

Welcome to The Liftoff ✈️

Global Opportunities newsletter!





**This is such an
exciting time as you
prepare for your
study exchange!**



Each month, this
newsletter will provide
you with insights and tips
to help you on your
journey, from early
preparation to making the
most of every moment
abroad.





Five Skills I Learnt on My Exchange

Harriet spent a year studying abroad in Salamanca, Spain.





1. Developing Personal Resilience and Independence

Arriving in Salamanca alone was a challenge for me; I always felt like a homebird who didn't want to branch out too far from my family, friends and community in Northern Ireland, so going out to an entirely different country on my own where I knew no-one was incredibly daunting.

I had to navigate an unfamiliar city, speak in a different language and adjust to a new academic system. But with time, I found myself rising to the challenge of living on my own, managing paperwork, finding my way around, forming close friendships, dealing with unexpected problems and speaking Spanish every day.

By the end of the year, I had become more self-assured and independent, comfortable doing things alone, confident speaking to strangers, and open to unpredictability.





2. Building an International Network

One of the most rewarding parts of the exchange was meeting people from all over the world. There were plenty of opportunities available to me to meet fellow exchange students who were in the same boat as me and were eager to make friends and form connections.



Through Erasmus meet-ups, shared classes and student societies, I made friends from Scotland, Germany, France, the United States, Brazil, Colombia, Venezuela, Honduras, New Zealand and beyond. I was able to learn so much about cultures across the world and hear about different life experiences, and now I've secured free accommodation across the world whenever I go to visit!



3. Mastering Real-Life Spanish

After around eight years of Spanish classes, I felt that I had a solid grasp of vocabulary, grammar and higher level structures ... but nothing compares to the practical challenges of using the language in real life.

At first, it was daunting. I struggled to keep up with the incredibly fast speeds of native Spanish-speakers and I made plenty of mistakes. I hesitated to join in conversations and sometimes just nodded along when I didn't understand. But gradually, the language became more familiar, I could follow full conversations, understand colloquialisms in day-to-day language, and speak on the spot without feeling the need to rehearse in my head. I was amazed to look back at how much my Spanish had improved!





4. Appreciating New Cultures

When I first arrived in Salamanca, I really felt the culture shock of being in a new country where everything was so different to what I was used to. In Northern Ireland, we are so used to fast-paced, rushed schedules and everyone seems to want things done immediately. But in Spain, they were much calmer about their daily life.

Learning to live at a slower pace helped me to drop that instant gratification mindset and accept that I can't rush or dwell on things that are not in my hands. I found it was really beneficial for my mental health, and it was something I really wanted to take back with me when I returned home.

I soon got used to shops closing in the afternoon for siesta and dinners happening much later than I was used to. Along the way, I tried delicious new foods and experienced some amazing local events such as Christmas markets and the incredible Semana Santa festivals. Soon enough I felt that I had really settled into life in Salamanca.

5. Learning to Say “Yes”

Before my exchange, I often played it safe and preferred sticking to the familiar. But being in a new environment encouraged me to change that.

From the beginning of my exchange, I knew I wanted to make the most of every opportunity. I knew that I would only get out of the experience what I was willing to put in, so I made a conscious effort to say yes to every opportunity that came my way. From a weekend trip to Portugal and a concert in Madrid, to joining cooking classes and showing up to student events like salsa dancing, painting nights, and karaoke, each one brought something different, and they made the experience so much richer.

Because of that mindset, my year was filled with unforgettable moments and meaningful connections. I came home with no regrets for missed chances, just a deep sense of gratitude for all the experiences I was able to enjoy.



A low-angle, upward-looking photograph of a woman with brown hair, wearing glasses and a green turtleneck, looking up at a modern building with a complex, geometric glass facade. The building's structure is composed of many triangular and quadrilateral panels, creating a star-like pattern. The sky is a clear, bright blue. The woman is in the foreground, slightly out of focus, looking up towards the building.

Tip #1 Arrive Early (If You Can) and Build a Routine

If possible, get there a week or two before classes. It helps to sort out things like registration, housing, and setting up your student card without feeling rushed. But it's okay if you arrive later. You can still build a routine once you've settled in.

Tips for Studying Abroad

**Alena spent a semester at
Universiteit Hasselt, Belgium**

A group of approximately ten young adults, likely students, and one older man, presumably a faculty member, are posing for a group photo in front of a red brick building. The building features large, arched windows and a balcony with a glass railing. The group is arranged in two rows, with some individuals sitting on the grass in the front and others standing behind them. The scene is set outdoors on a sunny day with green foliage and trees visible in the background.

Tip #2 Stay in Touch with Home

Being abroad is a chance to enjoy independence, but staying connected with people back home really helps. I liked when friends and family visited me, but even video calls or a message made a big difference, especially on quiet days. Having a few photos from home cheered me up when I felt homesick.

Tip #3 Keep Digital Copies of Important Documents

Scan or photocopy your passport, insurance, and university papers before you leave. The university printers came in handy for this. Having backups saved me stress when something came up unexpectedly.

Tip #4 Explore Local Transport and Free Days

Take some time to learn how public transport works. I studied in Hasselt and really liked how simple it was to get around. There are good discounts if you're under 26, so it's worth checking in advance. The bus app shows live locations, and the train app is great for platform info, carriage types, and delays. If you're in Belgium, remember Heritage Day happens every year on the first Sunday after Easter. Also, many museums are free on the first Sunday of each month.



Tip #5 Be Open to Spontaneous Adventures

Keep an eye on emails and group chats. Some of my favourite experiences came up this way. I found out about volunteering with Re-Book at UHasselt selling second-hand textbooks. This led to my very first go-karting team building. One of my best memories was visiting the maritime museum in Antwerp. I hadn't planned it, but it turned out to be a really interesting detour.





Stay on top of your
study exchange admin
with our checklist!

- ☐ Submit a Study Grant Application Form
- ☐ Complete a Student International Travel Risk Assessment form
- ☐ Follow directions provided by your host university
- ☐ Be pro-active in arranging accommodation, checking if you require a visa etc.
- ☐ Complete the Consent to share details form





Global Opportunities Team

Don't forget, if you have any queries
just pop us an email at
goglobal@qub.ac.uk
or book an appointment with
one of our team [here](#)



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