Exchange report – Vancouver Canada, Autumn 2016, Mimmi Ingered

Basic information
I studied at University of British Columbia in Vancouver, Canada in the autumn of 2016. Since I’m doing a bachelor’s in Geology in Lund I took classes in Earth and Ocean Sciences at UBC.

Vancouver
Vancouver is a huge city for someone coming from a small village, about 2 million inhabitants. Skyscrapers, parks and mountains in the background, what more can you wish for? Stanley Park is North America’s largest park, even larger than Central Park in New York, and there you can encounter wild beavers and racoons. Since the city is large, it takes a while to get around but the public transit is quite alright. People here are kind, helpful and chatty, don’t be surprised if someone engage in a conversation on the bus or on the street.

University of British Columbia
UBC is a big university that hosts over 60 000 students from all parts of the world. The campus lies in southwest of Vancouver, about 40 minutes from Downtown. The university is like a little village of its own, there’s everything you need. In 2016 UBC celebrated its 100th anniversary and it’s very attractive and modern. UBC has many different faculties and programs so you’ll most likely find something that fits you. The differences from Lund University are many, first the university is so much younger and they have over 200 clubs that you can join. Not dance clubs that is, but sport clubs, knitting clubs, food clubs etcetera. Most people also live in residences on campus and the libraries are popular study areas.

Arrival
I arrived 2 weeks before classes started and then stayed at a hostel downtown called Samesun, great place! The first days were stressful of course but once you start getting to know your way around you’ll feel better. The hostel arranged several little hiking trips which was very fun to take part of before classes started. When classes started we had an introduction day with important information for the exchange students and we were later divided into smaller groups with an older student as a mentor that showed us around the campus. The first 2 weeks, exchange student clubs arranged many events for the exchange students, from barbeques to movie nights. It helped a lot to get to know other people.

Courses
Be prepared to study a lot. But don’t be frightened it is also fun! From taking only 1 course at a time at Lund University to 5 at UBC. 5 courses, 3 credits each compares to a total of 30 hp at LU per semester. You don’t necessarily need to take 5 courses; you can also take 3 or 4 sometimes. UBC has 3 terms, an autumn one from September – December, a spring one from January – April and a summer one from April – August. Only the first 2 are mandatory. The courses are divided into levels, 100, 200, 300, 400 and 500 (graduate level). The levels correspond to which year of studies you’re in but a 300 level course can very well be harder than a 400 one. An advice is to take a few easier courses, 100 or 200 level and a few harder ones. It will be too much to take 5 of level 300 or 400.
The exams are easier compared to Lund; many has multiple choice questions but the lecture material can be harder. Every course usually has a midterm and then a final exams period the last month of the semester. You usually have 2-3 classes per course, every week for 1 hour at a time and some laboratory work in some courses. There are days when you have a lot of spare time and that time you should be in the library studying, it is for your own good.

Volcanology with Professor James Kelly Russell: An absolutely fantastic course in a subject far from anything at Lund University. You will learn about how volcanoes work, why they work the way they do, how to classify volcanic rocks and you will take a look at many exciting specimens from Canadian volcanoes. 3 excursions are included (on the weekends) where you will visit a bunch of volcanoes and volcanic structures. It is a really fun course with a great Professor and great teaching assistants.

Mineral Deposits with Professor James Scoates and Professor Kenneth Hickey: After this course you will know all there is to know about mineral ores and where to find them. They will teach you about the typical ores in different rocks all around the world, how they were formed and why you extract them. It is a difficult course but worth your time. The laboratory work is much fun as well; you’ll get to look at many weird rocks.

I took a course in Natural Disasters as well as “The Fluid Earth” too which were easier but fun too.

In general, you will most likely have to study more than you did at Lund University since you’re now handling 5 courses at the same time. It is not necessarily harder course material but the fact that you have assignments in all courses every week can be stressful and exhausting. So a tip is to take some hours every day to go through the lectures once more and you won’t be overwhelmed when it’s time for finals.

Accommodation
I lived on campus in a residence offered by the university. Most exchange students get a spot there but for those who don’t there’s alternatives such as sharing an apartment with other students. When applying for the university you also apply for accommodation on campus and it’s a fairly easy procedure. I lived in a dorm, sharing bath and kitchen with 4 other girls. The room was small but furnished with a bed, a desk and a chair, and shelves. You had to get bedlinens including duvet and pillows yourself as well as kitchen equipment. An advice is to take a trip to IKEA day 1.

Leisure/spare time
When you’re not studying there’s always something to do, from ice-skating, taking a stroll on the beach on campus, visiting the famous Museum of Anthropology to a hike around the mountains. It is not hard to get around and there’s so much to see! If you have a weekend to spare, drive over to Seattle or take a guided tour to the Rockies.

Costs
Prepare yourself for spending a lot of money, Canada is expensive! The accommodation is much more expensive than in Sweden, groceries are more expensive, especially vegetables and fruits, but eating out is generally more affordable! So save up some extra money to take with you because you will want to travel and experience beautiful places.
Other
No visa is needed and no study permit if you will stay there less than 6 months but apply for ETA – electronic travel authorization (needed when entering Canada) and ESTA if you’re planning to go to USA. UBC offers something called a meal plan, which basically is a card that gives you discount on food on campus but it costs a lot and in my opinion it’s a waste of money. A useful tip is not to be afraid to ask questions, Canadians are friendly and will always help you!

Contact information
mimmi.ingered@gmail.com