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Exchange Student

### My Exchange Semester at Thompson Rivers University, British Columbia, Canada

An exchange semester is always a very exciting and unique experience. It is a long process that starts with your application for the program and finishes with your return to your home, or actually never finishes because the memory of this special experience always stays in your mind. You have so many thoughts in your mind, for example to which country do I want to go, where will I live – in a residence or with a host family, how is the cultural difference to my home country etc. All of these questions are elements that can make students, in particular those who have never been abroad, afraid of what is coming in the future. According to my own experience, I can say that all of these worries are unnecessary. It might be frightening to live several months in another country and be tackled about many uncertainties, but if you don't risk it, you will lose the opportunity to collect an invaluable memory which lasts for the rest of your life. It takes courage to study abroad because it requires a lot of independence in a foreign country where you cannot rely on your parental support or aid from friends, but once you have done it and come back from your exchange semester, you will realize your tremendous deed and be proud of yourself.

I did my exchange semester in the small city of Kamloops in British Columbia, Canada. There were three reasons why I chose this location. First, I have always wanted to go to Canada to see the beautiful nature, the isolated wilderness and the wildlife in this enormous country. You don't really realize the size of Canada until you haven't travelled across the country. I mean a flight from Toronto to Vancouver took me five hours. If you flew five hours in Europe, you would be three countries away. However, the second reason why I chose

Kamloops is its location. The city is situated in the beautiful state of British Columbia (it is also written on their license plates) between Vancouver and Calgary. Adventurous people like me who love nature and hiking/walking will find a paradise here. Kamloops itself is literally a desert but has still many hiking opportunities to offer. The real treasures are a few driving hours away. National parks like Banff and Jasper, Wells Gray or Glacier National Park are less than a day drive away. Don't forget that in Canada this is a small distance whereas you would not even think about driving a full day in Germany just to do some walking. As you can see, there are plenty of things to do if you chose Kamloops as your study location. And I promise you that you won't be disappointed. The last reason why I chose Kamloops or Canada in general is the cultural experience. I was fascinated by indigenous culture and wanted to enhance my knowledge about this culture which was before I came to Canada ridiculously low because I knew almost nothing about native people, or was influenced by the stupid stereotypes that are distributed in Hollywood, Disney and Western movies. The history of Canada is very brutal and sad and comparable to the Holocaust in Germany so that indigenous culture is reduced to a minimum. That means that Canada is very much similar to Europe. Nevertheless, you can still find aboriginal culture everywhere, and in my opinion the best thing to get a deep knowledge of their values and beliefs is to go outside, walk in the beautiful nature and breathe the natural air. Then you will understand how native people lived together with nature and loved their country. Therefore, Canada is an exceptional place if you are interested in landscapes and culture. Definitely recommendable.

The Thompson Rivers University is a very good educational institution. I really loved the location from which you were able to overlook the whole city. In addition, the campus is one complex so that it is super easy to reach every building and room. Buses go to every corner in the city and thus it is no problem to go to uni and back home. There is everything what you need to survive your semester. You can buy your books easily at the TRU-store, buy food almost everywhere and if you need help with something, there are many offices and people

that help you with everything. There is also a big sports center where you can go in your free time and choose between many activities. My teachers at TRU had a high degree of knowledge and gave us many challenging assignments so that I enjoyed my classes and didn't feel unchallenged. Thus, I was busy the whole semester, even busier than at my home university, and learned many interesting and hitherto new things. Additionally, I always had to speak English which improved my English skills even more than before. It might be hard for some people to only speak a foreign language, but after a while you get used to it and it appears as if you were a native speaker. Then it even seems as if your mother language was a foreign language. Another thing that I liked was that TRU is very multicultural. There are students from all over the world such as India, Pakistan, Australia, Indonesia, Italy, Spain, England, Germany, South Africa or Colombia and many more countries. I don't have to say that it is always exciting to meet new people from different cultural backgrounds and I highly recommend to do so when you decide to study at TRU. When else do you have the chance to meet so much ethnicity at one place. Therefore, I recommend everyone to study at TRU and to enjoy it to the fullest. I definitely don't regret it.

The last part of this report is dedicated to my host family. I decided to stay at a host family and not in a residence. And now I can say that it was an excellent decision. I was very lucky with my Canadian family because I couldn't get to a better one. In my opinion, I had the jackpot. They made me feel at home. Every time I felt homesick, which was not often, I just had to talk to one of my new family members or friends of them and forgot about everything else. The dogs and cats they have are probably the cutest animals ever. It was so much fun to play or just cuddle with them. My Canadian parents provided everything I needed and never gave me the feeling that I missed something. You have some obligations like cleaning your room and dishes, but this is ridiculous for what you get in exchange. The life at your host family is super easy because you don't have to shop groceries or cook your meals, except for breakfast. Every day I received new and delicious food. The only thing I had to worry about

was not to come late for dinner. Honestly, I cannot think of anything negative there. I have met students who were not lucky with their host families, but I personally cannot complain about anything and would do the same thing again. You not only stay at a real Canadian family but also improve your English skills, and most importantly gain friends for the rest of your life. At this point I want to say thank you to my Canadian family who has made my exchange semester one of the most beautiful memories I have ever had.

All in all, I am very happy with my exchange semester. In my opinion, everybody should do it as long as he has time for it. It is a unique and exciting experience because of many reasons. You live in a foreign country, learn a new culture, enrich your knowledge, see amazingly beautiful places, meet new people and become friends with them, and most importantly gain so many happy and special memories. In addition, you become more confident of yourself. It is not easy to go away from family and friends and leave your life behind. Therefore, you can be proud of you if you do it. I am very happy that I did my exchange semester in Canada. It is a beautiful country with very polite people (yes, the stereotype is true) and I would not hesitate to go back. Thank you to everyone at ISEP who have helped me with all kinds of problems and struggles and made this special experience possible. I would always do another exchange semester with you guys. I also thank all the people I have met in Canada, including my guest family. I am grateful for what you have done for me, for your help and appreciation, invitations, and everything else I cannot think of at the moment. Last but not least I want to thank my real family who have always supported me and without whom I would not have been able to go to Canada. To everyone who reads this report, I can only say to take enterprise and go abroad.

Some photos:

View at Kamloops from TRU



Riverside Park in Kamloops



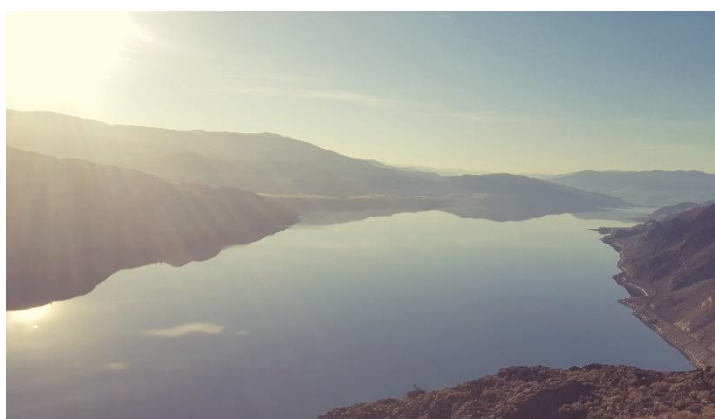
Main Building at TRU



University Campus

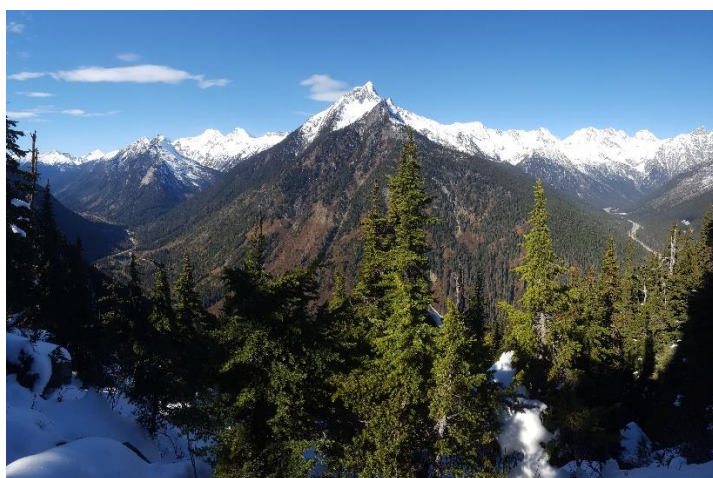


Halloween with my host mother



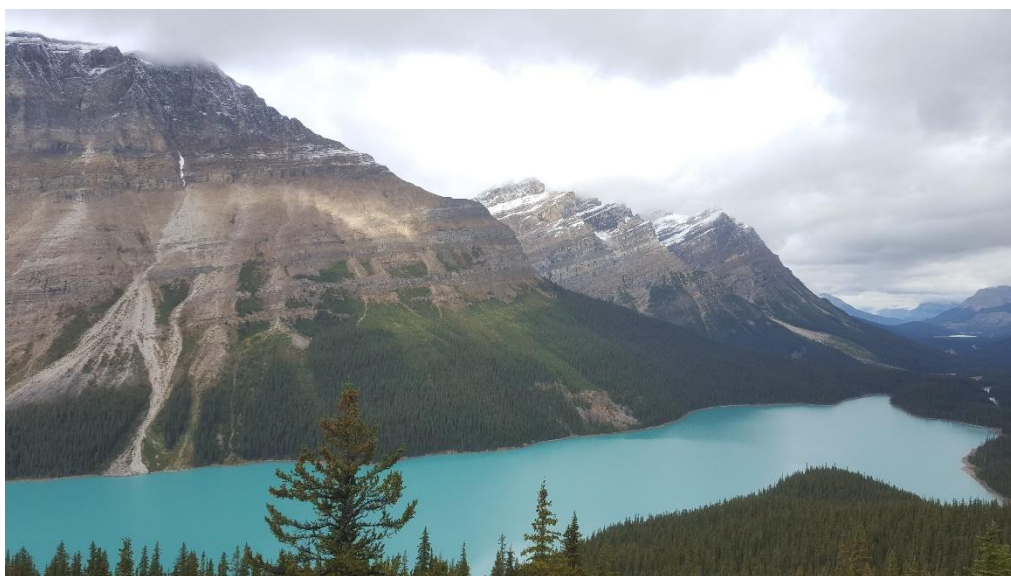
Battle Bluff Trail in Kamloops

Glacier National Park





Garibaldi Lake in the near of Whistler



Peyto Lake, Icefield Parkway, Banff National Park



Wells Gray National Park