

Experience Report Direct Exchange

Autumn Term at Goldsmiths,

London

Here is a list of almost every piece of information I would've liked to have before and during my time in London, as well as my opinion about my experience as I would share it with a friend. I hope it helps!

Preparation

- You need your passport.
- For short-term study (courses up to 6 months) you don't need a visa, but an ETA.
 - Get it 2 weeks before you travel, be aware of scams on the internet: it's on the official [gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk) site and should not cost more than £20. Once paid, it is automatically on your passport and is valid for 2 years.

Travel

- I went by train via DB to Bruxelles and then by Eurostar, which was a lovely experience, slow travel.
 - If you book in advance, the Eurostar has good cheaper options available.
 - Especially if you live at the student accommodation and have to bring bedding and kitchen utensils, it is worth going by train as you can take much more baggage included in the price.
- Go to the Seven Sisters Cliffs and hike there! It is breathtakingly beautiful.

London

- London is simply the best city, it is green, quiet, cozy, less stinky than Berlin, inspiring cultural and political events, so much diversity, the best food, people are friendly and kind on the streets.
- Check out all the boroughs and see where you like it most. My favourite area was South East, so Peckham, Brockley, Bermondsey, but North is also nice, for example, Hackney and Bethnal Green.
- Go to the canal!
- Follow G's Selection on Instagram for the best events if you like alternative music events.
- You can pay by card almost everywhere.
- If you bump into someone or even if someone bumps into you, just say sorry.
- I found a lot of kitchen utensils, cloth hangers and other things on the streets to give away.
- Go to the feminist library! In general, there are many pretty libraries to explore.

Public transport & safety

- Walk! Even long distances, I found so many wonderful spots that way.
- My flatmate got a (very bad) bike second hand and it paid off very well for her. Take care with the left-side and crazy traffic in Central, use a helmet, have lights.
 - I loved going by bus, it's the cheapest public transport option, often takes longer, but you see so many beautiful things. If you're there for one term you're not eligible for a term ticket thingy, you pay by credit card via approximation (tap in) every time you take a bus. Say 'thank you, driver!' when you get off. :-)
- I never used Uber for financial reasons and I always felt safe at night taking the bus. If it's a dodgy area, ask locals on their opinion to double check your intuition.

- Take care with your mobile phone and pick pockets! Hold on tight to your phone on a bus stop, sometimes bike riders can come and grab it. Never happened to me, but to a friend who lives there for 3 years.
- Just be generally aware on the streets, especially at night.
- I'm not racialised, so I cannot speak from first-hand experience about racism. I would like to think that due to the higher diversity, there is less racism. However, as everywhere in Europe, the right is rising and there were huge "Unite the kingdom" protests whilst I was there which were white angry men running around and behaving literally like dogs which was very scary and my PoC friends preferred to stay at home that day.
- In some pubs or clubs there are very annoying, very drunk men. There is no awareness concept at nightlife venues.

Accommodation

- I tried to find a sublet for many months on sites like Spareroom and Flatsforfriends App, as well as girlswhorent and girlswhosublet on Instagram and it did not work at all. Technically, there are much cheaper options for living there than the students accommodation.
- I lived at the **student accommodation** for lack of alternatives, here is a list of pros and cons if you have the option to decide:
 - It's very expensive.
 - All the rooms were exposed to noise: Either directly facing the trails where trains literally run 24/7 or facing a kindergarden where children live (and scream) like 8-5 daily, except weekends.
 - You have to bring or buy all bedding and sheets, cloth hangers and all kitchen utensils except kettle, toaster and microwave.
 - They have very difficult and strict rules to bring friends: There is only one person allowed, only for three nights with four nights of break, they can't walk around unaccompanied (leave or enter the area without you).
 - Every Friday at 11am there is a very loud fire-alarm test.
- + The room is ok-ish sized (around 10m²).
- + It is directly next to the campus.
- + New Cross is a nice neighbourhood, quick walk to Brockley and Deptford.
- + You are with other internationals (ERASMUS bubble) who are keen to do stuff. Most of the internationals are young BA students (18-21y).
- + Grace, the cleaner that came to our apartment, is so lovely and helps to keep everything clean.

Uni

- The university offers many things that you can use and participate in!
 - Welcome Week: If you're an MA student focus on the post-grad events, because Freshers in the UK are very young (17/18y) and have a very specific vibe and interest in drinking over their limits.
 - I never went to the Mensa, because it was expensive, but people say the food is good.
 - Cheapest coffee is at the Café of the SU (Student Union).
 - Career Service was not very useful for me.
 - You can book a free session with a tutor from the Royal Writing Fellows which was very helpful! Bring an essay / piece of writing you're already working on.
 - Free cinema every Thursday.
 - Take part in societies that interest you! I went to the Boulder Society and such a good time with the lot every Monday, going to the pub after the session.

Uni Seminars

- I had 3 seminars from 3 different departments, because I wanted to look into all of the areas that interest me regarding my studies.
 - + This gave me an individually tailored study experience and knowledge gain, which was very inspiring.
 - It can be confusing to be part of many groups and department structures.
 - It can be a lot to do all of the different assessments.
 - In hindsight, socially, it might have been more interesting to focus on seminars of one course, like Visual Anthropology, to really have the cohort experience, as they are also starting when the exchange term starts.
- Different to FU, there are **assessments** to be handed in mid-term.
- There are formative assessments that are not marked and summative assessments that are.
- Really start writing the essays already during the term as you won't have all the *Vorlesungsfreizeit*, but 1 month after classes end which is over the Christmas holidays and New Year's.
- Check the conversion of grades from Goldsmiths to the FU because it can be very misleading.

Sports

- A yoga-mat fits into the accommodation room.
- ClassPass works there as well, UrbanSports unfortunately not.
- You can run in Greenwich Park, it is wonderful there, especially in autumn.
- You might want to take table-tennis rackets and ball, as there are nice tables close by.
- Swimming is not as cheap as in Germany, but there are many swimming pools in London.
- Outdoor swimming is open all year long, those pools are beautiful and have 50m lanes, which indoor pools don't.
- Bouldering with the Boulder Society which is cheaper than going on your own and you meet lovely people. You can even participate in contests with them.

Food

- Someone told me there is at least one restaurant with cuisine from every country of the world in London.
- LIDL and ALDI are better in the UK than in Germany. They are the cheapest and best option for groceries.
- For local food: crumpets, scones, oatcakes from the supermarket, some places do a vegan full English breakfast you might want to try.
- You can drink tap water everywhere and it is normal to have some for free in cafés and restaurants.

I had such a brilliant time in London, if you have the chance, I highly recommend living there for some time. It is very expensive, but for these short months it might be more manageable. Goldsmiths is a nice university, I think compared to other unis in the UK they are much more political, creative and free, and less competitive. Enjoy the variety of music, food, neighbourhood there is to experienced.