

## Students Abroad Two Stories

### The Basics

Name: Hanna Nierstrasz  
 Age: What a question to ask a lady. Twenty.  
 Year: Third  
 Current university: University College, London.  
 Sort of housing: College Halls.

*What was your main reason to choose the place you're studying now, and what did you expect of it?*

I got here via the Harting programme, and from the list of Harting places I could choose from, London was the most attractive, because it's, well, London. So that means shops and art and excitement and whatnot. I expected it to be wonderful and busy, which it is. I had no expectations of the university itself whatsoever, since I didn't know the first thing about it. It turns out to be good, though the English department is rather dull.

*Did you come about any difficulties, apart from maybe personal ones, when organising your stay abroad?*

A lot of things - courses, etc - had to be arranged after arrival, so much of the stress came after moving. But everything was very well organised over here, so no trouble, really.

*Did you experience a culture shock?*

No, not at all. People tend to try and make out that Britain is completely different from the Netherlands, but it's not, really. Even the climate's the same. Only the coffee is shocking.

*Are you continuing your studies abroad, or are you taking other subjects?*

I'd like to continue them here, but have not as yet had the time to thoroughly explore the possibilities.

*Are you participating in any extracurricular activities, and do you feel they broaden your "abroad experience"?*

I am currently writing for a college mag, which, because of its controversial nature, has landed me in quite some trouble. So yes, that did add some edge to it. Apart from that, I'm in a couple of societies. On the whole, though, I don't have time to do much except coursework and enjoying the city with my friends.

*Do you feel you were well prepared for your stay abroad?*  
 Yes, both academically and in an organisational sense.

*Did your expectations prove right?*

Mostly, yes. Students of English here are more uneducated and especially more boring than I thought they would be, though. Dweebs.

*Do you have any advice for students wishing to study abroad?*

Have fun. Be fabulous. Go to London.

## The Possibilities for Studying Abroad

Some useful tips

### Programmes

- Socrates/Erasmus: the programme for studying within Europe.
- ISEP (International Student Exchange Program): the programme for studying outside of Europe.
- Harting: for students who perform (ed) above average and want to take their third-year courses in Great Britain or Ireland.

The easiest thing to do is to go to a university which has an agreement with Leiden University and enroll as a 'visiting student'. That will take less arranging, and you'll stay enrolled in Leiden University. Leiden will take care of your enrolment abroad, you don't have to pay a second college grant to the university you are going to, and you will be ensured of a scholarship.

### Study grants

- A few examples of the many grants:
- Erasmusbeurs (combined with the Socrates-/Erasmus programme)
  - VSB Beurs
  - Huygens Talentfonds

The "Beursopener" <[www.beursopener.nl](http://www.beursopener.nl)>, part of the Nuffic website [www.wilweg.nl](http://www.wilweg.nl), can help you find the right one. Just go to the "zoeken" (search) bit, and select the criteria. This site is only available in Dutch.

The best thing to do is visit the Leiden University site on studying abroad: [www.buitenland.leidenuniv.nl](http://www.buitenland.leidenuniv.nl) (only available in Dutch too, there seems to be a lot of work for students of English out there!), or visit International Office in PITSstop students' centre Plexus. For a general overview, you can also get a brochure at the Studiepunt.

**The Basics**

Name: Esther Heijn  
Age: Twenty  
Year: Third  
Current university: University of Southampton  
Sort of housing: Private rented property (my landlord being the parish secretary of the Catholic church next door)

*What was your main reason to choose the place you're studying now, and what did you expect of it?*  
I expected very little. I KNEW very little. I chose this place because I had a look at the courses and liked what they had on offer, plus, I've always lived close to the sea.

*Did you come about any difficulties, apart from maybe personal ones, when organising your stay abroad?*

You could say it was a minor logistic nightmare. Also, I had no room or potential room before I came here. The first four days were extremely stressful; people who're only here for one year are not entitled to a room in halls (and, on retrospect, I'm glad I wasn't, cause halls suck badly -- they all smell of really old cabbages), so I had to find a room with a landlord/lady. It took about three days, and then I could move in. I was lucky, also, that I'd been in touch with the Socrates/Erasmus coordinator for Humanities, Madeleine McNeill. She's helped me a great deal.

*Did you experience a culture shock?*

No, not really. People are just more polite and helpful than they are in the NL.

*Are you continuing your studies abroad, or are you taking other subjects?*

I'd like to stick around here, but I don't know if that's possible. These past months have so far been the best of my life, which is saying something.

*Are you participating in any extracurricular activities, and do you feel they broaden your abroad-experience?*

Yesterday (Monday 13 November), I pitched a play with the Theatre Group that I've become part of. Basically, it's introducing a play to the Committee, and twiddle your thumbs while waiting for their decision. I'll hear what'll happen in two weeks' time. I've also been to most of the activities organised by Friends International, who do things for international students. We've been exploring the city, having dinner together, and there will be traditional dancing, next. This Christmas, I visited a British family, as a part of the HOST scheme, which enables international students to visit families all over Britain.

*Do you feel you were well prepared for your stay abroad?*

To be honest... not really. But in retrospect, I could have been worse off, although I don't really want to know what I'd have done, then.

*Did your expectations prove right?*

Everything's loads better than I thought, from food to houses, to people, to activities to clubs and societies to even the city and the country side.

*Do you have any advice for students wishing to study abroad?*

Please do. But be active. If you want to go abroad, don't sit around and wait for things to happen. It will be worth every effort, trust me. Even in a city like Southampton, which may not have as many clubs as Manchester or London, there is so much to do and see, and in such a great variety. Invest in the clubs and societies the Students' Union has on offer; from sports to social to art to performing arts. It's all there for you, and more. And, psst, don't tell anyone, but all clubs and societies are far less stigmatising than the system we have in Leiden. You can be both part of, if you like, the Catholic Society and the Arts Society. Or the Lacrosse Club and the Musical Group. Whatever you like.