Erasmus+ Student Mobility – Nottingham Trent University

Why Nottingham?

A very attractive reason for choosing Corvinus University of Budapest’s BA in International Relations program was the opportunity to spend a year in the realm of a double degree program at the Nottingham Trent University during the second year of my studies after which I would have gotten two degrees, one from CUB and one from NTU. Unfortunately, the program was ceased. However, I still could spend a year at NTU as an Erasmus+ Exchange student which year was one of the best years that I have ever had. With this report, I would like to help you to make the most of your year in Nottingham and to return to Budapest with the feeling of belonging to another university and to another country. Originally, I was going for a semester only, but in early October, after 3 weeks of education, I knew that I was willing to stay till the end of the academic year and even some difficulties, I have never regretted this decision which enabled me to spend the whole academic year (2018/2019) in Nottingham.

Due to the partnership of the two universities, the majority of the subjects which are available at NTU can be accepted as obligatory courses at CUB, at least at the English language BA in International Relations program. Because you have four choices regarding CUB courses, namely having the courses of your host university accepted as obligatory, passing exams during the (Erasmus) exam period, having your obligatory courses a year later or risking the delay of your degree, studying at a university whose courses can be accepted as obligatory courses at CUB was a major incentive for choosing NTU.

The administration went very easy. NTU’s exchange office provided all the important information that I needed regarding the courses I could choose from, the fresher week and other important administrative tasks. The coordinator was extremely helpful all the time and even when I made a mistake with the administration, she helped me immediately.

About Nottingham

Nottingham, or as it is called locally, Notts, is a small town. Its population is around 290000 which was relatively new to me after having always lived in cities of 1.5M or bigger only. The city is compact on the one hand, on the other hand, one has everything that one needs during their daily life. One can find possibilities for entertaining, going out, culture, dining out, etc. Notts is around 1 hour 45 minutes by train from London (4 hours by bus). Other parts of England
and of the United Kingdom are easily accessible from Notts due to be well-connected via trains, buses or by regional flights to other UK destinations.

I hardly had to use my umbrella; however, it was worth investing in a high-quality umbrella at the beginning of the academic year. The climate was rather mild, only mid-January was colder. From late January on, I hadn’t had to use my winter coat and the boots were also changed to sneakers.

Notts has always something to offer, you won’t get bored during your studies. There was always a gig on Old Market Square or at NTU. It is only up to you, whether you want to take part in those programs or not.

After the first few days when you are new to the city, you can adapt to the local lifestyle pretty fast and you will definitely feel like a local. Or you become one, it is up to you.

**Nottingham Trent University**

I can hardly express, what a positive experience I had at NTU. NTU has two campuses (actually three, but for CUB students the third campus, Brackenhurst, is irrelevant). If you study at the Faculty of Social Sciences and International Relations, there is a high chance that you will have your modules at Clifton Campus, which you can reach in 30-35 minutes by the Campus Bus (No. 4) during the weekdays, on weekends and bank holidays you can go to Clifton by other buses. You might consider living at Clifton or even at Clifton Campus. However, I highly recommend you search for accommodation in Nottingham and not in Clifton which does not offer you anything beyond the campus, thus, your courses, gym, and a library. I had friends living on Campus or in Clifton, and they had always complained about how empty those places were after 5 PM.

NTU is a TOP 20 university in the UK and you will understand why. Normally, you have 3-4 modules (10 ECTS each). Each module has 1 hour of lecture and 2 hours of seminar (or 1 hour of seminar, 2 hours of lecture). It is a necessity to be always prepared, which might mean day-long readings in the library, working in teams, making presentations, editing vlogs, etc. The lecturers are amazing; they are inspired and make you feel motivated throughout the year. Beyond this, they see you as partners and not as students at a lower level of the hierarchy. “I am the happiest if you come to my office and ask questions”, one of my module leaders told us on the very first day, and this principle is true for the whole staff, both academic and support staff. They are there to help you, to make your study and university experience better.
Independent learning, critical thinking, analytical skills are the core elements of your UK university experience. You need to read the books/chapters/studies. There are no consequences if you do not read them or if you are not willing to participate in the discussions, but then it is a missed opportunity to develop your skills (both academic and language). Tutors, lecturers are very helpful, answer your emails very fast, upload the lecture slides to NOW (a mixture of Moodle and Neptun) and if you are stuck with your independent research for your exam, essays, etc, they are there to help you.

I had to come to the realization that the British tuition fees are worth paying as the university can provide you all the necessities (24/7 library, best online resources, infrastructure, Student Union programs, and infrastructure) which make your experience the highest available quality. Everything which is given to students is there to create the best environment available.

My courses in the first semester (Introduction to European Studies, Global Political Economy, Foundations in Global Studies) had been evaluated with summative essays (1500-3000 words each), courses in the second semester (Contemporary German Politics, Change and World Order and Foundations in Global Studies) required either an essay and an exam or just an exam. Exam periods are organized very professionally, and all libraries are busy 24/7 before and during the exam periods.

It was very positive to see that we, as an academic circle could have long and meaningful debates on the relevant topics, seminars were very vivid and required everyone’s participation. From an academic point of view, NTU was the best choice I could make.

**What made my stay the best year of my life?**

I could write infinite much, so let me highlight those factors which made my stay amazing.

First, the accommodation. I applied for a homestay accommodation via the university which meant that I hadn’t only gotten a room for my money, but it was catered as well that eased my situation. However, without my amazing landlady and her friends I met through her, I wouldn’t be able to tell that I have now a family in the UK as well. Thereby, I became a local, and not just a student studying in Notts.

Second, friends. I highly recommend the fresher week which offers you a fun way to integrate to the city and to your new lifestyle and to meet new people who share the same newbie-experience. Most of the people I met during the fresher week became my friends. I decided to do something different from the things I usually do in Budapest, so I joined the Latin Dance
Society which gave me the second most important thing in Notts, quality free time. I met amazing people in the society, made life-long friends, spent endless nights at dance classes and at Salsa/Bachata socials (in Revolucion de Cuba mainly). I picked up a new hobby which I will continue in Budapest as well. My advice is to join a society, meet non-Erasmus students as well from all around the globe. This will give you the feeling that you belong to Notts and to NTU as no one will think about you as an “Erasmus student” but as a student at NTU. Join a society and make friends there. You can meet all the societies at the Fresher Fair in September, and you will definitely find one that you like from scuba diving to cocktail making.

Third, work-life balance. NTU requires you to be busy with your studies but also gives space for your non-university life as well. In this free time, I could live for my new hobby or I could go on trips in and around Notts or even further. I had travelled with City Life (an independent student program organizer company) to Wales, with NTSU (Students’ Union) to Chatsworth House, or with friends to Lincoln, London, Manchester, Coventry, Birmingham, Peak District, and to Ireland (which is cheap and easy to access with Ryanair from East Midlands Airport).

Money matters and other practical information

My Erasmus+ contract was “Zero Grant” which means that I was funded by the Campus Mundi Scholarship (hereinafter CM). CM is a great scholarship which gives you more than the Erasmus Grant. However, keep in mind, that neither CM nor the Erasmus Grant is enough to cover all your expenses in the UK, especially if you have the wish for traveling. In this paragraph, I would like to give you a few guidelines on how to be smart with your expenditures.

The biggest cost is obviously your rent which might include (some parts of) your food as well as it was in my case. If you know that you will study on the City site, you should look for accommodation within walking distance (approximately 20 minutes from campus). You will find a place: read forums, other student reports, join Facebook groups to find your ideal accommodation according to your budget and your needs. There is no perfect accommodation, you have to decide what you can afford and what type of living environment you need. I lived approximately 15 minutes by bus from the center (Carlton Hill). Carlton is a nice and safe neighborhood and the bus ride to the center is more than acceptable. On the other hand, I had night buses only on Friday and Saturday nights, which made me use Uber or MyTaxi on other nights.

Transportation is another cost with which you need to calculate. If you have classes in Clifton more than two times a week (I had to be on campus three days a week in the second semester)
or you need to take a bus to the center, unlimited pass for NCTX service on your Student ID card is the best solution. Robin Hood Pass is more expensive but gives you the convenience of the tram and other bus companies accept that card as well. Again, your place of living and your needs should guide you when you decide which pass you buy.

Working out can be very important if you have the need. I used the Students’ Union Gym that has two gyms (one on Clifton and one in the NTSU’s building in the city). The gym is modern and well equipped, you will meet your course mates there for sure. Your Gym membership gives you access to all fitness classes and blast sessions which can be fun if you fancy trying new things (I did yoga for example). I can repeat myself again, think about what you need and search for the best solution. I found this membership the best.

**Overall experience**

Having been back to Budapest for more than three weeks hasn’t vanished away from my constant wish to go back to Notts. I had a life there, both academic and personal which was amazing to experience, and I cannot do anything but wish to continue my life back to Budapest with all the positive attitudes and changes which I picked up in Nottingham. My question to myself was in September “Why not?” before I tried new things and this open-minded attitude enabled me living the best year I have ever had yet.

Remember, there is no typical Erasmus experience or obligations you need to follow. You have yourself and your decisions to make the most of your semester or year abroad. Be open-minded, tolerant and curious. Travel if you can, or/and appreciate a relaxed coffee in town with your friends. And be local if you can, as a part of you will remain there and you will have two homes with friends and families from all around the globe.