

## 9 Months in Glasgow

In the middle of nowhere, I was walking with a rain-proof, white coat on and a red umbrella in my hands. The tracks are barely visible; it's almost an exaggeration to even call it tracks. Mud clung to my boots. Every now and then the light rain stopped and a single sunbeam made the grass glisten. There was no trace of humankind, though they have shaped the area. Only me, my friend and the hills around us. Autumn had turned the green to different shades of yellow and brown. The highlands are my favourite place, no matter what the weather is like.



Thinking back to my time in Glasgow makes me sad and happy all at once. I miss it. A lot. But at the same time, I am just so grateful that I was given the opportunity to study at the University of Glasgow for 9 months.

But first of all a small explanation to what the Erasmus+ programme actually is: it's a programme by the EU that supports education, training, youth and sport in Europe. As part of this exchange programme, the RUB established partnerships with other European universities. The list of universities for Chemistry/Biochemistry students can be found here (<https://www.chemie.ruhr-uni-bochum.de/studium/international.html>). For up to 12 months per study cycle, the programme pays all tuition fees at the host institution and gives the students a grant to cover some of the additional costs. If you don't want to study a whole semester or academic year abroad, you can also do internships funded by Erasmus.

As part of my undergraduate studies in Chemistry and English, I had to study or work for at least 6 weeks in an English-speaking country. Since 6 weeks are too long to squeeze in during the lecture-free time with lab courses lurking just around the corner. Already during school, I had dreamt of living and studying abroad for some time. Thus, I decided to apply for Erasmus. I got a place at the University of Glasgow. When faced with the choice to study abroad for one semester or the whole academic year, it was easy to make a decision.

Glasgow was the first time I was away from my family for more than two weeks – living alone on trial so to say. Because I was spending a whole year at the University of Glasgow, I was guaranteed a place at one of the student accommodations. My home for the 9 months was a shared flat of 5 in the Murano Street Student Village. Unlike many of the other flats, mine hadn't been renovated yet. The hallway had a cunning resemblance of a prison or psychiatric ward, at least based on what I had seen in different films. Someone once told me that the architect also designed prisons. A rumour, but a justified one. Our cooker was from the 70's with heating spirals, which meant that every spillage ended up underneath, inside the cooker, if it didn't burn into the top of the cooker. The carpet in my room sparkled in some spots, a reminder of former inhabitants, and I don't want to know how much dust and dirt the carpet must have swallowed over the years. It sounds awful, but it was definitely an adventurous time and there were plenty of benefits from living in Murano. During my first semester, I lived together with two Chinese boys, a Finnish and a French girl. With the latter two, I spent some evenings cooking together or meeting during lunch break chatting over music, books, relationships. My favourite benefit, besides only walking for 20 min to university compared to an over an hour commute to the RUB, were the movie nights. Every Sunday, the Living Support Assistants would put on a film with plenty of snacks and drinks in the Distraction Zone of the Central Services Building. There I met an American exchange student and made friends with her. She is also the reason why I now own a ridiculously fertile plant, affectionately called Harold, but more on that later.



The University of Glasgow is old – it's from 1451. The main building could just as well be a part of legendary Hogwarts, though it only dates back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century. There is something magical about seeing the first sunbeams hit the main entrance. It's definitely a big change to the predominantly grey RUB. The teaching system is also very different. I took all classes from the 3<sup>rd</sup> year Chemistry undergrad studies. We had organic, inorganic and physical chemistry, six different lectures for each field. Which means a total of 9 lectures each semester. While at the RUB a lecture means that you have each week a 90 min lecture over the whole semester, the lectures I had in Glasgow were 8 times 50 min. Our timetables were different each week. Luckily, the university has an app which shows you the location of your lecture rooms. Besides lectures, we had lab courses and tutorials. For the tutorials we had to hand in the solved (or attempt at solving) exercises two days before we would talk over them during the tutorial. The tutorials were held by lectures, and the tutorial groups never were larger than 10 students. What I enjoyed most was the versatility of the topics that we covered and how close the contact with the lecturers was.

One tutor became very dear to my heart: Joe Connelly. He's over 80 and used to be a lecturer for organic chemistry. He needed magnifying glasses to be able to read our handed-in exercises. He recognised us by ear, not by sight. He told me that I know more than I think. Before I went to Glasgow, I hated organic chemistry. Afterwards, we weren't enemies anymore but acquaintances, thanks to Joe Connelly.

In the organic lab course, I met Freyja, Scottish and living just around the corner from Murano. We started to take yoga classes at the university's gym every Sunday. In the second semester we started to go to a different café for cake and tea after each session. That way I got to know plenty of amazing places in Glasgow's West End. If you get a chance to go to Glasgow stop by at Tchai Ovna's and The Cup and Saucer!

If I hadn't had the second semester, I would not be as close with Freyja, Yasmin and Emilie as I am now. Yasmin, also Scottish, and Emilie, French and Erasmus student as well, were in the same tutorial groups as I was. During the second semester we went on many day trips together, visiting Arran, Great Cumbrae, and the Highlands. After our final exam all of us went to the Cup and Saucer to have afternoon tea. We recharged our batteries the next day by going on a 17 km hike right through the middle of the highlands. It was a very sunny, warm day – perfect for a hike out in the Scottish countryside.



Which brings me to the topic of weather. Yes, it rains a lot. But it rarely rains all day. There are plenty of rain showers, but nothing that can bother you when you have a water-proof jacket. You just make the most of every sunbeam that can touch your skin (there's a lot of skin out when the sun's out). Winters are supposed to be mainly rainy in Glasgow. The winter I spent in Glasgow decided to be different. In February, the "Beast from the East" hit the country and painted everything white. Glasgow hadn't experienced so much snow for the last 30 years. University closed down for three days. City centre was deserted – the best time for a walk through it.



Before the lectures started, the International Office had organised an orientation week for all the new international students. It's the perfect opportunity to meet plenty of people. I made friends with a German girl and an Austrian girl, with whom I was to go on many hiking trips during the first semester. Sadly, both only stayed for one semester in total. The three of us signed up for the baking society.

The University of Glasgow has several different, student-run societies. Bad Movie Society, Baking Society, Ballroom and Latin Dancing Society, Chocolate Society, Scottish Country Dance Club, Cheese Society, Eurovision Society, K-Pop Society, Manga and Anime Society, Disney Society, Music Club and of course a Whisky Society – just to name a few. You can also start your own one!

The baking society was awesome. We met once a month and brought along baked goods to the topic of the month. And then it's basically just eating, trying out all the different goods. Your belly is full afterwards and you have a sugar rush. And then there are still plenty of leftovers to take home with you. I really loved those meetings!

Harold's mother, Kristin, the American student, also went there. Harold is a succulent (no idea which type though) that Kristin bought for her room. But when she left she wasn't able to take her baby back with her to the US. That's why I became his adoptive mum. He grew a lot, got many "children" (sprigs), and survived travelling to Shetland (the furthest north you can go in the UK) and then via Cambridge back to Germany. My dad picked me and all my stuff up with our family car after my year in Glasgow had ended and we brought Freyja home to Shetland, where we stayed for a week before we had to get to Cambridge due to a conference my dad had to attend. Harold now happily lives on my windowsill in Essen.



Before I forget, there are three other things besides afternoon tea that you should definitely try when you are in Scotland. Fish and chips at the seaside (haggis can be pretty good as well; fried mars bars are not traditional food and not really worth the calories) and alongside some cooled Irn Bru, the non-alcoholic national drink of Scotland. The more you drink of it, the more you like it! And you should try to go to a ceilidh. It's a dancing event – the band tells you the steps and everyone tries to follow them (emphasis on *tries*). You don't need to be good at dancing, you don't need to bring a partner. In next to no time you'll have danced with nearly everyone. I love ceilidhs – they are a lot of fun and indeed a workout.



I lost my heart to Scotland. The 9 months there made it my home. There are so many places in Glasgow where I would love to go, just to grab a piece of cake, take a look at the vintage clothes or buy some books, but it's not around the corner. I already went back to Glasgow on a hiking holiday together with all my new friends. When I had to leave again, I was

crying. Thanks to Erasmus I met so many wonderful people, I discovered a new culture, a country and, maybe most important after all, I learned a lot about myself.

So, if you get the chance to go abroad during your studies: take it! Cling to it! Yes, it may prolong your studies. Yes, it's not cheap. But it will very likely be one of those experiences that you'll treasure for the rest of your life. It's definitely one of those for me!

*Written by Katharina Blanke*