

# Victoria Abroad Evaluation Form

PLEASE TYPE THIS EVALUATION FORM & EMAIL IT TO VICTORIA ABROAD AS A WORD DOCUMENT

## A: Student Information

VUW degree(s)	Bachelor of Arts
Major(s)	Theatre and English Literature
Exchange Institution	University of Surrey
VUW Tri & Year of Exchange	Trimester 2, 2015-16

## B: Finances

Please detail your basic costs in New Zealand dollars. This will help future students plan their own budgets. (Enter your number rounded to the nearest dollar.)

Books	Didn't buy any, borrowed ones that were necessary from the library.
Accommodation	\$4000
Return Airfare	\$2300 (bought beginning of June, left in July).
Local Transportation	Walked to university and took trains to London (\$22.40 at its cheapest with Railcard). I also bought a Railcard (£30) which quickly paid itself off as I used it to travel around the country.
Meals	Cheap. I think I spent about \$50 a week. I also bought organic, wholegrain, free range stuff, so it could be even cheaper than what I spent.
Visa	Didn't need one.
Health & Insurance	\$500
Personal Spending	\$50 p/week
Communications (phone, etc.)	(£10 p/month) = \$22
Other fees (specify)	
What unexpected costs did you encounter? What items were more or less than expected?	Trains are expensive but a great way to get around. Buses can be cheaper. Bus service between towns is quite good in Scotland.

### How did your financial expenses compare to what you originally expected to spend?

It was about what I expected. Even though the exchange rate is mad, their pound is stronger than the NZD, ie. You can buy a whole lot more things with £1 than you can \$1NZD.

**By what means did you maintain your finances? What would you recommend? (Credit card, foreign bank account, travelers checks, etc)?** I used a pre-paid travel card with Kiwibank. It's a great system where you load NZD onto it and it converts it to the currency at the current exchange rate. There are many different wallets you can have on the card. I had 4: GBP, NZD, Euro, and CAD. Because it was a Visa, I could buy things online with it which was handy. The annoying thing was, however, that I had to sign for almost all my payments made with an eftpos machine. And it was not recommended to take cash out, which sometimes was easier.

**What financial advice would you give students attending the same university as you?** Have play money. There are 2 pubs/bars on campus and 1 club which means you don't have to go far for a night out. Also, decide how often you are going to visit London. If you do it frequently (a few times a week) it might be worth getting an Oyster Card. If not (I only visited three times, which seems crazy to me in hindsight), then buying your train ticket (off-peak times are cheaper) and including unlimited Tube travel makes it more affordable.

**What was the average cost of a can of coke or coffee in your host country?** £1-3 roughly.

**C: Visas & Insurance** *\*Please note this information is recommended by VUW students & current at the time of their exchange. For all up-to-date visa information you must check with the embassy/consulate of your host university.*

**Did you have to apply for a visa? If so, was it difficult? What was the process, how long did it take and how much did it cost?**

I did not apply for a visa as I have a European passport.

**Do you have any advice for future students when applying for visas to your host country?** The UK allows for an NZ citizen 28 days (or 3 months?? I can't remember...) in the UK (on a temporary visa). So, in a way, you have some time before going for the big visa.

**Did your host university have a mandatory insurance? Or a particular insurance they recommended? If Yes, what was it and how much did it cost?** No, they didn't.

**What insurance company did you use and would you recommend it to future students?** I used the company associated with STA Travel (I bought my tickets through them as well).

## D: Academics at Host University

Which courses did you take while on exchange? Please rate the difficulty of each course (1-5, 1 = Very Easy & 5 = Extremely Difficult) and leave any comments you may have.

Course Title	Language of Instruction	VUW course equivalent or elective	VUW points/credits value	Rating (1-5)	Comments
<b>VUW Trimester 2/YEAR 2015-16</b>					
ELI 1020: Shakespeare	English	ENGL 208: Shakespeare	15 at 200 level	2	This was a great course. I really enjoyed it. The lecturer was great, very informative, we covered a lot of Shakespeare's plays.

THE 2022: Critical Thinking in Performance	English	THEA 205: Dramaturgies of the West	15 at 200 level	3	It was a bit more difficult to find what they were after in the assignments with the amount of content that was given with sometimes questionable relevance.
THE 2023: The Art and Performance of Place	English	THEA 205: Dramaturgies of the West	15 at 200 level	4	Again, difficult to understand what they wanted in assignments. Also expected a very high standard of content and presentation.
THE 2024: Acting: The Actor and the Self	English	THEA 113: Playing for Real (Acting and Performance Skills)	15 at 200 level	5	I found this very difficult because the module itself was a young one and needed work. It wasn't clear if it was theatre or drama therapy. We had to reveal very deep issues of ours in order to 'create' something, which I completely disagreed with.

### Course Registration/Enrolment

**Please describe the registration process at your host university. What kind of help was available?**

Email was your first point of contact. Then word of mouth. We also had a couple of welcome lectures which were very useful. Emails were sent out, it was very clear where you needed to be and when. Everything was ready for you which was great. They also encouraged you to register with the doctors on the same day, which I did.

**How successful were you in registering/enrolling for classes you wanted? What advice would you offer to next year's exchange students about registration at your host university?**

Very successful. I got into all the classes I wanted and my liaison for changing my courses, should I need to, was also very efficient and helpful. Don't stress if something goes wrong; just make sure you alert the right people and it will be sorted very quickly.

**Do you have any advice for future students when choosing and applying for courses?**

Choose subjects you genuinely find interesting.

### Academic Experience

**How did your academic experience differ from your time spend at Victoria? Did the academic experience**

### **meet your expectations?**

I'm not sure if I had any set expectation on my academic experience. However, it did differ greatly from Victoria. There was more emphasis on individual study. I had 2 hours a week per class, which meant I often had one class a day. This actually led to a lot less stressful trimester. There were no classes on Wednesday afternoons.

### **How did the style of teaching at your host university compare with that at VUW? How did the workload compare to what you would expect at VUW?**

For all my classes except for my practical one (THE 2024), they were lectures. There was a lot of information going into those sessions, and part of me wondered if having more, like at VUW, would benefit them, but it actually worked well. The workload was very different because I often only had 2 assignments per course at a 30/70% weight, which was terrifying. Also, they mark by percentages. We were told anything between 65 and 75% was very good. Equivalent range to a B+ and an A.

### **What would you recommend as an appropriate course load for other VUW students visiting your partner university? What specific courses would you recommend to visiting VUW students? Why?**

4 courses is the mandatory load and quite a good one, even with my one practical paper.

### **What advice would you give VUW students about succeeding academically at your host university?**

Talk to your lecturers. They were all very helpful and also very willing to help. They are also able to give you more clarity about your subject or assignment.

### **What was your impression of the computer facilities, library, and internet access at your host university?**

Internet was great. Not a lot of computers around, and they are occupied very quickly. The library is a lot smaller than VUW, which is not something I really realized until I came home. There are sufficient books, it's pretty easy to get them out and return them, etc.

## **E: Accommodation**

### **What form of accommodation did you stay in?**

Halls of residence. I lived on campus.

### **What were the pros and cons of this form of accommodation?**

Pros: I was 5 minutes away from the library. I was quite central on campus. It was warm and clean inside my room. I LOVED my flatmates, they were awesome. There were 14 of us and only 2 (including myself) were exchange students, so there was a real sense of emersion. Cons: It was very easy to get sucked into the campus bubble of life, leaving only to go to the Sports Park or Tesco. It was also easy to hermit in your room.

### **What accommodation would you recommend to future students?**

Halls of residence. Host families are a bit of a hit and miss, as are flatmates I suppose, but at least you're guaranteed your own private space where you can do what you want and come and go as you please.

### **How early can you move into accommodation?**

I couldn't move in any earlier than the 23<sup>rd</sup> of September, 2015. Courses started on the 5<sup>th</sup> of October.

### **What options were available for meal plans or cooking facilities? How satisfied were you with the food?**

The halls of residence are self-catered. Tesco is a 20-25 minute walk away, so it depends what quality of food you buy in accordance to your dietary and meal preferences as to how satisfied you will be. Cooking facilities were shared. There were 8 stove tops, one oven, a microwave, a jug, 2 big sinks, and we each got a cupboard and a half for storage, as well as a shelf in the fridge. The kitchen (and bathrooms) is cleaned thoroughly twice a week by cleaners who come in. The other five days a week, it's up to you and your flatmates to keep it clean.

### **Do you have any tips of advice for future students when applying for accommodation?**

Don't worry about where you'll live. If you're on campus (Stag Hill, Guildford Court, Surrey Court, and other Courts), great! If you live at Hazel Farm, a small community is made and that can be really fun. You also get free bus rides. If you're at Manor Park, it's very close to the Sports Park (so great if you're an active person!), and Tesco! And uni is only a 20 minute walk away! Easy!

## **F: Personal & Cultural Connections**

### **What was it like making friends? How successful were you at making friends with local (i.e., not international) students?**

I found the people genuinely pretty friendly. You are definitely more likely to make friends with people who are in your classes / tutorials or in your sports teams or in clubs you join. I also made really good friends with those whom I lived with (only 2 of us out of 14 were international students).

### **What was it like to adjust to the culture of your exchange country/university?**

I think the transition of cultures from NZ to the UK is pretty fluid considering there are a lot of similarities. Beware of their partying though. They go hard.

### **What parts of the culture did you most appreciate?**

Friendliness. Willing to invite you in as an exchange student, even if you're not staying for very long.

### **How were you treated by local people? By university staff and faculty? By students?**

I was well treated by my peers and staff, especially by the international team.

**As far as you could tell, how easy would it be for students with disabilities to study at your partner university? For students who are visible minorities in your host country? For students who are gay,**

## **lesbian, bisexual or transgendered?**

There was a girl who was from Australia who couldn't walk very well. She had either a cane or a mobility scooter. She managed to get around quite easily. Her accommodation was also tailored to her. I can't speak on behalf of other disabilities, or for students who are part of the LGBT community, but I would imagine they would be pretty understanding and open. One of my flatmates was gay and it was really a non-issue.

## **G: Extra-curricular/Social Activities**

**What organized activities (clubs, sports, etc.) were available to students? What extra-curricular activities would you recommend to future exchange students?**

There are HEAPS of clubs and sports teams you can join; and when I say HEAPS, I'm not exaggerating. There's a Board Games Club, a Harry Potter Club, Gardening Club, TED Club, just about any type of club you can think of. And there are SO MANY sports teams you can join: archery, squash, tennis, swimming, lacrosse, football, rugby, waterpolo, ALL sorts. This is due to their amazing facility, the Surrey Sports Park, which is where some teams trained while the Rugby World Cup was on in 2015. Also, Olympic swimming teams have trained in their pool. I would recommend choosing ONE sport and ONE club. That'll keep you busy enough.

**What do you recommend other visiting students see or do on their weekends or holidays?**

Go to London as much as you can – it's so close! Go to the theatre there, watch a musical. Also, visit the museums! Make sure you also do trips around England, like trips to Brighton, Cambridge, Oxford, Stratford-Upon-Avon, etc. If you can go to Cornwall, do! It's very pretty, reminded me a lot of NZ. On holidays, you can go travelling! EasyJet is your friend: if you book enough in advance, you can get return tickets somewhere for just £30! Europe is so close. Also, if you can, go on the organized trips the Student Union does. They do day trips to Cambridge, Cardiff, and Bath, even the theme park nearby. This is definitely cheaper than trying to do things by yourself. And you meet other people!

**What opportunities were there for students to work on-campus? Off-campus?**

I never worked when I was over there, but there were definitely opportunities for students to work on campus. There was even a CV check you could do to see if your CV was up to British standards.

**What volunteer or internship opportunities were there for students?**

There were definitely internship opportunities for domestic students (they have an intern year). Not sure what the protocol would be for international students.

## **5 things to take to your host country or region**

- |          |  |
|----------|--|
| <b>1</b> | An adaptor.  |
| <b>2</b> | Kiwiana knick-knacks and trinkets to give to friends on the way. |
| <b>3</b> | Victoria University things (pens) to give to friends.            |

4 A good backpack so that you can go weekend (or longer) travelling!

5 Gloves.

### **5 pieces of useful advice would tell a VUW student going to your host university**

1 Join a sports team and a club.

2 Make as many friends as possible, both international and domestic.

3 Do your work but don't stress out about it.

4 Do work in advance and then plan out your trips for travel.

5 Try to find someone in your flat who has similar dietary needs or preferences and buy food together.

### **Top 5 Things to do**

*What are your 'Top 5 Things To Do' future VUW students at your host university or city/country?*

1 Go to London.

2 Go to Scotland: Edinburgh, Glasgow, the West Coast, as far north as you can.

3 Go to Wetherspoons at least once (it's like McDonalds but with alcohol!!)

4 Find out about Guildford's connection with Alice in Wonderland. Try and visit the oldest church in Guildford.

5 Go to Cornwall.

### **H: Personal Experience**

Please write one paragraph about your exchange experience. Plus, don't forget to submit some photos to the exchange office!!

When I think back on my exchange, my favourite thing about going to the University of Surrey is the people I met, specifically my flatmates. They were welcoming, funny, and just generally great people. About my exchange generally, the fact that I got to travel. I loved the places I visited and it was such a great opportunity. And of course, being able to spend time with my family in Europe. I learnt so much about myself and what home is to me. I would recommend for others to take full advantage of every day, wherever you may be!