

Western University, London, Canada

S1 2017

BPhed and BA – Major in Spanish

I spent the last semester of my degree on exchange at Western University in London, Ontario and had an amazing time. London is very much a student city, like Dunedin, with a good party scene, plenty of cafes and bars, transport catered to students and affordable accommodation. The university has excellent facilities and support services which help make the student experience an awesome one. Canada is a great country to go on exchange because the people are extremely friendly, the culture is a unique blend of North American and British, there is lots of snow (in winter) and so many amazing places to travel!

Accommodation

I opted to stay in a flat (or rather a house as they call it in Canada) because I had already had the hall experience for 2 years at Otago and it was a lot cheaper than living in a residence. I found my flat through the Western off campus housing website, where students and landlords advertise available rooms. I arranged to rent a room from a girl who was going on exchange to Europe for the semester that I was in London, so it was a perfect swap. I lived with 4 fourth year Canadian students in a big house just North of campus and paid \$500 CAD per month. This excluded utilities (internet, gas and electricity) which were about an extra \$100 per month (since it was winter). The house had central heating so it was nice and warm, unlike most Dunedin flats, and as far as I'm aware most houses are like this.

Cost of living

The cost of living in London is fairly similar to that in Dunedin. Things like groceries, rent, eating out and drinking cost more or less the same. Sometimes meals at restaurants seem cheaper than they are at first, because the price on the menu doesn't include tax (13%) or a tip (usually 15-20% of the bill). It takes a little bit of time to get used to this, so just remember, the price you see advertised, whether it be for a meal, piece of clothing or a textbook, is never the actual price. Alcohol is roughly the same price as in NZ, but there are fewer places where you can buy it in Ontario. Rather than being sold in supermarkets, it is sold at chain liquor stores such as the LCBO or the Beer Store, which hardly ever have sale prices. Overall, I spent about \$500 a month on living expenses (not including rent or travel).

University

Western is a really good university. Students come from all over Canada to study there. The lecturers (or professors as Canadians call them) are great teachers and the classes are generally interactive and engaging. Western has a free rec centre with a hockey rink and Olympic-sized pool, lots of eateries on campus (including about 10 Tim Hortons) and a student bar called the Spoke which hosts quiz nights and live music.

I took five courses while I was there, which is the equivalent of four Otago papers (72 points). The courses I took were Sport, Exercise and the Body in Western Culture; Tennis; Music, Dance and Performance in the Hispanic World; Sociology of Inequality and History of Rock 'n Roll. The last two papers were electives which I really enjoyed – you will find that Western has a wide range of interesting papers to take. I had about 15 contact hours a week which was very manageable, and I didn't find the level of courses overly difficult. The main aspect that was different to Otago is that all courses at Western have midterms, which students take quite seriously, so it is sort of like having 2 examination periods per semester.

The course enrolment process at Western is slightly complicated. The Western exchange advisors will send you an email with all the information required to enrol as a student, and then once you have completed all the steps and your application has been processed you will be able to access the course enrolment site. Exchange students don't get access to course selection until a later date than domestic students, so I found that a lot of the courses I had initially wanted to enrol for were already full (as there is a limit of students for each class). It was a little bit frustrating, but I emailed the exchange advisors and they suggested that I keep monitoring the course enrolment site because people drop courses all the time and spaces become available. In the end, I managed to enrol for a couple of PE courses, a Spanish course and my two electives and I was happy with my selection.

Transport

The main form of transport in London is bus. There is a student bus pass included in your university fees which gives you unlimited access to the bus services. There is a good network of buses that run around the university area, the malls and downtown. I lived about 15 minutes walk from campus, but I used the buses quite frequently because of the cold

weather. The buses stop around midnight so after nights out I would get an Uber home, which was reasonably priced.

Weather

I was in London during the winter semester (from January til April), so I experienced the brunt of the cold weather. Compared to other parts of Canada, the winter in London is not too bad, but it was certainly the coldest I've ever experienced. It snowed quite a lot of the time and the temperature was usually between 0 to -10 degrees. I bought a good winter jacket in the States on my way over to Canada, and some decent winter boots when I arrived. You can't really survive without either of these, but I would definitely recommend buying them when you're over there because they have a lot more variety and better quality winter clothing.

Travel

London is quite conveniently located halfway between Toronto and Detroit (the US border), so there are a number of good travel destinations in the area. I visited Niagara Falls, Toronto, Ottawa, Stratford and Detroit during the semester and then spent a month traveling around the East and West coast of Canada afterwards. Also, during mid-semester break (called Reading week), I flew south to New Orleans for Mardi Gras with some of my Western international friends. Other destinations which are quite close by which you could quite easily travel to during the semester if you had time are Chicago, Montreal, Quebec City and New York.

Visa

The visa for Canada is really simple – all you need to do is apply for an ETA (Electronic Travel Authorisation) online and this is valid for six months. If you are studying there for 2 semesters then you will need a study permit which is a more lengthy process.

I decided to get a US tourist visa (B2) as well because on the ESTA you are technically only allowed to spend 90 days in the US and then are supposed to travel to a country other than Canada or Mexico if you wish to enter again and renew your ESTA. If you want to be able to travel before, during and after your exchange in the USA then I would recommend getting a B2 visa.

