Hey! My name’s Kate and I studied abroad at Lancaster University during my fourth year of a Bachelor of Management Studies (Hons)/Bachelor of Arts at Waikato. It was a wicked experience and one that I know I will look back on with fond memories for the rest of my life. I haven’t even finished my degree yet but I know going on exchange will be the highlight of my life and a bit years at Waikato!

Here are some general tips and advice I have about preparing for your exchange and the exchange itself. I hope I’ve done a good job of convincing you to consider Lancaster as the destination for your study abroad semester! Sorry about how long this is, you don’t have to read it all!

(Playing tourist in Central Park, New York City. I stopped over here on my way to the UK.)

BEFORE YOU GO

• **If you can, I’d advise picking papers** that you’re not too concerned about doing extra well in. By all means don’t make it your goal to just scrape through, but remember there’s more to going on exchange than just studying! I picked two minor/elective papers to take and just one paper from my major. I also went with a 2nd/3rd year mix. Pick papers at Lancaster that aren’t offered at home - it becomes a point of difference in your degree! Doing a range of papers as well means you won’t get bored and you’ll get to meet a bunch of different people in each course too.

• **Picking a college** and residence is one of the trickiest bits of studying abroad as it’s not as if you can just take a trip to check them out! Lancaster University has a Facebook page with great photos of the different types of accommodation offered by each college - I’d definitely recommend checking this out. There are 8 different colleges scattered all over campus so after making a shortlist, I decided to chose the one in closest proximity to where I thought my lectures were likely to be - County. I guessed right and absolutely loved my time living there. I was close enough to everything, but still far enough away to not be in one of the main thoroughfares. To be fair, you can’t go really go wrong - except if you don’t like walking, then I’d advise against living in Cartmel or Lonsdale - if you’ve got a class in County, it’ll be a 20 minute hike from your residence! Not fun if it’s 2°C and raining!

• **Arranging your flights and travel** will take place quite late in the piece which can be a bit frustrating if you like to be organised and on top of things. I knew the weekend of when I had to arrive at Lancaster but not the actual date (each college has their own move in day) so I decided to arrange my travel and flights around this. I had never lived away from home before so decided to spend 3 weeks travelling in America before I got to England. This was a fantastic way to break up the long journey and staying in hostels also got me used to always being surrounded by lots of people which was new to me. I found it the perfect introduction to my first time away from home.
ARRIVAL

- The university organises **transport to Lancaster** from Manchester Airport on arrivals weekend for international students and I'd definitely recommend doing this. As well as being the most stress free and cheapest option, it'll also give you the opportunity to meet some fellow study abroad students.
- **Fresher reps** are on hand all weekend and all of Freshers Week to help you settle in and help out. USE THEM. They are a fountain of knowledge and handy tips and made the whole process so much easier. Two reps are allocated to each flat or house and are responsible for your wellbeing in the first week. They are second and third year students so they know their way around university and town so get them to take you on a tour! These were my go-to people for asking questions like 'where is the closest laundry?' and 'how do I top up my printing account?'. It's pretty much luck-of-the-draw who you get but if you end up with duds, reps from other flats will be more than happy to adopt you!
- Nothing is provided in Lancaster accommodation except for a bed, desk and chair so you'll need to buy everything when you get there! This is kind of annoying and expensive if you're only there for a short while so see if you can share with flatmates! I bought the basics for myself and then shared the more random stuff with two American exchange students. There's a fantastic place in town called Wilko's which has so much cheap stuff for kitchen, bathroom and bedroom - I'd definitely head here! There's also a TK Maxx in town which has discounted high street stuff and there's also a charity shop on campus where you can pick up some bargains! Getting all of this stuff sorted was a bit of a mission - it required two trips into town on the bus so try and write lists and be organised!
- **Freshers Week** is like O Week but kicked up a notch or five. About 6000 Lancaster students live on campus with the rest living in town so you can imagine it's a pretty crazy week. Each college has their own agenda for the week with dedicated on-campus and off-campus bar crawl nights and fun activities during the day. There are non-alcohol events too so you don’t need to worry if drinking isn't your thing. Having a good time in Lancaster doesn't have to involve alcohol - I had plenty of good nights dressing up for themed nights and dancing with my friends without it! In saying that though, drinking at Lancaster is a big part of the social life and it's rare that gatherings don't involve a pint or two.
LIFE AT LANCASTER

- As I've already mentioned, I lived in County which was the northernmost college on campus and also the biggest - there were about 800 of us altogether. I lived in a five storey building with two 'flats' on each floor. These flats were made up of seven ensuite bedrooms and a shared kitchen/dining room. I really liked this set up as you could hang out in your kitchen with your flatmates and then head back to your own room for quiet. Not having to share a bathroom was great too - if your budget stretches, I'd definitely recommend this option!

- There are plenty of food places on campus to get you through the first week until you make it into town for grocery shopping! There is a Subway on campus, a SPAR (kind of like Four Square), a Chinese restaurant, a burger place and a couple of other takeaway places - my go-to was Sultans just past Alexandra Square. There is a big Sainsbury's supermarket in town as well as a Marks & Spencer and an Iceland. In saying this though, I would definitely recommend ordering your groceries to campus! Carrying a million bags on the bus is not ideal, especially if it's raining (which, chances are, it will be!) This is of course if you go with the non-catered option which pretty much everyone does.

- Every school/faculty is different but I found my time in the Politics and History departments to be a lot harder than at home. When I say harder, I just mean more challenging - not necessarily more difficult! Lancaster offers a more independent style of learning than what I find at Waikato. You're expected to read your set texts, be prepared to discuss what you've read and also form your own conclusions on what you've been taught. Lancaster lecturers value critical and analytical thinking so be prepared to form an argument and find the evidence to back it up. The lectures were very similar style to at home except you won't find anybody on Facebook during the middle of class! The tutorials were a bit different as they were often supplementary to the lectures rather than going over things you learnt in the lecture. Also I found that because of the short terms, assessment will often be one piece worth a decent chunk of your grade (and then an exam) so you don't get the opportunity to put a bad mark behind you and do better next time.

- Lancaster students are massive on societies. There is one for every interest - from normal, right down to inane! They have a big fair during the first week so you can go check out all the clubs and decide which ones you want to join. No-one has any shame at Lancaster. If you want to join the Tea Appreciation Society, do it! If you’re a bit of a Harry Potter or Dr Who nerd, then join those respective societies. You'll often find there are more people in these meetings than in your
lectures! Lancaster is a campus university so everyone gets involved - it's the best way to meet people who have similar interests as you. These societies also have weekly or monthly socials - pretty much just another opportunity to dress up in ridiculous costumes, drink, and dance the night away. Often societies will join up and do joint socials - you'll see some very interesting combinations and some equally amazing/disturbing costumes!

- The Lancaster campus is pretty isolated but the **bus system** is excellent. Town is only a 10-15 minute bus ride away (unless you get on the 2A bus!) and there are numerous buses that will get you there. Buses run every 2-5 minutes from the underpass which is under Alexandra Square in the middle of campus so you'll never be left waiting long. In town you'll find all the pubs and clubs so you can experience Lancaster’s vibrant student nightlife but also the essentials - supermarkets, clothing stores, markets, phone stores, McDonalds, pharmacy and the train station.

(I captured this sunset while walking back to the bus stop in town after a trip to Sainsbury's supermarket!)

**TRAVEL**

- Lancaster is in the north west of England and pretty handy to lots of interesting places to visit. While I was there I visited the Lakes District, Manchester, Liverpool, Chester, Northumberland, London and Edinburgh. This is by no means an exhaustive list of where you can go - all of the UK is in pretty handy reach if your time and budget can stretch that far. There are plenty of places that I wish I’d got to but I just didn't have the time. The majority of these trips were organised by the university's grad college which made travelling cheap and stress free. In the beginning, it was also a fantastic way to meet friends who you could organise your own travel with later. Self-organised travel is totally do-able and gives you the freedom and flexibility to do what you're interested in.

(This is the River Avon in Bath. To the left is the famous Pulteney Bridge.)
Plenty of trains stop at Lancaster and I would definitely recommend purchasing a **railcard** if you’re going to do a bit of travelling while you’re on exchange. The 16-25 card costs £27 but will get you 30% off every rail fare that you purchase. It more than pays for itself in the amount you save, especially if you’re doing expensive trips to places like London.

(Watching the All Blacks take on Scotland at Murrayfield in Edinburgh!)

(Hanging out with Hannah, my flatmate and a fellow exchange student from the University of New Hampshire in the US! This is at Alnwick Castle, used for the exterior shots of Hogwarts in the Harry Potter films. We stood in the courtyard where Harry, Ron and Hermione have their first flying lesson!)

**FINAL THOUGHTS**

There was not a single thing I disliked about my time in Lancaster - except for the fact that it wasn't longer! Lancaster students live by the rule: work hard, play hard. Being a top 10 university, it's rare to meet someone who is disengaged, but by no means is everyone boring and nerdy! Lancaster students definitely know how to let loose and have some fun! That's what makes Lancaster such a cool place to be - you really get the best of both worlds, which makes it a perfect destination for studying abroad.