

## **Taking the Plunge: Life in a British Independent School**

It definitely requires a certain amount of bravery to take the plunge and set out for the strange island behind *La Manche*, which several rumours circulate around Europe about. My mum gave me several lectures in manners, dad bought me a new umbrella.

It seems like yesterday when I was in September finally looking out of the train's window and approaching Scotland. The first Scotsman I met was a phlegmatic taxi driver with an HMC sign around his neck. Since he possessed a broad knowledge of local pubs and football clubs, I quickly got my own picture of this country.

Right after my arrival to Loretto School I developed a slight suspicion of my ability to adapt. My theoretical knowledge of English grammar and prescribed vocabulary proved to be inapplicable to the Scottish dialect and various local expressions, some of which even missing from the Oxford Dictionary. Fortunately there were people ready to give me a hand, so I got gradually used to it. I got also used to the fact that all the school houses and organisations bore the names of former headmasters and that the school walls were densely covered with names of people nobody remembers any more. A perfect place to study history, though.

Having been encouraged to engage in some team sport, I enrolled with a great enthusiasm for rugby. Yet, as I quickly found out, this broadly popular sport did not quite fit my pacifist persuasion. After getting squashed in the bottom of a pile of bodies and getting my entire body bruised, I gave it up and converted to a much more peaceful squash. Being hit by the squash ball does not at least hurt that much.

Once when I was in an electro shop somebody asked me for an advice, because I was just wearing my school uniform and he considered me a shop assistant. The uniforms are just bizarre. Nevertheless, I am aware that the British have allegedly some very convincing arguments for why they make all students look like clerks, so I must not complain. What I find virtually fashionable are kilts, which we wear once a week for the chapel service. I had to do a little research in order to find out if I was expected to wear anything under it, but with satisfaction I discovered that the old customs were already dead.

Our school has a liking for the Scottish traditions in general. Even though my musical abilities are hopeless, they made me dance several Scottish dances and sing Scottish hymns. What's more, the school menu offers frequent opportunities to try food such as haggis. Initially I was disgusted by this delicacy and looked in fright at the locals feeding themselves with full plates of it, but when I was on my second holiday I suddenly felt that I missed haggis. One lesson I got is that you can take a fancy even to the weirdest things, as long as you have enough time and determination.

The year in Britain is a unique experience. If anyone asks me about a good place to study school subjects thoroughly, to meet people from all corners of the Commonwealth, to enjoy bacon and eggs every morning or to try various types of peculiar clothing on, I will certainly recommend him a British Independent School.

*Adam Lalak (Czech Republic)*  
*Loretto School*