

My Exchange Term at Brock University

St. Catharines, Ontario, Canada

Canada itself

I have to start my report with talking about the country itself. Why? Because it is simply beautiful. Before the term started I took the opportunity to travel for five weeks through Canada and that clearly was one of the most amazing experiences in my life. I drove through British Columbia and Alberta by car (which I can totally recommend), visited Quebec and Montreal (the most exciting cities in Canada in my opinion) and spent nights in Toronto. Never in my life have I seen nature like that and met people as friendly as the Canadians. Also during the term I seized the time off to travel to Algonquin National Park during Indian Summer and to Buffalo, NY to experience an NFL Game. I would recommend to seize every day off to experience something in this beautiful country, which has so much to offer. I think I would have never seen all of that if it was not for the exchange term and so I can say that just because of these five weeks and the other travels it was totally worth to take the step to go there in my opinion.

Studying at BrockU

Brock University is very different from the University of Innsbruck. Everybody goes there every day, you could say the students live there pretty much. This is no surprise thinking about the size of the campus and the numerous possibilities how you can spend your time there. From a modern gym to a swimming pool to restaurants of all sorts and a nice park to spend autumn days you get pretty much everything you can imagine. The classrooms are very well equipped and the building itself, at least the Goodman School of Business, is newly renovated. I really liked to study at Brock and experience this "Campus Life" for once, even though I did not live on the campus as many other exchange students did. In terms of workload I would say it is a lot to do. There are assignments to hand in every week and exams during and at the end of the term. The content which is covered is in my opinion easier to comprehend than at home but still a big quantity to work through. All in all I think I was able to improve my speaking skills and took some courses I would have never taken at home, therefore I can say that my time at BrockU was also very important in an academic manner for me.

Living in St. Catharines

Overview

I have already talked about Canada but St. Catharines itself is also worth describing because there are some differences. If you have already visited Toronto prior to your

term you will be a little bit shocked about St. Catharines at first. It is a really small town and in a cultural way it has not that much to offer I have to say unfortunately. You can still go out at night and eat very nice food there but the nightlife itself would be best described as mediocre. The clubs are designed for a very young audience, also in terms of music, and therefore I have to say I did not enjoy to go out in St. Catharines that much. If you are into sports, there are a lot of different opportunities to either take part in or watch games of the domestic teams, which is very nice and always worth experiencing. Another problem many exchange students face is that it takes a lot of time to commute in St. Catharines, because the area is geographically very spread out. The domestic students all have cars and you are dependent on the bus system which can be very annoying and time consuming.

All in all, I would say it is "alright" there, also because the University is very nice and you are really in proximity of a lot of nice places (Niagara-on-the-lake, Niagara Falls, Toronto, Algonquin National Park, etc.). I just advise you that you should not expect too much of this town or you may be disappointed eventually.

Accommodation

First I have to explain the situation: You can live on the campus of BrockU, which is for sure the most convenient way to have safe accommodation and food while your time in St. Catharines. However, it is very expensive and the food is not worth the money you have to pay each month. Therefore I decided to live off-campus and search for an apartment by myself. I started searching in May/June (which is MUCH too early) and just got one rejection after the other. Every landlord is searching for tenants which stay for 8 months at least, which was not possible for me. Eventually this process spread until August (when I was already travelling through Canada) and so I just accepted an offer which was seemingly "okay" to get rid of the problem. That was a really bad idea as I experienced later on.

I want to give you some advice:

- 1) look at the apartment before you sign a contract – it will be your home for a relatively long time! (that sounds obvious, but a lot of students do not have the possibility to look at anything before signing)
- 2) they will charge you more because it is only for 4 months, so maybe on-campus accommodation is not that expensive in comparison anymore

I do not want to go into too much detail about my apartment, but it was not worth the money I had to pay for it at all. The area it was located in was really not nice and the apartment itself was a mess in terms of hygiene. I stuck through it because I had no other possibility but I have to say that these circumstances really overshadowed my overall experience. It is just unnecessary stress next to university you can avoid by

being more cautious than I was. Despite that my flat mates were really nice and we had a good time at the apartment just ignoring the above.

Conclusion

During my time in Canada I experienced a lot, good and bad things, and I think that is what an exchange term should be all about. I met some of the nicest people, saw the most amazing nature and got an idea of what "campus-life" in the US/Canada really is. I have to say that I would not change my experience for anything because it also showed me how convenient studying at home really is and how you can handle difficulties in another country on your own. If you have the opportunity to do an exchange term I can clearly recommend you to take the step but be cautious with choosing your accommodation, it will be your home for 4-5 months after all. If you have any questions do not hesitate to contact me!

Student: Philipp Juen (Strategic Management, Master's Program, UIBK)

Program: MBA (Marketing) at Brock University (Ontario, Canada)

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Email: philipp.juen@student.uibk.ac.at

