

Exchange Experience Sharing

Host University: University of Alberta (Canada)

The school that I went to was University of Alberta (U of A). It's located in Edmonton, Canada. It's not a popular choice among students, but it's a good school, and I love it. And I love Canada a lot as well. That's why I'm writing this article hoping to share my experience with you.

INTRODUCTION

The City – Edmonton

You are advised to visit wikipedia if you're interested in having a brief idea of the history of Edmonton.

Ethnicity

Don't expect to see a lot of Chinese / HK-ers in Edmonton as compared to other Canadian cities like Toronto or Vancouver. But this may provide with a good chance to speak English.

Weather

Umm...one word for Edmonton's weather – COLD.

Expect it to be freezing outside, with snow that won't melt for 5 months. Once in a while, there'll be snowstorm; or the weather would drop to -40°C (with wind chill). Sounds fun, eh? But with heater almost everywhere (all buildings, public transportation), it's not too bad as it sounds. And I beg you won't stay outside for very long, there isn't much out there. And it's quite dry as well, because of its low humidity and the heater.

What you need to survive in this weather:

- A warm down jacket
- Warm mitten, scarf, cap (don't wait till to buy it here, it starts getting cold very soon in October; and they're not cheap in Canadian dollars)
- Leggings to wear under the pants
- Wearing layers (so that you can take off your clothes easily when you're indoor. I strongly discourage you to wear a woolen underwear in Canada, as it'll be very difficult to take them off when you get hot with the heater on)

REASONS FOR CHOOSING U of A

The city doesn't find fun to live in, right? But I think there are several reasons that you may consider U of A as one of your choices.

1. The University of Alberta has been consistently ranked as one of the top five universities in Canada. So it is equally good as compared to U of Toronto, McGill, UBC, etc...
2. Edmonton is comparatively cheaper than other states in Canada. Alberta is the only province in Canada with no Provincial Sales Tax (PST). The Goods and Services Tax (G.S.T.) in Edmonton is just 5%. While other cities, like Vancouver, individual has to pay tax of 12% (G.S.T. of 5% and PST of 7%) when buying goods
3. Edmonton is very near to the Rockies, a spectacle in the North America
4. If you're lucky, you may have a chance to see Northern light (aurora) in Edmonton
5. There's so much snow in Edmonton, you can build your snowman, have snow fight, and have lots of fun!

6. Because there's nothing much to do in Edmonton, you tend to make more friends and spend more time people talking and hanging around. And I regard that as a true essence of exchange, to make friends rather than just travel.
7. Convenient location. I'm not saying that Edmonton has good transportation here, but just that U of A is conveniently located near downtown, and there's a main bus-stop and 2 railway stations located at campus, which make U of A a very convenient location to go to other parts of the city.

Accommodation

- International House
 - Best choice for exchange students in my opinion
 - Individual room with bathroom, 2 kitchen and 1 lounge with TV on each floor (with about 30 residents), 6 floors with elevator
 - The reasons I think I-House is good:
 - ◆ All residents are international students, they tend to understand each other more, and you don't have to be shy about speaking English because many people around you don't speak fluent English either.
 - ◆ The kitchen and TV lounges provide a favorable location for you to chat and hangout with your floor mates and other residents.
 - ◆ I-House organizes many activities for its residents frequently: workshops on different cultures (songs, dance, food), monthly potluck, Year-end Gala, I-House ski trip, floor gatherings, movie night, etc....
 - ◆ I-House is near to a pub (5 min walk), near to LRT station and bus stop,
 - ◆ Good location. Just across the street and there's a building which is connected to insulated bridges which lead to many school buildings. This means that there's heater warmth for your walk to class and you don't have to suffer the bitter cold wind in winter.
- HUB
 - Unfurnished apartment (without any furniture, but there's a kitchen and toilet.) with private room
 - Usually more Asians are living in here
 - Extremely convenient location. HUB apartment is located inside HUB building with lower floor lines with restaurants and shops. And HUB building is connected to business school and art school. Therefore, you don't have to go outside to go to class or to buy food.
- Lister Centre
 - Shared room, residents are mainly Canadian
 - Relatively far away, need to walk a bit (15 mins) to go to class or bus station

Recreation

- Butterdome
 - Butterdome is a pavilion which hosts facilities of different kinds of sports. And all the sports facilities are free!!!!!! So you better work out as food in Canada is quite fatty.
 - All the sports courses for students are not expensive at all. Ice-skating, dance, yoga, you name it!

You have to register them quick at the beginning of the semester, courses are full very quick.

- University of Alberta Business Exchange Association (BEA)
 - It's an association that organizes activities for exchange business students, so don't miss out their events and chance to have fun!
 - ◆ Hiking / Ski Trips to the Rockies Mountain!
 - ◆ Social Gatherings for exchange students
 - ◆ Group tickets to some ball games (Canadian Football, Hockey games)
- University of Alberta International (located at HUB)
 - It serves all International Students (exchange, undergraduates, postgraduates, doctor students). It provides occasional gatherings and activities for these students.
 - ◆ Organize International student orientation
 - ◆ Carry out visits to landmarks in Edmonton
 - ◆ Organize parties during festivals
- North Saskatchewan River
 - It's a gorgeous place. I suggest you to go jogging along the river, or to watch the sunset, when it's cold
- The Rockies
 - The nature in Canada is spectacular and you're not gonna miss it!!!
- West Edmonton Mall
 - It used to be the largest mall in the world!! There's Waterpark, Amusement Park, Ice-rink, many shops, supermarket (T&T which is a Chinese supermarket) etc. Convenient transport by bus from university.
- Skiing / Skating
- Watch Ice Hockey – support the Edmonton Oilers!!!!!!

Academics

Courses

- The BA office has a list of courses (offered by exchange universities) that are equivalent to courses provided by CUHK
- After you've selected the courses that you'll like to take, you can submit a form to the BA office to get a review on the equivalence of those courses

Books

- Textbooks are expensive, it's better to enquire the course professor about the required textbook title, whether a textbook is necessary, etc. That will allow you buy those textbook in HK before you go abroad.
- Photocopy is not cheap either

Reminders

- Bring a few plug converters for your electrical appliances as the socket in Canada is different from that in HK (they're cheap, you can get them from Mong Kok)
- Check out the transportation between the airport and your accommodation.

- Highly recommend you to attend the orientation days for international students. It's the best chance for you to know people and make friends.
- Get a US Visa if you want to travel to the States
- You'll need a Canada VISA if yours is an one year-exchange programme.

Sharing

Exchange experience is a personal experience. Every year, hundreds of exchange students go to the same school, but each of them brings home his / her unique memories, friendships and hopefully some personal growth. This is my recipe to a fruitful exchange:

1. List out what's your expectation from the exchange programme, so you know why on earth you are leaving your friends and family to come to this new city.
2. Have an open heart. Don't be afraid of trying new things. Learn to accept different cultures.
3. Establish real friendship. Talk to more people.
4. Don't be shy. Never be afraid of losing face.
5. Be safe.

I hope you'll enjoy your exchange.

Kendra Wong (PAC)

Year of Exchange: 2006/07