

Pre-reading

Would you like to study abroad? Why, or why not?

An Autumn in Bath

As a student at Oslo Handelsgymnasium, like an increasing number of Norwegian upper secondary schools, you may take part of your education in England. You live in private homes and attend local schools where lessons are taught in English, by English teachers and together with English students. After an introduction course at the beginning of term in vg2, students at OHG travel to Bath to join their designated family and attend Hayesfield Girls' School for a period of three months. The programme is considered to be demanding insofar that it presupposes adjusting well to new circumstances and showing independence and maturity. In return, the students get to practise their English skills and learn about the English school system, the society in general and its culture. Below follows an interview with three of this year's participants, Oskar Veggeland, Max Meinich and Oscar Lilleby.



From left to right: Oskar Veggeland, Max Meinich and Oscar Lilleby

1. What was your first impressions when arriving in Bath?

Max: I found the people in Bath to be very nice and polite. The fact that people always say “Yes, please” and “No, thank you” was a new experience for me. My host family was equally welcoming, and instantly made me feel like a part of the family.

Oskar: The town is quite different from Oslo. Almost all buildings are made of the same type of stone, limestone. This makes Bath very characteristic. Another difference to Oslo is the

landscape. Bath is located in a valley, surrounded by steep hills.

Oscar: The food is what I expected from typical English cuisine. Eggs, bacon and baked beans are served frequently. I have also noticed that the portions are rather big, which is good, because I like to eat. There are also many affordable restaurants here, making it possible even for us as student to go out and eat.

2. What struck you the first time you arrived at school? Any similarities or differences compared with OHG?

Oskar: Well, the school we attend is a single sex school, a girls' school, although the sixth form is mixed. It felt strange walking around a school with almost exclusively girls, especially when many of them are as young as 10 years old. The younger girls also have to wear school uniforms. This took some time getting used to, but now I barely notice them.

Oscar: I agree with you Oskar. Another aspect, which is different from Norwegian schools, I believe, is the respect shown to teachers. You cannot address them by their first name, but you have to say either Sir, Miss or their surname, for instance Mr. Smith or Ms. Saunders.

Max: You could say that the student teacher relationship is less personal. Another difference, which I find rather pleasing, is the serving of warm lunch every day. This arrangement makes it easier to stay focused throughout a long school day.

3. Describe a typical school day with lesson plans, extra-curricular activities etc.

Max: Every school day starts with registration in tutor groups mainly consisting of English students together with some Norwegians. A very typical lesson is the supervised study, which is a lesson in which we are working with a subject of our choice, with a teacher present to help and maintain order in the classroom.

Oskar: On the first day, we were asked to fill in a form with the subjects we had chosen as our specialty back in Norway. Then we had to find the English subjects that correlated best with our Norwegian ones. It was a complicated task. The common core subjects, like Norwegian and history, are more difficult to keep up with, though, as there is only one Norwegian teacher here at a time. Moreover, we tend to prioritize working with subjects like economy and science, as we can join classes and there are teachers available to help and guide us.

During a regular school day, we usually have one or two free periods, which I usually spend at the fitness suite. Every Friday, in the last period, we have a student-teacher football match, and there is no doubt that the Norwegians are best!

Oscar: The school provides lessons in two different buildings that are a 5-minute walk apart. As a result, we walk on average one hour between these locations each day. Bath has a lot to offer when it comes to activities outside of school. In our spare-time, we frequently play golf and tennis, which is great fun.

4. To what extent is your English skills from Norwegian school sufficient? In school lessons, and for after-school life.

Max: I consider my English skills to be average for a Norwegian my age. I find that on occasion, my lack in skills causes sudden stops in the middle of sentences, as I have to think about what I am going to say. However, I now usually think in English when speaking, and

English people are very good at understanding what you are saying even though it is not perfect.

Oscar: I agree, and I generally think that the English taught in Norway prepares us well for England. Moreover, I believe you are equally well understood when speaking English with a Norwegian accent. Actually, I have experienced that Englishmen are surprised and impressed by our English skills. I remember Max used the word *surpassed* when talking once. The Englishman then commented, “That’s a difficult word, which I’d not expect you to use or know of”.

Oskar: I have experienced some problems following English classes, especially in Maths. In our English lessons in Norway we never learned the vocabulary necessary to fully understand the lectures in the science subjects. Some examples are *domain* (verdimengde), *gradient* (stigningstall), *quadratics* (2.gradsfunksjoner) and *range* (definisjonsmengde).

5. What has surprised you the most about English culture and society?

Oscar: What has surprised me the most about English culture and society is people’s politeness and their open-mindedness. Everyone you meet tend to be polite, even strangers. They are also helpful when you, for instance, ask for directions. Even though some consider the politeness to be superficial, it is something we, or at least I, had to adjust to.

Oskar: I have noticed that the social protocol when meeting new people is quite different from the Norwegian one. In Norway, we usually shake hands and present our names. In England, however, I find that it is not usual to shake hands, but rather to sustain a friendly conversation, or small talk. Typically, the talk revolves around the local rugby team and, lately, the Rugby World Cup.

Max: I have found that the English are very keen on seeming liberal. Being seen as conservative, on the other hand, is almost taboo. Therefore, people will go to great lengths to pretend to be more liberal, modern and open-minded than what they really are.

6. Are English teenagers’ life much different to Norwegians’, do you think? Explain.

Oscar: I do not think there is a huge difference. The English youngsters I have become acquainted with like to do the same things as me. They even listen to the same music. The only major difference is the fact that rugby is very popular here.

Max: I very much agree with Oscar; the English youngsters seem similar to the Norwegian. We have the same interests. A small difference might be that we, the Norwegians, are a bit more social and active outside school. This may, however, be an illusion caused by the fact that we do not see the English students a lot outside of school.

Oskar: I have noticed that, at least at Haysfield, the different social groups are significantly more separated socially than at OHG. It seems that the students here are divided into different groups based on interests and preferences in clothes and looks. OHG’s students are more similar to each other. Consequently, they are more able to socialize with people outside their closest circle of friends.

7. Do you think you have learned anything from this stay?

Max: By now, I think I have learned more English. Particularly, my oral English have improved. I have also learned a thing or two about the culture, and about the typical Englishman.

Experiencing the culture and the country, in general, is what I find most interesting.

Oskar: Firstly, I have definitely become more fluent in speaking English. My host-mother used to be an English teacher so she constantly corrects mistakes that I have never thought about before. Secondly, I have learned a lot of English phrases and words that are different from my somewhat American vocabulary. *Garbage, gas station* and *cab* have been substituted with *rubbish, petrol station* and *taxi*.

Oscar: I have learned to be more disciplined and organized with my schoolwork. I have also learned more English, especially slang and words you would not learn in lessons back in Norway. *In it* means *me too*, *safe* is some sort of greeting like *hey, what's up*, *peckish* means *hungry*, *dodgy* means *shady*, and *tea* is another word for *dinner*.

8. Would you recommend such a programme for other students?

Oscar: Yes, definitely. The feeling of being independent is great, and living in England is amazing. I think the experiences and memories will be cherished in the future.

Max: I would definitely recommend this kind of programme. However, it is very important that a student doing it is able to study the Norwegian curriculum, individually and independently, alongside the English lectures.

Oskar: Without a doubt, yes! I think it is a once-in-a-lifetime experience, and it makes us more independent. What we have learned here will definitely come in handy later in life. In addition, we have a lot of fun here. It will be a pleasure to look back on all our good memories.



Activities

1. What is your impression of OHG's programme in Bath?
2. Schools nationwide promote international cooperation. Why, do you think?
3. Are there similar programmes available at your school or at another school in your district?
4. Find out whether it is possible for you to join such a programme. What would you need to do in order to make it happen?