

## **London calling**

My name is Joris Taks and during the fall semester of 2015 I did my exchange at City University London. I had an amazing time in London and it has been a unique experience I'll never forget. If you are thinking of going on exchange I would definitely recommend going to London since it is a great city to live in and there is always something to do or see.

### **Preparation**

It all starts with deciding to which destination you want to go to. I knew I wanted to go to an English speaking country and listed London as my first preference. Fortunately, I was also allocated to my first preference. After being nominated by the ESE you can start your application at City University London which involves filling out some forms and demonstrating evidence of English language proficiency. Usually this has to be an IELTS test score however my IB and Cambridge certificates were accepted as well.

The next and perhaps most important step is arranging your accommodation. Housing in London is in general very expensive and it might be challenging to find a place to stay yourself. That's why I decided to apply for a room in one of the halls of residence of the university; Liberty Court. The advantage of Liberty Court is that it's very close to university and cheaper than most other accommodations (although still very expensive). Since I was quite early with my application I was lucky enough to get a room in Liberty Court. The accommodation is in good state and from Liberty Court it's only a two-minute walk to Farringdon tube station. I shared my kitchen, living room and two bathrooms with three American girls and a Swiss guy who were all in London for one semester. I would really recommend to stay in Liberty Court and my advice would be to sign up for a room as soon as you are accepted.

Other things you need to take care of before you leave are the Erasmus+ grant, outliving student finance and public transport reimbursement which all comes down to filling out some forms and getting them signed and stamped.

### **Arrival**

On September the 13<sup>th</sup> I took the train from Brussels to London St. Pancras from which it's only one stop to Farringdon tube station. The advantages of travelling by train are that there are no luggage restrictions and it only takes two hours to arrive in the centre of London. I took the tube to Farringdon station, checked in at Liberty Court and realized my exchange period really had begun. Since the introduction week started on the 21<sup>st</sup> of September I had another week to explore the city and do some sightseeing. The introductory events consisted of a couple of information sessions and drinks with all the exchange students which is a great opportunity to meet new people.

### **Courses**

After two weeks of exploring London and getting to know some people my courses eventually started. Each course accounts for 7,5 ECTS which means you have to take four courses to gain the required amount of ECTS. Each course consists of three hours a week of lectures and tutorials which leaves you with more than enough spare time. I took the following courses:

### Intermediate Microeconomics 1

This is a 2<sup>nd</sup> year course which is relatively easy. It is quite comparable to microeconomics at the EUR although some of the materials are a bit different. The course covers some basic microeconomic theory and consists of one two-hour lecture and one tutorial hour every week. There is one midterm class test and a final exam which both shouldn't cause any problems with a bit of studying.

### Global Financial Markets

This 2<sup>nd</sup> year course was by far the most interesting and enjoyable one to take. The course covers different financial markets and is taught in a very enthusiastic and interesting way. The lecturer uses a lot of up-to-date examples and anecdotes to illustrate the theory which makes it very enjoyable to pay attention to. There is one midterm class test and a final exam which again shouldn't cause any problems. I would definitely recommend this course.

### Money and Banking

This is a 3<sup>rd</sup> year course which is unsurprisingly divided in two components; a money and banking part. The course is mostly theoretical which makes it a bit boring and the lecturers don't make it much more interesting. There is one coursework which ended up taking quite some time and a final exam which probably required the most hours of studying of all.

### Applied Econometrics

This is also a 3<sup>rd</sup> year course which is considered as one of the most difficult ones. However, for me as an Econometrics student this course consisted mostly of repetition but covered some new topics as well. Besides two hours of lectures there was a tutorial and a lab session every week where I learned Stata, which was quite useful since it was new to me. There is one coursework which was not that difficult and a final exam. I would recommend this course for Econometrics students but without some econometric knowledge it will be quite difficult.

Overall I think the level of the courses was a bit lower than at the EUR. I really enjoyed Global Financial Markets but I sometimes regretted the choice of Money and Banking. All courses are eleven weeks long and even have a so called "reading week" in the middle which enables you to catch up with some of the materials or just have a holiday break. For regular students the final exams are in January however exchange students are given the opportunity to attend an early exam period in the end of December.

### Finances

To come straight to the point, living in London is expensive. You will find out that everything you can think of is more expensive than you are used to. Combining the high prices with expensive housing, dinners, drinks in pubs, nights out, football matches and concerts I ended up spending a lot of money. But if you just take in mind that it is only 3,5 months, it's best not to worry about money too much and make the most out of your time. Below you can see an overview of my expenses for the total period.

Rent	€3380
Return ticket train	€140
Public transport	€500
Groceries	€950
Social life	€1050
Tickets	€450
Fitness	€90
Phone costs	€60
Clothing and other stuff	<u>€400</u>
Total	€7020

### **Daily life**

Basically there was no such thing as a regular daily life in London as there was always something else going on. Since you only have a few hours of classes everyday and you don't have to do much self-study you have a lot of time to do whatever you want. London has so much to offer in terms of museums (which are all free to enter), great football matches, restaurants and characteristic pubs that you'll always end up doing something fun.

Besides the classes at fixed times there were only a couple of other recurring things in a regular week. On Monday we always had cheap drinks at a UCL student bar with a group of internationals aka the exchange homies and on Friday we sometimes played football with some guys in Regent's Park. During the evenings we would sometimes go out but most of the times we would just hang around at someone's place and cook dinner or have some drinks.

Where the weeks were somewhat structured, the weekends were always different. During some weekends we would take the train for a daytrip to Brighton, Cambridge or Oxford and other weekends we would stay in London and visit something there. I also had a couple of weekends where some friends or family came to visit me and I would show them the city.

My final word of advice is take the opportunity to go on exchange and especially to London. However, I'm convinced that you will have wonderful experience regardless of where end up going to. When I think back to that time the best memories are not about London but they are about the people I got to spend an amazing time with!

I hope my report was helpful and good luck on your exchange.

Joris Taks