Auslandssemester Erfahrungsbericht

Vorbereitungen für mein Auslandssemester

Die Vorbereitung für Kanada hat ein bisschen früher angefangen als für Erasmus-Länder, weil die Deadlines früher im Jahr sind. Also: am besten rechtzeitig kümmern, damit man nichts verpasst. Ich habe mich damals persönlich beim Canadian Studies Centre vorgestellt (heute kümmert sich das International Outgoing Office darum) und habe meine wichtigsten Fragen persönlich gestellt. Das hat vielleicht ein paar Pluspunkte gebracht, weil man Initiative gezeigt hat.

Für mich war vor allem wichtig, dass die Kurse, die ich im Ausland belege, auch angerechnet werden. Ich würde euch empfehlen, so früh wie möglich bei eurer/m Studiendekan:in nachzufragen. Ich studiere Psychologie im Master, und obwohl wir offiziell nur Bachelor-Kurse nehmen durften, hat es funktioniert – also einfach probieren! Wichtig: Exchange Students durften zu meiner Zeit als Letztes ihre Kurse in Kanada wählen. Die Kurse, die ich eigentlich nehmen wollte, waren schon alle voll, deswegen war es doch ein bisschen tricky mit der Anrechnung – am Ende hat aber alles geklappt. Mein Tipp: Lasst Wahlkurse frei, die bringen in Psychologie die meisten ECTS. Mindestens 16 ECTS müssen am Ende nämlich angerechnet werden.

Ein Motivationsschreiben musste ich auch verfassen, aber wenn ihr euch ein bisschen Mühe gibt und vielleicht ein Deckblatt dazu, sollte das kein Problem sein. Zudem habe ich bei meiner Bachelor Uni ein Recommendation Letter angefragt. Damals gab es nur einen Platz für die gesamte Uni und ich dachte wirklich, dass ich den Platz nicht kriegen werde, aber am Ende bewerben sich doch weniger Leute, als man denkt! Also einfach probieren!

Ich wollte nicht in Kanada arbeiten und bin nur für 4 Monate geblieben, deswegen brauchte ich kein Visum. Ein einfaches ETA hat gereicht, das geht super easy auf der kanadischen Regierungswebsite (innerhalb von 5 Minuten). Trotzdem vorher nochmal überprüfen, ob ihr ein Visum braucht.

Ich bin im Wintersemester gegangen, was perfekt zu den Uni-Zeiten in Österreich gepasst hat. Im September ging die Uni los, und im Dezember waren die Klausuren. Einen Englisch-Test musste ich keinen machen, da ich meinen Bachelor auf Englisch gemacht habe, aber da würde ich sicherheitshalber nochmal nachfragen.

Wohnen

Ich habe mich direkt entschieden, auf dem Campus zu wohnen – und es war super! Besonders empfehlen kann ich das Nipisy House. Bis April muss man sich fürs Housing anmelden.

Das Nipisy House ist eines der modernsten Häuser: Man wohnt zu viert oder sechst, hat sein eigenes kleines Zimmer, teilt sich die Küche mit zwei Öfen/Herdplatten und das Bad zu zweit. Ich wollte zuerst ins International House, wurde aber abgelehnt – und im Nachhinein bin ich sehr froh darum! Dort wäre es nicht so sozial gewesen, weil man ein eigenes Zimmer inklusive Bad hat und nur die Küche mit dem gesamten Stockwerk teilt. Also kommt nicht so ein WG-Feeling auf. Viele, die ich vom International House oder der HUB-Mall kannte, hätten im Nachhinein lieber in Nipisy gewohnt.

Zudem bietet die Uni ein System, bei dem man einen kleinen Text über sich schreibt und Fragebögen ausfüllt, um zu schauen, mit wem man gut zusammen wohnen könnte. Man kann auch gezielt Leute auswählen und anschreiben. So habe ich mir eine tolle WG mit fünf anderen Mädels zusammengestellt und wir hatten eine tolle Zeit zusammen!

Leben in Edmonton

Edmonton selbst hat nicht super viel zu bieten, aber langweilig wurde uns trotzdem nie! Jeden Donnerstag gab es kostenlose Line-Dance-Lessons in Cook County, wo wir regelmäßig hingegangen sind – das hat super viel Spaß gemacht, also unbedingt mal ausprobieren!

Außerdem ist Uni-Sport sehr groß dort: Football- und Eishockey-Spiele stehen regelmäßig auf dem Plan und die Rocky Mountains sind relativ nah! Ca. 4 Stunden von Edmonton. Direkt am ersten Wochenende haben wir ein Auto gemietet und sind in die Rocky Mountains wandern gegangen, was super beeindruckend war! Das haben wir generell sehr oft gemacht, da Mietwagen und Unterkünfte nicht allzu teuer waren, also macht unbedingt Roadtrips!

Im Alltag waren wir viel im Uni-Gym: dort gibt es einen Ice-Rink, eine Boulder-Halle, ein Schwimmbad und ein sehr gut ausgestattetes Gym. Wenn ihr feiern gehen wollt, geht am besten auf die Whyte Avenue oder nach Downtown auf die Jasper Avenue. Mit dem Bus kommt ihr eigentlich überall gut hin!

Uni

Die Uni ist ein bisschen mehr Arbeit als in Innsbruck, aber absolut machbar – auch mit Wochenendtrips. Ich hatte insgesamt vier Kurse, und in jedem Kurs gab es ca. drei Prüfungen plus Abgaben. Ich hatte die Kurse Abnormal Psychology und Cultural Psychology, die leicht waren, aber vor allem Cultural Psychology fand ich sehr spannend! Zudem hatte ich noch Behavior Modification und Human Memory.

Fazit

Ein Auslandssemester kann ich echt nur wärmstens empfehlen! Anfangs war ich hin- und hergerissen, ob ich es machen soll, weil ich die Einzige von meinen Freundinnen und Freunden war, die gegangen ist. Aber rückblickend würde ich es sofort wieder machen!

Zurück in Innsbruck ist alles wie vorher, aber in vier Monaten erlebt man so viele neue Dinge, trifft neue Leute und taucht in eine andere Kultur ein. Traut euch, verlasst eure Komfortzone und erlebt euer eigenes Abenteuer!

Zuletzt noch ein Dankeschön an Christina Plattner, die mich hervorragend beraten und unterstützt hat!

Wenn ihr Fragen habt, schreibt mir gerne jederzeit!

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Preparations

My preparations for the exchange semester started during COVID in 2020. I planned to go to Canada in the Fall 2021 term, back then I was optimistic that the world will get over this whole pandemic pretty quickly. As it turned out, I was wrong. Summer 2021 approached, and the situation hasn't gotten significantly better. After a lot of discussions and considerations I postponed my exchange in agreement with the U of A and the Centre for Canadian Studies at the University of Innsbruck to the winter term 2022. Everybody involved was very helpful and understanding regarding my concerns, for which I am still very thankful. My motivation for rescheduling was that I guessed that a higher vaccination rate would mean a more normal student life. This seemed to be true until December, then the Omicron wave hit the world. Again, I was wrong and my exchange seemed on the brink to cancellation. I booked a flight anyways, at the end of December, which I missed due to illness (not COVID). I scheduled another flight in the first week of January, which I missed due to illness (COVID). My next try at the end of January turned out to be successful, I guess "third time's a charm" proved itself to be right. During January I attended classes online, which was quite challenging given the time zone differences.

Arriving in Canada

The itinerary of my flight was Innsbruck-London-Vancouver-Edmonton. As I just recovered from COVID I was excluded from arrival testing and quarantine, I still had to have a Quarantine Plan ready, as the Border Officer decides if my documents are sufficient to prove my claims. I created my own Quarantine Plan, as the prepaid ones were incredibly expensive. I stayed in the Varscona Hotel for three nights, which was nice as the On-Campus dorms are completely empty. This gave me enough time to rent a car and drive to IKEA to buy everything I need. Quick tip: if you plan on saving money, only go to IKEA to buy blankets, pillows, towels, etc. Stuff where you just want to be the first person to use it, and buy cooking utensils at a thrift shop, such as Goodwill on Whyte Avenue. They have a lot, and it's super cheap. I bought a fondue set just because it was 15$ and used it twice for parties, great deal. Starting off to explore Edmonton from Whyte Avenue is great because everything vital is in walking distance, such as great restaurants, nice bars, etc. Also on the top of the bucket list for the first views of the city: Highlevel Bridge, great downtown and river valley view.

The best housing possible

I always wanted to stay in On-Campus housing, as I live quite far away from the university in Innsbruck and I wanted to experience as much of the North American way of studying as possible. I chose International House because there you have a bedroom and bathroom to yourself, which is nice if you want some privacy, and kitchens are shared for the floor. Honestly, I didn't like the idea of a shared kitchen, until I arrived. On the first day a super nice guy from Lebanon named Karl invited me to try his Pasta while I was cooking, so we ate

together. The following days I got to know a nice Mexican girl named Laura which showed me some proper Mexican dishes. It turned out to be a hotspot to meet new people, try different kinds of food, overall it turned into one of my favourite spots in I-House. I didn't get homesick, although I had some concerns before I left, because I was constantly meeting new people which became friends I spent a lot of time with. The first month just went by in a blink, and I felt as this is my home now. I couldn't even imagine not being in I-House anymore. The community in this housing is very active, so a lot of trips, activities, and parties. And these people know how to party. There are also several more introverted people in I-House, but be prepared that there will be parties happening in the Lounges or Meeting Rooms, often during the week just because, you know, life is short. I got to know so many people from different nationalities, but my closest friends are from Mexico, Netherlands, Finland, Egypt, Germany and Hong Kong. That's the thing about I-House, you won't meet a lot of Canadians. If you want to live together with Canadians, you got to rent somewhere off-campus.

Studying in Canada

I was enrolled in the Graduate Program of Electrical Engineering. I took three courses, one of which also had a laboratory. Usually, you're only allowed to take 9 Canadian credits, but I was allowed to take 9.8 as one course was rated 3.8 credits, whereas the others were 3 credits. I know what you're thinking, why do 0.8 credits exist and how should this be noticeable. This course was one of the best courses I had in my life, but also one of the most challenging. We had lectures for two hours twice a week, weekly assignments, a three hour laboratory with challenging tasks which took at least another three hours of time to solve and a big project at the end of the term. The second course was also very interesting, and fortunately took a little less work, although it became very stressful at the end, but that was mainly my fault to be honest. The third course was really not my cup of tea, especially since it was basically a three hour online presentation without any interaction on a Friday afternoon on an extremely difficult topic. I ended up failing that course, as I directed my motivation towards the other two (and "extracurricular activities"). All in all, I really loved the campus, I loved the lectors of my other two courses as they made it extremely interesting and interactive and were very keen on students understanding the underlying principles. It was definitely one of the best studying experiences I had so far, the U of A is a great university and you should visit it if you get the opportunity to do so.

What to do in Canada except studying

Canada is huge. Everybody knows that, but as a European have no clue what huge means. It's just ridiculous. In the Reading Week I went on a road trip with a few people, one of which I met twice and he immediately invited me to join them. I didn't know the other ones at all and I didn't know the itinerary of the roadtrip. That turned out to be a marvellous experience. I was surprised at every stop because I didn't know what was planned, and Canada has such a diverse landscape. We saw canyons, prairie, mountains, and a lot more.

We relaxed in Lussier hot springs at -15 degrees Celsius air temperature, we walked on frozen lakes in the middle of the night to stargaze, and so much more. Make some friends, rent a car and do a road trip, it's so worth it. We did 3500km on my first road trip, and we didn't even leave the province. As comparison, that's the distance from Innsbruck to Yerevan, Armenia, which means seven different countries. It's just incredible. I was so happy with the first road trip that I went on a second one after the term, on which we did 9200km, although I only joined for 5000km of them. It's was just amazing. Plan for extra time after the term to travel with friends you made in Canada. I stayed over a month longer than I had to, and every second was worth it.

In a nutshell

Fill out the application and go to Canada. The experience is great, the University is great and the country itself is just awesome as well. They really life up to the stereotype of being extremely friendly and kind. I'm definitely going there again, probably as soon as next year, then in Summer and Fall, as I have seen Winter and Spring now. And I almost forgot to say it: Bears, lots of Bears. I always thought of them as aggressive animals, but in real life they look extremely huggable (please don't though) and behave more like cows than predators. Literally every bear I have seen was eating grass at that point. Just bring bear spray (and know how to use it). I didn't have to use it, but I was happy I had one on me while hiking.

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