



Erfahrungsbericht: Cardiff University

Studying English-Speaking Cultures in Bremen I knew I would get the chance to go abroad for a semester and I am very happy with the choice of Cardiff as my temporary home.

Cardiff is the biggest city in Wales and is its capital. The university has a good reputation, a beautiful campus and offers a wide range of courses. The city is close to the sea, has a lot of cultural history and a very nice town centre, with a castle, a huge stadium and lots of restaurants, shops and pubs.

I had visited Cardiff and other parts of the UK several times before my stay abroad. I had lived in different cities and gone to two different universities in Germany before enrolling in Cardiff University. Even though I am pretty used to change and to adapting in new places I was very nervous upon my arrival in Wales.

I must say that the staff at Cardiff Uni did a great job of reassuring and supporting me and the rest of the Erasmus students. Especially the first week - orientation week - was extremely helpful and well organized. I went to three information events where members of

staff explained everything that I would need to know during my stay: how to choose and register for the right courses, how to connect your mobile devices to the campus-wide Internet, how and where to get your student ID card, how to use the libraries and how to sign up at the online student intranet. The intranet of Cardiff University is comparable to Bremen's Stud.IP, but in my opinion it is much easier to understand and better organized. The intranet combines a convenient array of functions: a Mail account, the online platforms for all your modules, the SIMS function of the university that is important at the beginning of your studies, the uploading feature for essays and other module work, your timetable and the online library search application. The password that I used for the intranet I used for basically everything, even for the campus wireless LAN and the printers at the library. During orientation week the Students Union was another big support for new students. They offered a plethora of fun events like pub crawls, quiz nights, parties and daily campus tours. The amount of clubs and societies at Cardiff University is pretty great. There are clubs for almost anything - all kinds of sports, film, art, books, games and several obscure clubs for weird interests to check out. The Students Union was pretty good at keeping me informed about the goings on of most clubs during the semester. Make sure to like their page on Facebook to stay updated. The international students union offered several trips during the semester that you could join for fair fees. You'll have to pay in advance, so make sure to follow them on Facebook as well, as the more popular trips will be sold out pretty quickly. Uni Cardiff would sometimes send out mails for international student job offers, so always check your E-Mails in case you might be who they're looking for.

When it comes to finding accommodation Cardiff was less easy to navigate than the German cities that I had lived in before. I found my room via the webpage spareroom.co.uk, which works similarly to the German 'wg-gesucht'. A notable difference though is the lack of private room offers. Most of the rooms on Spare-



room were offered by letting firms, who let rooms in several houses that they own. This means that you generally won't have a chance to meet your future housemates, because you will only be in contact with members of the letting firm. Another difference is that these firms will want to know an awful lot about you before they will accept you as a tenant. I had to scan several bank accounts and fill out an online formula about where I lived during the last three years, with addresses, exact length of my stays and contact details of my current and former landlords. I must say that I found the whole process a little intrusive, especially given the fact that I was only going to rent a room for 5 months and had my parents acting as guarantors. If you do not want to put up with this, you might consider applying for a room at the housing facilities of the University. There are pretty early application deadlines, so you might want to find out about those early on, while you're researching the universities you are interested in. The room that I lived in cost approximately as much as the Erasmus money that I received each month. With the added expenses of bus or train fares and groceries, living in the UK is definitely more expensive than living in Germany. Cardiff is still one of the cheapest options though, living in cities like London or Liverpool will be even more costly.

After moving to the UK you do not need to register at local office like you have to when you move to or in Germany.

Another thing to consider is the method of payment that you are going to use during your stay abroad. As paying with cash grows increasingly unfashionable in the UK and cards are accepted anywhere it wouldn't be a bad idea to open a bank account for your stay abroad. You do not necessarily need one, your German bank card will work just fine but a normal transaction will always cost you a transaction fee and if you get cash at an ATM the fee will be pretty steep at 5 Pounds. There are some offers on opening a bank account for students at the local British banks that will be cheaper for you in the long run.

I wasn't too happy with Cardiff's public transport. The bus fare for one single ride into town was about 3 pounds, something I wasn't prepared to pay all the time, which meant that I walked a lot during my months here. A lot of the buses were late too, and there wasn't really any way of knowing how long you would have to wait at the bus stand. Another inconvenience was that most buses didn't have screens that showed you at what stop you were. Many buses didn't give you change either, something that I had to learn the hard way. There is an app called Cardiff Bus that gives pretty good directions and lists the departure times and stops for the buses in Cardiff.

I would recommend taking a trip to London at least once while in Cardiff. Both the National Express coaches or the Megabus coaches travel between Cardiff and London regularly and for very little money. Megabus is generally cheaper than National Express, a trip to

London can be as cheap as 5 Pounds and the coach will drop you off in the heart of London at Victoria Station. The long-distance coaches also drive to lots of other cities in Wales, England or Scotland from Cardiff and are the cheaper alternative to taking the train.



While in Cardiff you should check out some basic sightseeing things. Visit Cardiff Bay - maybe try to find someone to go sailing with. Have a look at Cardiff Castle: don't pay the regular entrance fee but ask for a 'key to the castle'. It costs about half as much and will be valid for three years. To receive the key you just need a valid Cardiff address. If possible, get a ticket to a Rugby game - it doesn't get more Welsh than this. The city is full of fans, the red dragon is everywhere and the atmosphere in the stadium is pretty amazing. I enjoyed myself even though I had absolutely no idea about Rugby. Even now, I still don't, it is a pretty weird sport.

Also, go to the cinema as often as you can if you're into films. A normal ticket in any of Cardiff's cinemas is about 3 pounds, which is amazingly cheap in comparison to other cities in the UK. (In London a ticket will cost you about 10-15 pounds.)

While in Cardiff you should definitely visit the Museum of Welsh Life at St. Fagans - it's just outside the city, the entrance is free of charge and the open air museum is an amazing destination for a day trip (pick a day with dry weather though).

All along the coast near Cardiff there are beautiful towns and villages to visit for a walk along beaches and cliffs. I loved Barry Island and Penarth - both easily reached by bus or train. (The bus fares for day tickets in Cardiff and the surrounding areas are very low, I



payed 5 Pounds for a two hour trip plus return, so don't pay expensive single bus fares if you can avoid it.)

The thing I personally loved most in Wales in general are the very common, ridiculously cheap charity shops. If you are into second hand clothes and thrift store shopping Cardiff and Wales are heaven. Don't ever try finding anything second hand in London, the prices there are absurd and the shops are not even as well stocked or organized as those that I found in the Welsh towns I visited (Pontypridd would be a tip, or Porthcawl.)



Retrospectively, I can definitely say that living in Wales for four months was a valuable and rewarding experience. Even though the British are maybe not that different from the Germans, living among them for a time has given me a better understanding of their culture, their history and their values. In regard to my future studies and my professional life after university as a teacher, the time abroad has been very instructive on a scholarly level. I loved all my modules and had very thoughtful and friendly lecturers. On a personal level I think that going abroad is something that can be a good experience for anyone, studying any subject, it doesn't have to be a thing valuable to only language students. Meeting new people, expressing myself in a language other than German and living in a different environment made me more flexible and also enhanced my ability to put things into perspective. The only thing I would do differently now is to live in Wales during a summer semester, because British winters are wet and windy.