

Experience Report: UBC Winter Term 2023/24

I decided to study abroad at the University of British Columbia (UBC) for the winter semester of 2023/24. This decision was driven by my fascination with Canada and its stunning natural landscapes. Furthermore, UBC is known for its excellent psychology institute which supported my decision to study there.

Arrival & Accommodation

I arrived in Vancouver at the beginning of September, only two days before the semester started. I was lucky to receive a spot at the student housing "Fairview". I shared an apartment with two Canadians and a fellow exchange student from Italy. Student housing does not provide basic housing equipment for the kitchen, bedding or cleaning supplies, however living with two Canadians solved my issue of missing supplies since they kindly provided everything. Moreover, this living arrangement provided a wonderful and supportive environment for me, as me and my roommates grew very close and quickly became friends.

Academic Experience

Starting the semester was challenging as I discovered that psychology master students from Germany are not allowed to take graduate course (500-level) at UBC. This affected course selection as I needed to find a course I could get credit for back home. The initial week was stressful as I navigated through a long list of courses, seeking approvals for all kind of classes. I found it difficult to figure out courses, so I would suggest trying to handle as much as possible before arriving and also emailing professors to see if you can take their class. Eventually, I successfully enrolled in two psychology courses. They were undergraduate courses, though especially "cultural psychology" was a great class. I did learn that even if psychology graduate courses were apparently restricted to exchange students, emailing professors and asking their approval does work on occasion. Therefore try to make the most out of the first two weeks, and really see which courses you might like. Do not underestimate the work load, north American courses are way more demanding than European ones.

Research and Extracurricular Activities

While I did not formally volunteer, I did help one professor with his research in cultural psychology. This involvement significantly enhanced my stay by providing academic and social engagement opportunities. I found it easier to form connections with local students through research projects and off-campus activities rather than through university-organized events, which were few for exchange students. Participating in student clubs also proved beneficial for social integration.

Exploration and Recreation

Utilizing services like Turo Car allowed me and my friends to take excursions to various hiking or ski trips. Use the time off on weekends to go see the lakes or hiking spots. My favourite was St.Mark's Summit, which provides a stunning view over nearby islands and other summits. Another must see are sunshine coast and Vancouver Island with its charming towns Tofino and Ucluelet. A few of my favourite neighbourhoods around Vancouver included Kitsilano and Main Street. Another tip for yoga enthusiasts like myself: I volunteered at a hot yoga Studio (Modo Yoga) in Kitsilano as an "Energy Exchange". I took care of the yoga studio for four hours each week and in exchange was able to participate in unlimited classes for free. This was a game changer for me as I was able to connect to people outside of university while maintaining a regular sport.

Final Thoughts

Overall, my exchange semester at UBC was a transformative experience. The blend of academic rigor, cultural immersion, and natural beauty made it an unforgettable journey. I highly recommend future exchange students to embrace both academic and extracurricular opportunities to make the most of their time at UBC.