

Stornoway
and the
University of the Highlands and Islands
with
ERASMUS

Steòrnabhaigh
agus
Oilthigh na Gàidhealtachd agus nan Eilean
le
ERASMUS



Figure 1: The Town Hall of Stornoway in the centre of the town

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My Stornoway experience started when I went to the ERASMUS presentation held by ERASMUS coordinator Prof. Ingo Mose in my first year of studies. He was showing pictures of the partner universities of Oldenburg and when I saw the picture of the Lews Castle and the adjoining college on the isle of Lewis and Harris I knew I wanted to go there.

A few months, some grey hairs and a lot of paperwork later, my plane landed near the town of Stornoway in the Outer Hebrides on the 5th of September 2019. It was stormy, the sky was grey, and it was raining cats and dogs.

As uninviting as the weather was, as friendly and welcoming were the people. Whenever I had a question or a problem, people were always happy to lend a hand or help me out with some advice.

*'...Where the folk are truly kind
Where you leave the world behind
Where each cloud is silver-lined
My lovely Stornoway...'*

From 'Stornoway' by Peat and Diesel

During my taxi ride into town I could see very few houses and a landscape that was rough and wild, but beautiful. When I reached my accommodation at the Bayhead Bride Centre, I was greeted by the manageress Teenann, whose family name I still have not learned until this day. Everyone is very familial and last names are only every used when people share the same Christian name (which, frankly, is often the case). Sometimes father and son share the same first and last name, which leads to amusing solutions like calling a man with the name of Callum MacLeod among his friends of the same Christian name Boydie, until his father enters the room, who will from then on be called Boydie, whereas the man formerly addressed as Boydie will now be spoken to as Callum Jr. (at times it could get a bit confusing).

In the Bridge Centre I met a lot of other students and found good friends, with whom I went hiking in the castle grounds, swimming in the Atlantic Ocean, camping in the mountains and studying for hours on end in the library when the exams were near.

When I went to the induction at the college to meet Murdo Smith, who helped me organise my studies and collect my student ID, I met some girls from the newly founded Stornoway Ladies Rugby Club who convinced me to join, and that was one of the best decisions I could have made. The training was intense and a lot of fun and the games were mostly off the island, so I got to travel to Orkney, Shetland, Inverness, and a few minor places during the Sarah-Beanley-Cup. It was a great experience and in spite of all the bruises and pains I wouldn't want to miss it for the world.

During the induction I also met some representatives from the local gym, which I joined about a week later. There I met half the town, my fellow students and some of my teachers as well and it was always fun to go

for a swim, the sauna or to lift some weights with my friends.

When the actual course 'Sustainable Development' started on Monday, the 9th of September, I was very excited about the method of online learning. However, I quickly figured out that working from my accommodation was accompanied by a lot of distractions, so I decided to work from the university library instead and in one case was even allowed to join my teacher, Eddi Graham, in the VC room while he was giving his class, which was made possible by my PAT Eilidh MacPhail.

Is fheàrr Gàidhlig bhriste

na Gàidhlig sa chiste.

Gaelic Proverb ('Bad Gaelic is better than no Gaelic')

Eddi suggested I might enjoy learning some Gaelic, as the Isle of Lewis is the number one hot spot of the world for Scottish Gaelic with more native Gaelic speakers than anywhere else. He and Eilidh arranged for me to join the 'Ulpan' courses for Gaelic that are offered by the college and I indeed enjoyed it very much (Bha e sùgradh agus math dha-rìribh!). The class was a very nice mix of professions and ages and we would regularly go for coffee after class. During these challenging times of the SarS-Cov-19 pandemic we continue to meet online twice a week to talk about Gaelic and the world over a nice cup of coffee.

My classes for Sustainable Development left a very good impression on me, as we were given a lot of freedom in the choice of our main focuses. The lessons provided a loose frame for what we had to learn and most of the self-conducted studies were open to student's preferences. This made it very easy to stay motivated throughout the whole term and was ultimately what led me to apply for another semester.

After having spent almost 9 months on this unique island (which by the way has some of the most beautiful beaches in the world) and in this wonderful port with its roughly 8,000 inhabitants and vivid pub-culture I am sad that my time here has come to an end. I learned a lot for my studies but also about this beautiful place. There is no stress, and everyone takes their time with the tasks at hand. When I had a meeting it usually started with a cup of tea and a chat. Lewiseans surely seem to be march to the beat of a different drummer.

'...And that's the way we do it

And that's the way we do it

And that's the way we do it

The way we do it in the Western Isles...'

From 'Western Isles' by Peat and Diesel

I am very glad I made this decision to spend a year in Stornoway and will cherish the memories forever.