

Major and Degree	B.Sc. Psychology
Host country	Canada
Start and end date of the exchange	August 2018 – April 2019
Host university	University of Ottawa
Identification Code	CA-2018-5R7J6-w

How were your arrival and the first week in your host country? Were you provided with any introductory information and if so, was it helpful?

My arrival in Canada went without any problems. I decided to arrive two days before the scheduled Welcome days for all participants in the OBW-program to have the opportunity for some sightseeing in Toronto. I flew from Oslo (because I spent my summer holidays in Norway) to Toronto with a layover in Reykjavik. At the airport in Toronto I already met four other exchange students from Germany who are also taking part in the OBW-program. We waited together until an officer at the airport had processed our study permits. Afterwards we all headed to the different accommodations we had booked in advance.

Two days later, all OBW participants and the exchange students from the programs of France, India and China met on the campus of the York University in Toronto. We have been provided with several introductory information there. I experienced the given information as more or less redundant because they have already been given during the introductory seminar in Bad Herrenalb. However, I highly encouraged all exchange students to attend these Welcome Days because it was a great opportunity for me to get to know other students who will be studying at the same university as I do and to create a network of friends across Ontario. Furthermore, knowing that my first days in Canada are already organized greatly reduced my nervousness before the start of this adventure.



After having arrived in Ottawa, I also had a mandatory introduction session offered by the University of Ottawa. The given information was not useful for me because discussed topics like the enrollment in courses had already taken place weeks ago. The University of Ottawa also offered several welcome events for international students such as public screening of movies or a pizza party. These events are a great opportunity to meet international students from different countries.



Were you able to deal with all formalities (course selection, accommodation, insurances etc.)?

The course selection already took place while I was still in Germany. I experienced the process as rather complicated. I was told to choose my courses from the online course timetable of the University of Ottawa. Afterwards, I was supposed to submit a document for the request of the enrollment in my desired courses by e-mail. Canadian students can enrol in their courses online on their own. Due to the delay of the individual examination of my course selection through the faculty some of my desired courses have already been full and I had to change my enrollment form. It is important to know that the course selection that you take in advance can be easily changed once you have started your studies at the host university. You can drop chosen courses online on your own. If you want to modify your selection or add a course, you can either submit a document to your faculty (at least that worked for me with the Faculty of Social Sciences) or you go to the faculty's office in person.

Concerning my accommodation, I found out that the on-campus residences are rather expensive compared to living off-campus. Furthermore, a lot of residences have mandatory meal-plans which means that many apartments or rooms on-campus do not have access to cooking facilities because you are supposed to eat in the cafeteria. Therefore, I decided to live in a shared house off-campus. I already signed the lease contract for my room while I was still in Germany. On Facebook there are some groups where people search for or offer rooms for rental. I found my place through the Facebook group of the OBW-program because one girl who has been studying at the University of Ottawa in the previous year was looking for a next tenant. The location of my shared house is perfect because I can reach every university building within 2 to 12 minutes by foot. The house is even closer to the main university buildings than some residences which are considered on-campus. In total I am paying 665 \$ for a 10 m² room which is alright compared to the rental prices I heard from other students. The most of us are living in Sandy Hills which is the residential area close to the University mainly inhabited by students. Some of the other exchange students found their rooms through the website <https://www.kijiji.ca/> which is a Canadian sales portal. In general, I would suggest not to sign a contract without having seen the room, if you do not have a person (like in my case) which has already lived there and assures that it is no fraud. Furthermore, you should make sure that you do not sign a 12-month contract because some landlords insist of having one and you might have troubles finding a sublet because Ottawa is quite calm in the summer.

I decided to take out an additional international health insurance to the insurance offered by the University of Ottawa (UHIP) because the Canadian one does not cover special cases such as dental care or travels in other countries. Furthermore, I was told that there is an option to opt-out of UHIP if you have an equivalent German health insurance. However, this year no of the exchange students I got to know so far managed to opt-out of the insurance of the university so we had to pay these extra expenses.

What was your highlight of the first weeks?

One of the greatest experiences I made so far was the camping trip to the Algonquin Provincial Park organized by the OBW program. After the first organized three days with almost all the OBW participants, I stayed with six other German exchange students for five additional days in the backcountry of the park. This was the perfect beginning of my stay in Canada. We experienced the beauty of the Canadian nature while canoeing, hiking and

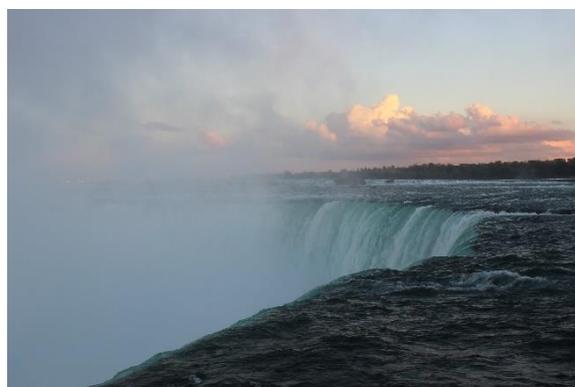
camping. I encouraged all of you to take part in the trip to the Algonquin Park and to extend your stay in the park (if possible) because there is a lot to discover. I was so overwhelmed by the great experience outdoors that I returned to another region of the park one month later. You should definitely take the opportunity as long as it is warm enough for camping and canoeing (in the end of September we already had just 4 °C which was really cold if you spent



the whole day outdoors).

Furthermore, I used the less busy month of September to do more travels around Ontario and Quebec. For example, I went to the “Picnic Electronique” in Montréal with some other exchange students which is a cheap festival I would definitely recommend to all of you who like electronic music. In general, if you like to go to concerts it is always worth to do a short trip to Montréal because many good artists do their shows in Montréal instead of Ottawa. I also went back to Toronto to discover more of this great, vibrant city and to do a trip to the Niagara Falls. The huge waterfalls are really impressive, however I would suggest travelling there outside of the main touristic season, maybe even in winter, because I got pretty annoyed by the tourist masses. Another trip I am recommending is going to Bruce Peninsula which is located between the Georgian Bay and Lake Huron. The landscape there is incredibly beautiful and offers a variety of great hikes. This destination is rather far from Ottawa, that is why I used the Reading Week in October to travel there. Another great place for hiking and spending time in the nature is the Gatineau Park close to Ottawa. In the time of Indian Summer there are even free buses to the park.

When we had the first snow in November, I went skiing at Mont Tremblant which also remains one of my highlights from the first weeks. Unfortunately, there are not a lot of mountains/hills close to Ottawa which makes the area of Mont Tremblant (approximately 2 hours from Ottawa) the closest good skiing region. Another great winter activity is renting a cottage in the forest to enjoy the winterly, snowy landscape. For example, I rented a cozy cottage in the Gatineau Park with some friends to go hiking and enjoy a short break from studying during our final exam period.





Furthermore, playing Squash in the University Team of Ottawa became one of my favourite activities in the first weeks. This is a great opportunity to meet Canadian students and to travel around Ontario and Quebec because we are playing tournaments against different universities in these provinces. Do not hesitate to try out new sports at the University because for some disciplines (especially squash) it is easy to become part of the women's team due to their lack of female squash players. I first started playing squash when I arrived in Ottawa and now, I am enjoying the frequent practices and free time activities with my team mates.

What do you perceive as unfamiliar, strange and/or different from Germany?

I perceive the fact that many Canadians frequently talk to strangers as unfamiliar from Germany. It is normal that people on the street or the cashier in the grocery store start a conversation with you. Furthermore, I experience the Canadians as friendlier and more helpful compared to many German people. If you are looking lost or have problems for example fueling your rental car, there is almost always a Canadian right there who is happy to help you. However, in my opinion it is harder to built up real friendships with Canadian students. While being in a lecture they seem to be really focused on the presentation of the professor. Many Canadian students are sitting with their headphones in the class room until the lecture starts and leave the lecture hall immediately after the end of the professor's presentation. During the lecture there is no possibility for small talk because it is always really quiet in the class room which would make talking to your neighbor obvious and disturbing. This is another difference to my studies in Germany, because there is often lots of chatting before, during and after the lecture. However, being more attentive is also a good thing and I can understand the studiousness of Canadian students because they are paying high tuition fees to be allowed to study at a university and therefore want to finish their degree as quickly as possible. What I am saying should not sound deterrent. All students are really helpful and nice, it is just harder to really make friends with them in the lecture. However, until now I never felt lonely because you can easily build friendships with other international students and people in sport activities or clubs.

Another difference between my studies in Germany and Canada is the more relaxed and equal interaction with the professors, teaching assistants and people in the university's offices. Professors and other officials always address me by my surname and it is also accepted from the most of them to be spoken to rather informal compared to German standards.

Another aspect which was unfamiliar for me, is that you are not allowed to drink alcohol in public. I knew this rule before coming to Canada however I was surprised how strictly the compliance of this law is controlled. Sometimes there are officers checking the content of your can if you are standing in front of the LCBO (one of the few shops which are allowed to sell alcohol) with a can of iced tea.

Moreover, I experienced the traffic regulations in Canada as unfamiliar in the beginning of my stay here. For example, there is no “Right-before-Left”-rule in Canada. Instead you have a stop sign at every street and usually the vehicle which has arrived first at the intersection is allowed to drive first. This might take a few seconds or minutes because Canadians are so polite and respectful. The predominance of stop signs is especially annoying if you are travelling by bike. Furthermore, at least in Ontario you are allowed to turn right at a red light (of course only if there are no cars, pedestrians or bicycles in your way).

Concerning the university life, I was surprised that many courses were offered in the late evening. For instance, I had a course from 7pm to 10pm in my first term at the university of Ottawa. Also, the exams were sometimes held on unusual times and in unusual places compared to German standards. Some of my friends had their exams on Saturdays or Sundays. Furthermore, some exams took place in one of the gyms of the university or even in the building of the uOttawa ice rink.

Another issue which is unfamiliar for me is that the taxes are not included in the prices you can see in the menus of restaurants, in the grocery stores and even on bus tickets. So, you must be aware that the total amount will always be about 13 percent more than expected. Furthermore, it is common to leave at least 15 percent tip for the waiter/waitress. Everything below is considered rude. Another difference to Germany is that you do not say how much you want to pay including tip (e.g. 20 dollars) you would say how much money you want to have back (e.g. give me 10 dollars back please).

Please describe the course of a typical weekday in a few sentences. How will the schedule of your second semester look like?

In the Fall term 2018, I participated in four lectures. Two of them were part of my program, while the other half were electives. Based on my interests I chose one course in “*Introduction to Aboriginal Culture and Society*” and one lecture about “*Arabic Culture*”. Luckily, I had every Friday off which allowed me to catch up with my school work or extend my weekend trips. My classes from Monday to Thursday all started rather late (no class before 11:30). I had between one to three classes per day and usually long breaks in between. During lunch time I often used the ice rink of the university to go skating or participated in one of the drop-in activities (no registration necessary) such as volleyball. In the evenings where I did not have classes, I usually had squash practice, went climbing, met other students for dinner or a movie night, went to museums (which are free on Thursdays) or went out with friends.

My schedule in the second semester looks less relaxed then the previous one. Until now, I will have courses from Monday to Friday. Furthermore, the courses are rather early (three times 8:30 a week) which forces me to adjust my weekly rhythm. I am currently enrolled in five courses but will most likely drop one of them within the next weeks. Like in the fall term, I am taking two psychology courses again. Additionally, I have chosen three courses from the subject areas Criminology, Human Rights and Conflict Studies and French as a Second Language. I can encourage all of you to check the offered courses from other disciplines

because in my opinion the year abroad is a great opportunity to get insights into other interesting fields of studies.

Please tell us about a great and/or formative experience (e.g. a party, university life, food, sports etc.)

As mentioned above, I took the chance to participate in the squash team of the University of Ottawa. This experience was formative for me because it taught me to enjoy a new sport and play at tournaments no matter how bad the game's result would be. In Germany I would have never dared to play tournaments in a sport which I just recently started because I would have been far too anxious to make a fool of myself. Until now, I do lose almost all my squash games quite high but it does not matter for me because I have a lot of fun playing and I get to meet many students from different universities in Ontario and Quebec. Furthermore, I get to travel a lot and experience real team spirit while cheering for my team mates or enjoying fun activities after our games. Therefore, I am really thankful for this great experience and to have learned that having fun in a discipline is far more valuable than being successful.

Please complete the following sentence: , ... is what I miss most.

Real German bread, cheese and the range of ecological and regional products in German supermarkets is what I miss the most. In my opinion it is hard to find a tasty and healthy bread in Canadian grocery stores. Although, there is a wide offer of different toasts and bagels, I hardly find good, dark whole-grain bread. Furthermore, Canadian bread tastes a lot sweeter than German bread due to the addition of sugar in almost every food. The positive side effect of the lack of good bread, is that I started to bake bread and rolls myself. Unfortunately, the lack of good and especially affordable cheese is much harder to solve. Canadians tend to eat a lot of cheddar and mozzarella which is in my opinion not really tasty. Nevertheless, I got accustomed to the offer in Canadian grocery stores and enjoy my newly discovered baking skills.