

1. What was your first day in your host country like? What about your first day at the internship site? Did your pre-departure expectations match the reality?

My first day in my host country was very hectic. My flight plan had been entirely disrupted by cancellations and rebooking mistakes by the flight company. I arrived later than planned which changed my further travel plans. I made sure to have copies of the train and bus schedules available without Wi-Fi so I could plan accordingly with the changed travel plans. Upon finally arriving in Dublin, I was missing luggage but had to proceed with my travel plans. I took a bus from the Airport to the Heuston train station where I caught my first train to Mallow. I had a connecting second train in Mallow to Killarney. Due to the late flights, I missed the last bus to Waterville and had to stay in Killarney overnight, but having expected this might happen I had made overnight plans already. While stressful and not at all how I planned my first day in Ireland to go I stayed on top of the bus and train schedules so I knew where I might get stuck and what my options were. I did a lot of research into my options before leaving for Ireland at all, not anticipating such a hectic day, but to understand my options for how to get from Dublin to Waterville.

After staying overnight in Killarney, I caught the first bus to Waterville in the morning and arrived at about 12 o'clock at my host company's office. While I could tell they were a little busy, everyone was very friendly and welcoming. Shortly after arrival, they drove me up to the intern accommodations and showed me around. I was then left to set up my room, unpack, and unwind from the crazy day before. At the end of the day, the rest of the interns and the other newly-arriving intern returned home and we had a really nice meal together. Everyone was super open to discussing what the work was like and what you could find around the village.

The next day I started work. I ate breakfast but didn't pack a lunch, planning to get something at the shop next to the office that day to ease into my routines. To get to work, everyone at the house had to bike 6 km, so one of the interns left early with me to take it slow and show me the way. It isn't an easy bike ride to do, with lots of hills made more difficult if it is windy. I was definitely a bit exhausted once arriving. To ease into the rhythm of the company, they started with an introduction to the office space, easy tasks, and accompanying another intern on an outing for her project. That was followed the next day by a "typical activities" day running what they call a Sea Shore Safari with groups of kids on a rocky intertidal beach. The first two days were really nice for easing me into the kind of work I would be doing, I was able to observe and learn how to do things I would be doing quite often by myself later on.

Having described these first few days my pre-departure expectations matched for some things and didn't for others. I expected a complicated and many-legged journey with multiple trains, buses, and connections. I did not expect the delays, disruptions, and missing luggage that came with the journey. But I had done a lot of research on the Ireland portion of the journey from Dublin to Waterville, so I wasn't completely confused or overwhelmed. I hadn't expected the company's office to be so small, only a single room. And I hadn't expected the small size of the company or such a large percentage of people working there to be interns. I didn't realize that the person I had done all my communication with was the only permanent employee of the company. As far as the accommodations, they were both better and worse than I expected. I

hadn't expected as many spiders as there were, but the house also wasn't at all cold when the heat was on, and the showers were very hot. Finally, I hadn't expected how beautiful the Waterville area and honestly all of Ireland would be, but it really was incredible.

2. How did your impressions of the host culture and internship site change over time? What are some of the biggest differences you encountered?

It had been difficult to find specific differences to expect in U.S. culture vs Irish culture, but I had been constantly told that Irish people are incredibly nice. This is the expectation I went into Ireland with. Upon first arriving, I didn't really notice a major difference in the people I encountered. Over time I found the people to be just as variable as they are in the U.S. Some were very friendly and obliging, and others could care less. It was specific people that I saw on occasion multiple times that really stood out to me as really friendly when they didn't need to be. There was a couple that I would see when whale watching that always offered us anything we needed. The people I regularly passed on my bike always had a cheerful good morning ready. Our neighbor at our accommodations would periodically come over just to have a chat. My impression changed from the idea that people gave me that everyone was really friendly to more the people you encounter often are very pleased to know you at all.

My impressions of my internship site changed many times over the course of my 90 days there. When I first started things seemed a little hectic and busy, but they knew what they had to do. After talking to some of the other interns though, they couldn't remember the last time they had had a day off, or a really weekend whether on the actual weekend or not. This left me concerned as the biking, projects, and activities were already leaving me exhausted. It was not easy for me to adjust to the way the company was running. After a few weeks, I was getting really fed up with the projects I was working on. I would put in hours of work based on what they asked for, only for it to be torn apart for not being their exact vision. It was draining and there was little praise going around for any work that was done. It was hard to be doing so much work and never being acknowledged in any way for it. After about a month and a half though there seemed to be a change spurred by two interns' internships being over causing a shift in responsibilities and an emergency with a different intern. There started to be way more recognition, way more freedom, and just a better vibe at the company in general. By the end of my internship, I was truly happy, felt I had done some great work that was really appreciated and was sad to be leaving my projects and the people. While early on my impressions of the internship site would have left me never suggesting it to anyone else, after I was able to adjust and the company adjusted a bit too I definitely changed my mind. My impression now is that they are all incredible and dedicated people just as excited about marine biology as myself.

As far as the biggest difference I encountered between my host culture and office culture, there was a general increase in familiarity. Socially once you met someone once or twice even just in passing it would be like you had had many long conversations and years with them. Within the U.S. it usually takes a lot longer to always receive such an open welcome from people. I could spend whole terms with people in a small class and still not really know anything about them. In the company, there was a very close relationship with everyone who worked there. The line between work and social blurred greatly since. Most of our entire social lives in Ireland and Waterville depended on the people we worked with. I was told by others from

England that that blur of work and social isn't normal, but is rather a symptom of the remote location, the small size of the company, and so many short-term employees or interns. While sometimes the blur could be challenging I also wasn't lonely and really enjoyed all the people I was working with.

3. Considering the entire experience, what were the most important benefits of your internship - personally and professionally?

Personally, the most important benefits of my internship were the people. I was connected with a number of people both my age—just starting out in marine biology—and older—experts and champions already in marine biology. I had taken classes with fellow marine biology students, but I had never spent so much time engaging in all aspects of life. I found friends that I could walk along the beach or go snorkeling with and be absolutely ecstatic together for the things we could find and see. I never before had a friend that obsessively collected shells and remains found on the beach like I did and would spend hours figuring out what animal those remains were from. When snorkeling they would get excited by things that others might find uninteresting. It was also just amazing to be connected to people who are pursuing the same field as myself, with similar interests. We were all led to the same internship, and therefore have similar marine biology interests and a love for watersports. The people I met during this internship I think will be very influential in my future both as friends and from what we experienced in Ireland together.

The other major personal benefit was learning about myself. I discovered that I value quiet time and don't have unlimited social energy. I also learned how much I value my independence. Unfortunately, because the local bus systems have very few spots and sporadic running times, it was almost impossible to travel anywhere without getting a ride from two people at the company. It did become difficult to constantly rely on someone else to go to the store, or do anything outside of Waterville for me. So, I definitely benefited from learning about myself and what I need to be happy long term.

Professionally, the most important benefit was a huge range of professional experience. I took part in so many different activities and projects with varied needs and focuses. I co-designed and ran a campaign on social media for a month-long event. This included social media engagement and finding company partnerships, as well as event coordination. I got a lot of experience in marine biology education for young children with daily tourist activities and weeklong summer sea camps. I participated in water activities for tourists alongside the company instructors. I assisted in a dolphin rescue of a mother and calf. And my personal favorite, I co-designed and completed marine life surveys. Those surveys observed seabirds, whales and dolphins, intertidal creatures, and seals. The data collected from those surveys became part of the company's datasets and was uploaded to the Irish National Biodiversity Data Centre. While originally looking for internships, those specific experiences may not be what I had in mind, but I came to recognize how the diversity and types of experience would be incredibly beneficial for me going forward with my career.

4. Describe your daily routine for workdays and weekends.

Workdays: I would generally wake up at about 7:30 am so I had time to eat breakfast, pack a lunch and do everything I needed to be ready to leave for work. I would start my bike ride to work at 8:35 am. Rain or shine the bike ride was 6 km and took about 21 minutes. It was not an easy bike ride, with multiple hills and one very large hill in both directions. If there was wind the ride could take longer and would be significantly more difficult if it was against you. Once arriving at the office, I would change and get ready for the day ahead. Wearing a different biking shirt became essential to have the company shirts last more than a few days.

A work day could vary greatly depending on what was going on that day or week and the tides. If I had a tourist SeaShore Safari session to run, depending on the tide, it could be at any time throughout the day and took 2 hours. Around those sessions, I would have marine life surveys that could take anywhere from 5 to 1 ½ hours. The whale watching surveys would take all morning and part of the afternoon taking 5 hours. The seabird surveys would take 2 hours, while the seashore and seal surveys would take about 1 ½ hours. When I wasn't on a session or doing a survey, I would do office work, data input, social media, poster design, research, project assembly, or advertising. Lunch wasn't scheduled but would occur at any point when I was hungry or had time throughout the day. The end of the work day would be marked by the bike ride home. As I was living with 3-4 other people in a small house, we would trade off cooking and cleaning duties. Generally, between 7:30-8:30 pm, we would eat as a household. These dinners could last quite a while as we got lost in chat and discussion about everything from movies to cultures. After dinner, the day would truly be over.

Within that general workday structure, there could be great differences. During sea camp weeks the entire day was devoted to running sea camp or prepping for the next day/cleaning up from that day. During the really warm weeks, most of the time was spent doing activities with the increased number of tourists and people wanting to do water activities. Sometimes tourist bookings would come in day of and plans would change to fit those. On other days, you could have no bookings and plan to be in the office all day but then end up spending half of it trying to save dolphins. This flexibility worked well though allowing freedom to work on things as you could and get breaks from one project or another.

Weekends: Most weekends I would stay in and get a lot of sleep. The weekdays with the cycling and other physical activities were very draining and a day or two of rest was always welcome. When things did come up we might go to the beach, take a day trip to the city, do a boat tour to see puffins, or have a barbecue. I spent a lot of weekends reading, watching movies, baking, or cooking big breakfasts or lunches. I physically needed rest after biking so much during the week that weekends tended to be pretty chill. On the hand, weekends were a great time to go see things, so we definitely tried to plan some activities and travel outside of the village even if just one village over.

5. Who was your site supervisor/mentor (first name and title) and what sort of guidance and direction did you receive from them? What was the communication style like?

My site supervisor/mentor was Natasha who is the Operations Manager for Sea Synergy. She is one of only two full-time employees for Sea Synergy and runs all the directions and day-to-day of the company. Tash was the one who interviewed me and all the other interns and organized our living situation and bikes and everything else. On a daily basis, she was

handing out things to do and duties. A lot of the guidance and direction also came through as learn as you go. I learned a lot of new skills just by needing them to complete the tasks I had been assigned. Almost everything I did came from her directions. She was also our primary contact for all things. She would take us on our shopping trips every two weeks, would have dinners with us sometimes, and would encourage us to do lots of fun activities outside of work. During a medical issue with one of the interns, she became like a second mom always checking in and making sure they could get everywhere and had everything they needed. Tash having been in Waterville and the general area much longer than any of the rest of us, would direct us on where to go for food, where to get things, and where to go just for fun. She acted as everything from interns' manager to boss and friend.

Communication in general for the entire company was generally very casual. Quick conversations here and there, messages on the group chat, or emails when attachments were needed. There would be at least one longer meeting a week to go over the current plan for the next week and a few weeks beyond based on goals for small projects, and what needed to be completed for large events and projects. While communication was sometimes difficult at first, learning the ways of the company and how to be successful in it definitely made things easier over time.

6. What do you wish you had known before you arrived? Think about culture, logistics, host site, language, etc.

I really wish I had known how rural and remote the host site was. Waterville and the surrounding areas are incredible, but without a car, it was nearly impossible to travel outside of the area and see any other parts of the country. The bus systems and logistics and leaving for a weekend would take significant planning. Because our accommodations were 20 minutes outside of Waterville by bike, to get to a bus stop one would have to ride into Waterville and leave the bike at the office. The bus systems were also only running a few times a day and with differing connections to make it back to Waterville or to make it out of Waterville. By the end of my time, I felt like I had seen very little of Ireland and all it had to offer despite being here for 3 months. The parts I did see I saw well and many times were really incredible. I wish I had known how I would only see Kerry county and not much else while living in the country.

As far as the language, a lot of people had told me I would struggle to understand the accent. This stressed me out as I got further into the rural countryside. However, upon arrival I found no issues understanding people. I only had issues understanding people when they had a really thick accent and there were either lots of other sounds interfering or the person was mumbling. The reason I wish people had not suggested so much I wouldn't be able to easily understand people is that it adds a layer of unnecessary stress for me. While this experience may not be the same for everyone, I certainly found your average person to have a perfectly understandable accent.

Logistically, I wish I would have known how little independence I would have had. I was certainly given all the details about the distance to places and such, but it is difficult to comprehend when you have never experienced it before. I knew I wouldn't have a car and that the closest grocery store was 20 minutes away by car. I knew I would have only a bike as a mode of transportation. I didn't realize how annoying the bus system would be. While this was

all host site stuff, I really did not anticipate how difficult the lack of freedom and independence would be. It was hard not being able to run to the store or go only a village over without help from someone. By the end of my time, I was really looking forward to the freedom I had at home within a city and with more convenient bus systems.

7. What tips do you have for future interns headed to your same internship site, the host city, or country? Consider discussing housing, transportation, clothing, budgeting, entertainment, culture, and social groups.

For housing and transportation, definitely do what I did and start biking before you arrive if possible. Getting used to biking will help with the transition to full-time biking. If you are not used to biking it will make for a very sore few weeks.

For clothing, definitely rain pants on top of a really good raincoat no matter what season you are visiting in. I got lucky and had a relatively dry summer, but I still bought rain pants while I was in Ireland. During the days when it is pouring rain during the bike ride in, or if you have to be out during the rain for some reason, it is either a rain jacket and pants or a complete change of clothes. It gets very cold and uncomfortable if you have to sit around in wet clothing. As far as other clothes for the rain, I had brought waterproof hiking boots but, on most days, even really rainy ones, I chose mesh sneakers. The sneakers just provided more comfort and breathability for the long active days. As far as other clothing, some form of shoe for the water, whether boots or water shoes was really beneficial. I wore knee-high boots multiple times a week rock pooling.

Entertainment, it may seem like a small village where little happens, but they certainly like to have events. I learned that Monday nights were the night for parties during the summer. Many pubs often had live music. There were also just events of every kind happening every week in Waterville and the surrounding towns. Even if a tractor parade isn't necessarily your normal go-to for entertainment, in the small town, it is important to take the excitement where it comes. The best entertainment I found though was just saying yes when my housemates and coworkers suggested things, whether kayaking, trivia nights, just going to the pub, or extra snorkeling trips. Certain activities really weren't of interest to me or I was too tired on a given day, but to get that social time and entertainment meant trying new things sometimes.

I found budgeting to go better than I had predicted. Rent was very reasonable with the house that our supervisor had found for us, even if the trade-off was a long bike ride. With shopping at Aldi rather than the small convenience store that was closer food was much cheaper than I had predicted. In fact, for many things, food was much cheaper than I thought it was going to be. This made staying within budget much easier. I was also able to splurge a little more on sweets, snacks, lunch from the shop, or dinners out sometimes. Being in the rural countryside, everything seemed much more affordable than I had predicted. The program in itself is certainly very affordable when compared to other programs I considered.