

**Helen:** Good afternoon. My name is Helen, and I'm a member of the study abroad team here at Reading, and this is our podcast series. I'm joined today by one of our incoming students. If you'd like to introduce yourself, tell us where you're from and let us know a little bit about your time here.

**Lilli:** Yeah. Hi. My name is Lilli. I go to the University of Maryland, Baltimore County in the United States. And I am here for the spring term at Reading.

**Helen:** Fantastic. Thank you. Lilli, can you tell us starting off, why did you want to study abroad and why did you choose Reading?

**Lilli:** So I have always wanted to travel the world, see a lot of the world and my older sister works in the education abroad world and she always was a big proponent of me doing it. When I got to college so there was a lot of support from home and when I got to college. I decided that it was time to go and explore and further my education abroad so.

I was looking for schools that offered a range of different topics, and the University of Reading has a really great programme for history majors like myself to kind of come take a variety of classics and archaeology courses, which is mostly what I'm in right now and just a broad band of different types of things you can study and the location to London has also enabled me to go see lots of theatre productions and go see museums.

Well, there's just a really unique opportunity to further my studies here at Reading.

**Helen:** Oh, fantastic. Yeah, we're all very lucky being so close to London, aren't we? OK, so can you tell me a little bit about the courses that you've picked? You've told me a little bit about you're interested in history. That's your major. How have you found choosing the modules? How have you found they're different or at home? Or perhaps they're the same? Can you talk a little bit about how your experiences of the courses have been?

**Lilli:** Yeah, for sure. First, I want to say that the study abroad team was super helpful in getting me into these classes. I really was not sure when I got here exactly what I was going to take. But then within that first week, everyone was super commutative. Back and forth, getting me into classes.

And there were just so many that I was interested in taking that getting into three that I was happy with was really easy. And at the end of it all, so.

Probably the class I'm most interested in is my American Civil War class that I'm taking. I don't normally specialise in American history, but I really wanted to study abroad and take an American history class to see how other countries teach our history.

And the professor is so knowledgeable and I'm learning things about the civil war that I have never even thought to be taught.

It's not like it's been so eye opening too.

**Helen:** Yeah, new perspective I guess.

**Lilli:** And it makes me much more interested in American history, I think as well, which has been such a cool experience.

But as for the differences for my home university, these courses are split in into lecture versus seminars, which at my home university you just kind of have two chunks of time in the week where you go and you maybe have a lecture or maybe you talk about things you read, but here I think it's been easier for me to know what to prepare for the classes which has been really nice for my time management as well, I always know what I need to get done for which day.

And the assessment style, I think is way more straightforward. Because at home I would have homework of reading quizzes or that kind of thing that all these little assignments that build up to my total grade, whereas here you're working towards those bigger projects which is not something I'm used to, but I've really enjoyed getting to do these longer assessments to kind of learn how to write bigger papers and, you know, peer review, those kinds of things. So I think that's really helpful for me when it comes to thinking about going into post grad afterwards as well.

**Helen:** OK, fantastic. I'm so interested that you've chosen an American history module and it's working out so well for you. You mentioned the welcome from the Study Abroad Office and we're obviously delighted to hear that you, you were happy with that. But how was your first week? Did you feel that you had lots of information before you came here? Did you feel that, you know, you were welcomed, you were put into a community, that sort of thing. How was it when you first arrived?

**Lilli:** I immediately was excited to be here. I think initially I just was happy to even have gotten here all by myself and made it. Then after going through what the welcome orientation with the study abroad team, that was super critical because it helped me know what to expect for the next week when I was choosing classes. Maybe not getting into all of the classes and maybe having to switch things around if the time conflicted. But it was also super critical because those were the people that are my first sort of allies on the faculty side, but then additionally, the people that I met that first day are still some of the people that I talked to day-to-day.

The girl that I ran into on my way to try to find the orientation meeting ended up being my first friend and then we kind of went to lunch that day with a couple other people and these are all of the same people that I go to game night with on Mondays.

So you know, this has been that first couple of activities that week were so critical in how my experience has been and I think that it was the most positive start to something like this that I could have expected genuinely like it was. It's been so helpful. Yeah.

**Helen:** Oh, wow, that's so good to hear that it was such a positive experience. We do try to make connections with you, make you lot make connections with each other, but it is great to have the feedback that you already feel connected in a community and your friends are still the people that are with you today. Wonderful. That that's really heartening. We'll talk about some highlights. What have been your highlights so far either academically? or maybe more socially, you say game night you go to, sort of tell us a little bit about some of the highlights that you've had. Obviously it's not going to be the weather that we've had in January and February so far.

**Lilli:** There were some weeks where it was not as rainy, which I was not expecting. This week has been more of what I've been expecting. Truly, I think.

**Helen:** Yeah, not as rainy.

**Lilli:** Some of the highlights, there's just so many. I'm trying to think. I think the first study abroad trip to Bath was definitely a highlight for me. Mostly because that was a very historical site I got to spend some time with those new friends that I made and it ended up being such a successful trip. In all of the senses. And then Oh my. I think I've liked the way that the classes are set up and the way my schedule has been mostly just because it has given me a lot of time to do my work during the day and work on those assessments and then go to those like little blocks of time of classes and then go have time in the evening to still be social while not inflicting any harm to my academics. Umm, so getting to go.

**Helen:** Excellent. What have you found to do? What have you been doing? What have been getting up to in the evenings?

**Lilli:** There's so many options Monday nights, we normally will go to the student union and hang out in Mojoes, they have board games there. So for those of us, we didn't, none of us brought board games. So we've been able to play cards and all kinds of things like that. And then Sunday nights we use the JCR lounge space in my hall to either do a movie night or maybe more games, just kind of hanging out, relaxing together.

During the day, we'll spend lots of time in the library group studying, maybe helping each other, talk through their assignments, that kind of thing. But. Yes. I get lunch every week. That's my little treat.

**Helen:** Have you got a favourite?

**Lilli:** It's definitely the Indian. I don't know what it's called, but the Indian stall I always get the lamb kofta like every week or the Namaste.

**Helen:** Let's just explain to people who might be listening in the autumn semester and the spring semester. We have an international food market that comes on to campus and there's about what 10 or 15 stores of street food and you can try different ones. And yeah, as you say, it smells delicious and it's extremely popular with all our students. So yeah, you're enjoying the koftas.

**Lilli:** It's been great and today I got the Namaste Asian cuisine and ate inside because it was kind of rainy, but rain or shine, they're out there so.

**Helen:** Yeah. And do you use the fruit and veg market as well? Do you ever go in there?

**Lilli:** Yeah, I've been a couple of times. I haven't bought anything yet, but I think just like the overwhelming variety of choices. Yeah. Is really great for a lot of my friends who are cooking for themselves here. One of my friends wants to make soup this week, so she's going over there today to look for some vegetables, so I'm pretty excited to try that. I'll try her soup, but it's so nice to have that option available as well as the like bread and pastry market in there as well. Everybody raves about the bread choices. So definitely, definitely a fan favourite among the study abroad students I've talked to.

**Helen:** Brilliant. And I have to say, among the study abroad staff as well, we definitely enjoy them too. OK, let's be serious now. It's not all Disney, is it? There must be times that you feel challenged. Overwhelmed. Obviously. If you can just maybe elaborate on something and then how you've overcome that, that would be great. Thank you.

**Lilli:** Yeah, this week is actually a great example of it. So as a study abroad, student studying through the USAC programme, I'm not here for the summer exam term, so I've spent the last couple weeks communicating back and forth with professors about how my exams will look instead, how those assessments will range. And luckily I have no tests that I'll take all of my assignments are papers or presentations that have been turned into a paper. And it's been relatively smooth up until the point. But one of my courses, the final assessment has been made due for me the same week another large paper for that class is due and another large assignment for another class. So I've just been feeling a little overwhelmed by the massive work that I have due in about 3 weeks. So I was feeling really stressed out about that. But I emailed the professor to see if I could get an extension, and he led me to RISIS where I could fill out the circumstances form trying to get a sort of extension for that, and when I was struggling with that, I'm kind of feeling like all hope was lost. We got in touch with the Student Support Centre and I went there yesterday and Edith Morley around like 11. Talked to some really great staff members who were able to kind of get that process of figuring out why I wasn't able to submit the thing I was supposed to submit and how to put that on priority for them so I could. It was just.... It took a huge weight off of my shoulders to have that kind of support, so I kind of wish I had gone to that right away to, you know, facilitate that. But I was kind of at the point where I was like, OK, if student support Centre can't help me, I'll

go to the study abroad faculty. And but I've just been feeling a lot better about that in the last couple days or so. So having the support of the staff has really helped me overcome that anxiety about turning in these assessments before I leave.

**Helen:** Yeah, sounds like you've done exactly the right thing. There's plenty of support in place, but you do need to reach out, talk to the right people and I'm sure as you found, that people will try their very best to support you. That's fantastic. So would you have like 1 main memory? Say you're back in the summer and you're going to look back? Obviously, we've only got these weeks that we've had so far. Is there one main memory that you would think? Yeah, that is a wonderful memory that I will cherish for the rest of my days.

**Lilli:** That's such a hard question. There's so many.

**Helen:** Right. OK, well, maybe your top three, I don't know.

**Lilli:** Oh, I think I can at least pick one that will definitely be up there for sure, and that is probably ...we went to the Wednesday Student union a couple weeks ago and I have never been to an event like that before and I was kind of nervous, but I had some other friends who also wanted to go. So the group of us got our tickets. We went early and we just spent a couple hours hanging out dancing. And it just was so great to just be in a space with other international students who are coming to do the same thing and knowing that we all came from super different backgrounds all coming to the same place at the same time and having this chance meeting and ending up, you know, hanging out late on a Wednesday just dancing and having a good time taking pictures together. And just knowing that, these are people that I'm going to talk to, hopefully for the rest of my life. I mean, there's we've already talked about how we're going to get to Australia from America and vice versa. So you know, just having that knowledge that these are people that do want to keep in touch after we go our separate ways after Reading and having Reading be the place has facilitated this for us is just that alone is such a big takeaway for me, I think.

**Helen:** Oh my gosh. Well, that's absolutely perfect. And I have to confess, you've just given me goosebumps up and down my back talking about that because that is everything that we hope for and more from a study abroad experience. OK, so this is going to sound a bit of a daft question. Would you do it again? Would you recommend it to others?

**Lilli:** Gosh, yeah, absolutely. I can't recommend an experience enough and Reading itself being a place to come if you're interested in why I don't know history or. They have even theatre here, you know. Having a place where there are museums and on campus, and there are restaurants and events for people to go to when it's this nice balance between learning and studying and also having social moments and having fun with other people. This is just, like such a great place to have. You know your first

international experience. Or maybe your 7th international experience. Who knows? Like, this is just a great place for people from all over to come together and really just, I don't know, grow and have memories for later in life. I would do this eight more times if I could, I think.

**Helen:** Fantastic. Oh, so brilliant to hear. Right. One last question. Would you have any hints or tips for anybody to make it easier for when they arrive? I mean Cason. He mentioned bringing an umbrella. Would you have anything similar or? Other Tips.

**Lilli:** Definitely bring an umbrella that one for sure. I think the biggest is learn about the buses, because I flew into Heathrow. Didn't really sleep on the flight. Got a little bit of sleep. I took the express train. I got to Reading and then I was like, OK, how do I get to the university from the train station? And instead of asking around or maybe looking up beforehand the bus system or anything, I walked with all of my luggage to my hall.

**Helen:** Oh.

**Lilli:** And I was so tired when I got here. I slept for like 3 hours.

**Helen:** Really quite far for anybody listening, that really is quite far.

**Lilli:** Oh, definitely it. It was. It did take a while, but now, having used the Reading bus system more times than I can count in a couple of weeks I've been here. Just make sure you know how that works beforehand, because it just it would have saved me a lot of trouble, I think. And it's nice and efficient and cheap. And you don't have to carry 50 pounds of stuff around with you. So check out the transportation before you go. It's great.

**Helen:** Well, there you go. That is an absolute top tip. The number 21 bus is the one you need if you're looking up on Reading buses. Right. Thank you so much. Lilli. I've really enjoyed hearing all about your experiences. It's absolutely wonderful. So if anybody else is interested in coming to reading, you can e-mail us [studyabroad@reading.ac.uk](mailto:studyabroad@reading.ac.uk). We've got our website. Yeah. So we hope to meet you all soon. And thanks again, Lilli.