

Tales of three expats

A recent report carried out Oxford University's Migration Observatory has shown that the number of immigrants living in Scotland has doubled in the last decade. This research has also demonstrated an important fact; Scotland is the most popular host countries within the UK with a 93% rise in its foreign-born population between 2001 and 2011 (followed by Wales with 82%, Northern Ireland with 72% and England with 61%).

For its part, Edinburgh, Scotland's capital, is home to the highest number of expatriates within the country.

Scotland may be uncomfortable with the current UK immigration system but the aim of this article is to tell the stories of three expats living in Edinburgh.

Concentrating on the visa requirements that we have had to meet I will relate the point of view of a 'visa national', Khandro Lhazin from Bhutan; a 'non-visa national', Phillipa Simmons from Australia; and an 'EEA citizen', myself, Silvia Montes from Spain.

I arrived in Edinburgh in 2008 with no more needed other than having my passport or my ID in order. My main goals were to improve my English and to enjoy the experience of living abroad. Coming from an EEA country allowed me to enter, live in and work in the UK as if I were already from here! However, this was not the same either for Khandro or Phillipa.

Khandro came to Edinburgh in September 2010 thanks to a study visa that was quite difficult to get: "I studied hotel management in Kolkata, India, before I came here. The college I studied in had an affiliation with Edinburgh Napier University so I had the choice of completing my final year here. I made the decision to come here because I thought it was a great opportunity to travel and experience another

country firsthand. I was also curious to know what was happening in the west.

“To acquire the study visa I needed to show only the course fee, living expenses and a University sponsor letter. It was made difficult though because we needed to evidence a huge amount of money and we had to go through a lot of paper work to finally get the visa.”

Phillipa came from Australia to Edinburgh with a working visa. “I decided to come here for the experience of living in the UK, in a city that it is totally beautiful and has everything you need without being as big as London. I wanted to be close to Europe to travel and I had to get the visa before I was 30. It cost approximately \$200, it was quite easy to apply and it was approved within 4 weeks. The most annoying part was having to travel to Sydney (6 hour drive) for the bio-metrics testing where they scan your finger prints. Then, when my 2 year visa ends, it is my understanding that I must leave the country. The only way I can stay longer is if I get married or if an employee sponsors me.”

We have all felt very welcome in this city. According to Phillipa this is because Edinburgh is such a multicultural city. She added:- “I love living in Edinburgh much more than I ever thought I would. I love the lifestyle, the convenience of being able to walk most places, the culture, the friendly people, the architecture and history of the city.

“I was disappointed with the job market, and the low (compared to Australia) minimum wage. I receive a far lower wage here, then back at home and work in a totally different industry, but it is a sacrifice I am willing to make for the experience.”

Khandro recognises that it was not easy at the beginning but she has managed to live fairly comfortably in Edinburgh:-“When I came here I felt very different and it took me a while to

adjust, but it slowly changed as I learned about Scottish culture. When I was studying I got part time work. Then, after completing my studies I applied for a post study working visa and I got a permit to live and work in the UK for another two years. I feel my life in Edinburgh has been very simple. I share a flat with another immigrant like me from Bhutan. We both work in a hotel and we earn enough to pay all our bills and save a little too. Our life is not too bad as we are financially independent.”

However, Khandro also criticised the wages and her own prospects in this city:- “I sometimes feel very discouraged as we get paid very low wages for the hard work we do; we earn the minimum wage. Edinburgh is a wonderful city but, as an immigrant, I feel that my chances of getting promoted or getting more responsibility at work are limited as I do not have a permit to live and work in the UK for a long period of time. I understand the situation but the rules are strict and it is expensive. The legal system must do things to protect the culture and the country, but innocent people are affected in the process.”

From my point of view as an EEA citizen, Edinburgh is a wonderful city to live in. I came here for a year and I have been living here more than five years. Edinburgh has me spellbound for several reasons: its stunning beauty (it was deservedly declared a World Heritage city), its culture and history (these two go hand in hand) and its friendly people. The fact that it is an easy city to walk around that offers everything you may need, including social benefits and services.

When I arrived in Edinburgh, my English was very poor and even then there were some job opportunities available for me. Moreover, I have completed different studies here taking advantage of the wide range of academic offers (mainly hosted in colleges and Universities) and the different funding options available to make them affordable.

I would say that I have gradually grown here, not just as a person but also professionally and academically, as my English has improved and new challenges have presented themselves.

For all these reasons, the experience that I sought when I came here has far exceeded all my expectations.

Submitted by [Silvia Montes](#)