a so-called Mews House where some acquaintances from Stockholm already lived. That was rather expensive, however, I believe it is very difficult to get anything less expensive. An example is a friend who lived in Hackney, 45 min from Central and paid 1000 pounds anyway. It was cheaper than the schools own accommodation in a dorm room.

Food however does not have to be very expensive if you shop smart and go to the right places when going out to eat. Close to every Saturday we went to different farmers market or food markets. There you not only had cheap amazing food from all over the world but you also met exciting people and saw new boroughs. Maltby Market in Bermondsey or

Broadway market in Hackney are two great examples.

Conclusion

Even if it's possible to live rather cheap in London, you probably won't because there is too much to do, see and taste. Having said that I am tremendously content with my stay in more or less every aspect of it. I feel I can confidently speak about how it is to study and live in London and I feel as if I have gained a new city. A place I feel at home. I strongly recommend it to anyone as everyone is represented there. That's the final charm I'll mention.



Concert at O2 Academy in Brixton



Hunting in Fife in Scotland



Left the new Tate Modern extension

Visit in Oxford

