

Samara's Winter 2020 semester exchange in Scotland

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If you ever remember the first time you got onto a plane, you'll definitely think back to that wave of nostalgia you're inevitably hit with once you've reached the boarding gate. The myriad of fleeting moments running through your mind like a picturesque carousel. The time spent purchasing the ticket, going through your checklist three times whilst packing, telling near everyone you know about your futile attempts at containing any and all excitement, the sentimental goodbyes, and of course that final couple days rush once you've realized you forgot to buy a few of your essentials. Saying goodbye for a long time to your family and friends, and missing them on your loneliest nights, is very painful indeed, but I'd be remiss to say that if it weren't for those painful moments; the sweet moments that shaped the best experience of my life would be filled with acrimonious voids. The trip began with my dad being my chaperone and coming along to Aberdeen to help with the settling in process. We spent some time sight-seeing in London before our departure to Scotland, and once there we soaked in the entire atmosphere. The cultural transitions, bar hopping, Scottish restaurants, museums, tours, landscapes, etc. Aberdeen made it quite easy to adapt, as the people were nothing but kindred spirits and accommodating hearts. Right off the bat, I was well acquainted with my flatmates who, by the end of this trip, would become my best friends. When I attended my first week of lectures, I instantly fell in love with designing menswear, as well as creating a sustainable menswear line through Fashion Buying and Trend Forecasting. Not only did my creative juices thrive, but I felt a heightened sense of empowerment when it came to other classes such as Managing in Changing Organizations- which inspired me to develop a business plan and resolve a few creative epiphanies I'd been pondering. I also learned to improve my overall professionalism and gained valuable insight into the next chapter of my life.

Aside from my classes, the first week of University mostly involved attending an international exchange student orientation, which is where I came to learn I would be facing my most stressful and adversarial obstacle. I was told I had 30 days to leave and return to the UK with a short-term visa. I was upset and distraught to the point of a nervous breakdown. Not even a month and here I was on the verge of being geographically displaced

due to a measly bureaucratic issue. However, God works in mysterious ways and I would find my resolve in the best travelling experience of my life. My Italian flatmate recommended we go to Rome and stay with her family, expense-free and so, we embarked on our trip to The Eternal City on Valentine's weekend. Needless to say, I fell madly in love with Italy. Easily cemented as the best weekend of my life within the recesses of my memory palace. Ally and I explored everything that Rome had to offer. Authentic Italian pizza pies, gelato, carbonara pasta, intriguingly challenging zombie apocalypse themed escape rooms, the indelible Italian nightlife and yes, of course, I had on my most superlative fashion attire whilst perusing some of the most historically remarkable landscapes on God's green earth such as the Coliseum, St. Peter's Basilica, the Sistine Chapel, and much more. Even when I think back now to those cherished memories, it all feels so surreal. The emotional and spiritual impact that Rome left on me warranted the necessity of cataloguing it as one my homes away from home.

Returning to Aberdeen and campus life seemed so dull at that point. Following the best weekend of my life with a sordid return to lecture halls and hand cramps from writing too many notes? I was already thinking of packing up and doing it all again. But over the following weeks is when I came to learn the most crucial part of my trip. It's not where you go that matters, what matters is who you're spending your time with once you've reached that destination. Would I still have those family dinners with my flatmates where we would share each other's traditional recipes? Still go to the gym with? Go grocery shopping for wine, ice cream, and an overload of carbs? Have those movie nights and girls' night out? All I know is, I was blessed to be surrounded by the most supportive, loving, and nurturing group of young women anyone could ask for. Unfortunately, the moment that I'd been dreading had arrived. Lady Fate would cut my trip short due to the COVID-19 pandemic. So much time and money had been spent preparing for this, only for all of it to end so soon felt like a punch in the gut. I decided to ride it out for an extra month, but the pandemic became all too dire. It was time for me to let go of the blissful bubble that was this trip, and head home to reality where my family needed me to be and that's when it hit me, going back so soon made all the experiences sweeter and rawer. An emotional tenacity would forever hold the memories of that trip, and that's all one can hope for at the end of day. Despite the global pandemic that is COVID-19, I've come to the realization that my international experience abroad is unfinished, and I look forward to completing my journey in the years coming.

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