

Home is where...

To say the Covid years were tough is, of course, a gross understatement. But what if you're a new international student finding your feet in a foreign country? Olivia is a second year History (MA Hons) student, and this is her story.



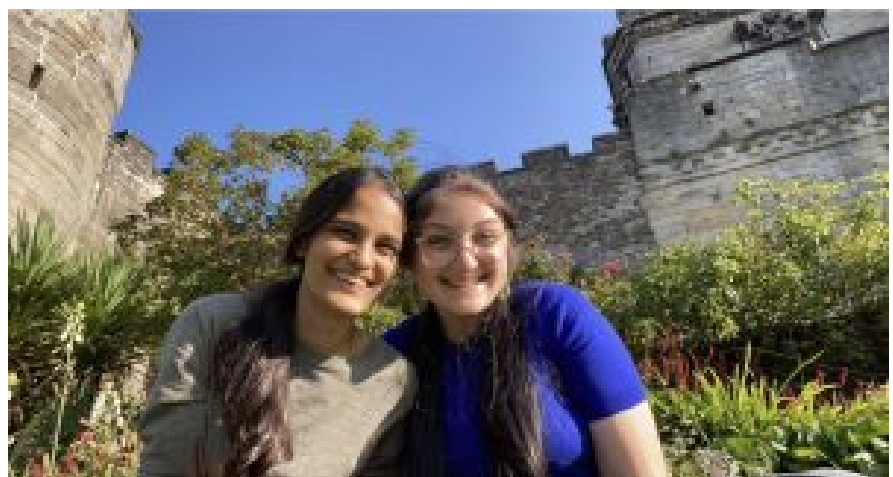
View of Edinburgh from Calton Hill at sunset.

I had never been to Scotland before August of 2020 when I moved here for the first time. I honestly don't think I was scared then, but looking back with a year and a half of separation, I don't know how I wasn't terrified. I was definitely anxious about concrete ideas like making new friends, adjusting to learning at a university level, and what if I didn't understand Scottish accents, but as for the physical act of hopping on an airplane and moving to a different country, I wasn't overly concerned about it. It wasn't really until my first week out of isolation that I realised I was in a totally new place living with totally new people, and I had no idea what I was doing. I still don't really have any idea what I'm doing.

I spent my first couple weeks in the city going to the same grocery stores, the same tutorials, the same coffee shop, the same and the same and the same. My world here – whilst bigger than I ever could have imagined in rural Texas – was

still incomprehensibly small compared to the Edinburgh I live in now. And for the most part, I didn't think about home. As the semester went on my flatmates and I started to get more comfortable with each other, and the same and the same and the same started to get less familiar. My flatmates and I would stay up late in the kitchen singing ABBA or trying to figure out ceilidh steps or talking about whatever and whatever else. We'd take day trips, go for long walks to nowhere, explore the wynds and closes of Old Town and get completely lost. And before I knew it, I had finished my first semester of university.

I went home for Christmas, discovered that it was infinitely harder to be the one who leaves than the one who stays, and when I came back, Edinburgh was a different city. The lockdown meant that even the same and the same and the same that I had experienced in the first semester was limited. My flatmates either went home or didn't come back, so I moved to the West End of the city and basically didn't leave my room for the rest of the semester. The concept of making a home here had splintered.



Olivia and her friend, Nikki.

But that semester ended too and I got to go home. I spent most of my summer recovering from living through a global catastrophe functionally alone, so when I came back to

Edinburgh this year I didn't know what to expect. I was scared that it was going to be as isolating as it was the previous semester, and I was scared that I would be starting over with friends again. But I didn't have anything to worry about and this past semester has been incredible! The same and the same and the same of my first semester is a distant memory. Edinburgh – which I thought I had a decent grasp on – has gotten so much bigger and I can't possibly imagine that I'll see the whole city before I graduate.

I think that the biggest hurdle to overcome, being both an international student and a pandemic student, is realising that the concept of 'home' takes time. Recently, I went on a trip to St Andrews with one of my very dear friends, and for the first time coming back into the city felt like coming home. After a year and a half, I've made a home and I didn't even know it. My home here is impermanent, but it is beautiful.