

The Canadian Experience

Why did I choose to go to Canada? There were a couple of reasons for this decision. First of all: I wanted to study abroad and I wanted to go to an English speaking country (I do not speak another language well enough to follow lectures or write academic essays in it). So this was my first criteria for choosing where I wanted to go. As I study Liberal Arts and Sciences I thought it would be nice to go to a country where this educational idea is normal and where it originates. At the same time, I had a Canadian flatmate (who was on exchange in Germany) and she made me curious about this huge country with only few people which has a spectacular and breath-taking landscape.

I went on exchange with the Baden- Württemberg/ Ontario exchange programme and I can only recommend this programme. We had a pre-departure meeting in Bad Herrenalb where we got many useful tips concerning the visa, health insurance etc. from people who did the exchange in previous years but also from Canadians on exchange in Germany who gave us tips concerning phone plans, where to live etc.

What are recommendations I would give? Don't stress about the visa (it worked out for everyone and once I had all documents together it took me less than a week to get it). Canadian phone plans are expensive. Like, super expensive. I had a prepaid plan with Kodoo which was 'only' 15 Dollars per months and which gave me international texting and with an add on the possibility to phone people. As I had wifi on Campus (where most things happen anyway) or at home I didn't really need data.

Finding accommodation in London is easy. This is different in Toronto or Ottawa from what I've heard, but in London you do not need to be worried to end up homeless. There are more rooms available than students to take them. I found my room through facebook before I arrived and was very happy and lucky with my landlord, the house and my roommates. Some people looked for a room only after they arrived in London and had no trouble finding a place. I enjoyed living together with Canadians, but some things are different. Depending on your flatmates, it is not necessarily normal to share dishes (it's good to talk about that in the beginning. In my case, we had shared dishes which were provided by our landlord but I had friends which had to get their own dishes and cutlery).

The transportation system in London is, well, different than in Freiburg. There are busses and they have a schedule which they sometimes follow. When they are full they don't stop (which is rather annoying in winter) and for some reason they occasionally do not come at all. I highly recommend a bike! I think I used it about 80 percent of the time- and got it cheap on Kijii, a useful online platform for used stuff- and it really is worth it I think. The busses stop going at around 11:30 at night and bikes are very handy to get home.

The international office staff at Western is super nice in my experience. They had all sorts of leaflets with useful information for international students (from campus maps, to places to eat, to activities and convenient apps). Additionally, they were pretty relaxed and helpful when it came to administrative stuff like changing courses.

Canadians in general are mostly very helpful and friendly. And they really value politeness. If someone accidentally runs into you, you should better say sorry (maybe it was somehow partly your fault after all). It is normal to say 'Thank you' to the bus driver and help any car that you see stuck in the snow. When I went grocery shopping in Canada, it was normal to have some small talk with the cashier who would put your stuff into bags for you. Sometimes I miss talking about weather or that I am from Germany with a friendly cashier now that I am back in Germany and have to get used to putting my stuff into bags as fast as possible with barely any eye contact with the cashier....

Western- Everything in Purple...

Western counts as one of the older Canadian Universities and has a beautiful campus. Nearly everything student and student- life related happens on campus. I have talked with a Canadian who lives on campus in a residence and he said he had only left the campus three times during an entire semester. For me that was strange in the beginning but it got more and more normal. London is not the prettiest city. It has some nice parks and I would recommend to check out the walk along the river and the nature around, but the city 'centre' is not very pretty and not that nice. I still liked to go there sometimes, for example to one of the few independently owned coffee shops, a bar or the boardgame café. But mostly, things happen on campus or at people's houses. And the campus is nice!

Western has quite many international students and it is easy enough to get in touch with them. The International office organised trips which exchange students can join if they want and once a week there is a global café for international students. They also have a buddy programme where Canadian students become 'buddy's' for international students. Some of them became good friends to me. I think the International office at Western does a very good job!

Getting to know classmates in university courses, however, is not easy. It depends on the class and the people in the class of course, but most Canadians which take second or third year courses already have a close circle of friends and do not expect and not necessarily want to meet any new people in their classes. There are exceptions of course, but I have not made any close friends through courses. This is easier through extra-curricular stuff. I joined the swing, outdoor and salsa club which was quite a lot of fun and went to the orientation week (short O - week) which is for all new students of the university.

The courses themselves are different than in Germany. I could choose pretty much any course which I wanted (if they wanted prerequisites the professors admitted me anyway without taking those courses beforehand). I very much enjoyed that. I took classes in Philosophy, Gender studies, English literature, History and in First Nations Studies. The two First Nation studies courses were absolutely interesting. Where in Germany would I have the chance to have Indigenous university teachers and Indigenous classmates discussing about topics like Indigenous feminism and showing me a glimpse of their life and of a very different perspective on life. It was great to take courses in Canada that I could not have taken in that form in Germany. Talking about history and historical events like the first World War is quite different from a Canadian perspective. The relationship between students and teachers tends to be close in Canada. Teachers encourage you to go to their office hours and talk with them about assignment, an essay thesis etc. I liked this quite a lot and I have the feeling that it helped me to improve.

The courses themselves are often more applied than in Germany, i.e. in a philosophy class you might focus on a topic that is in the news today. I liked it quite a lot, because I had the feeling I could use the more theoretical concepts which we study in Germany on more specific real-life

problems. The course load was sometimes quite a lot. Studying Liberal Arts & Sciences in Freiburg, I am used to having frequent assignments and that is normal in Canada too. I wrote many, many essays and during the semester there is always something and most of the time quite a lot of studying, writing and researching to do. The assignments themselves are doable and the grading is fair in my experience. However, it is a lot of frequent work to do. This is not to say that I did not like studying in Canada. I very much enjoyed to get to know different perspectives on topics and to have some courses which were more applied than what I was used to from Freiburg.

Canada is a quite diverse society with most people having some roots in countries all over the world and has official multiculturalism in its constitution. It does- certainly and unfortunately- not always work. But I had the feeling that Canada has a more accepting and open society than we do. Not the least is the university rector of Western of Indian heritage and came to Canada as a university student.

All in all, I can recommend studying in Canada a lot! And if you have the chance to go travelling, go to the West and visit the National Parks out there. The landscape is incredibly beautiful. Enjoy the winter and go ice- skating (just don't compare yourself to the seven year olds who are incredibly good at it). Go to a cottage (best with a hot tub), and try the bagels at the "Spokes".

