

EXCHANGE REPORT

Queen's University

Spring 2019

BAI, Yu

Monthly Activity Log:

January, 2019

I arrived in Kingston late in the night on Jan 1st, the very first day of new year. Kingston is a small city, almost 1/2 of its people are students in Queen's. And it was all small houses in the neighborhood where students live.

First month was all about getting familiar with new life. Buildings at Queen's are just like castles and Canadians have been really nice. One of my professors even talked to me before lessons started to help me get better prepared.

I also took some time explored the city. It was really quite and slow-paced. Kingston only has one Main Street where almost all diners and other stores are located, a few blocks away from the campus. Walking down the Main Street, you can arrive at the Ontario Lake and enjoy the lake view.

I was quite excited about the coming months in Queen's.

February, 2019

I found myself off-campus housing before I came to Canada and I genuinely love the place I stay. It is a cream pink two-story gothic style house. I also had been really lucky to have five housemates who are also exchange students at Queen's.

February is the time when people had already gotten used to the new life at Queen's and started to meet lots of new friends and have fun. We also threw a lot of house parties at our place. I had great time drinking and laughing with friends around warm fireplace for so many nights while it was icy cold and snow outside.

Spring festival also happens in February. I planned a trip to Vancouver and then Yellowknife to see the polar light.

I met a friend who is also from HKUST and was exchanged to University of British Columbia during that time in Vancouver and travelled around. Vancouver's climate had been much more pleasant than east coast. Vancouver's biggest selling point as a tourism city must be its food. You can easily find great food at a random street corner.

After a few days, my friend and I went on the trip to Yellowknife which was a real mistake. Yellowknife must be the most popular destination for spring break. We booked accommodation like a month before and there were barely a few choices. It was so cold in Yellowknife, which is reasonable since it was close to the North Pole.

The main sightseeing activity in yellow knife is to go aurora hunting during night. You could

either get on a minibus and let people drive you around to wherever might be good to see the polar light or just go to a wooden house far away from the city so that you could see the light more clear. The house is quite simple and as for my case, it was actually built on the lake. We did see the polar light after a few nights. But it really depends on your luck, aurora might not appear a few days in a row or just so pale that could not be seen with human eyes.

People would go aurora hunting at night, usually from 10 P.M. to 3 A.M. while during daytime, nothing much to do. Yellowknife does have a few agencies who provide outdoor activities such as dog sliding and ice jet which are quite expensive and freezing cold because with the speed of those activities, the wind felt just like knives.

After all, it was nice that I could travel around even to places near the North Pole.

March, 2019

Studies has been quite stable during February so I got more opportunities to go out of town to other cities like Toronto and Montreal.

Toronto is an international city as Hong Kong but of course larger. Also, thanks to large number of immigrants, you can find great Chinese food in Toronto, hotpot, bobble tea, barbecue and traditional Cantonese food.

While in Montreal, it is of a different style from Toronto or Kingston. Since it used to be a French colony, lots of French style things can be seen in both its architecture and people. There were a lot more museums to visit in Montreal and more cultural district where you can see colorful graffiti and explore many cute stores. Also, Canadian traditional food is called poutine, which is actually fries with cheese and gravy on top. You can find best poutine in Montreal, totally different from those in other cities in Canada. Worth a try.

It snowed a lot in Canada. Everything was covered to white. Along the roads were piles of snow, as high as a meter or even higher. Rivers were frozen. Canada in winter is cold but beautiful as a wonderland.

April, 2019

This was the last month of my stay in Canada. I basically stayed in Kingston and got prepared for finals.

Queen's attaches great importance to case studies. So my team and I had lots of meetings and discussion before and built close connections. We also reviewed together and had lots of fun and helpful coffee chats with the professor.

Finals went on well and I finished all the exams in late April, which left sometime to travel.

Weather had become more pleasant in April. A few friends and I have planned a self-driving trip to Banff, a national park lies in Rocky Mountains.

We arrived in Calgary first and planned to drive through Banff to Edmonton. We have been really lucky since weather was good so the sky was really clear in Banff. Lakes were also started to unfreeze. The scenery was like the most significant picture you can think of. Banff is truly an amazing place to go and get relaxed. Just drive down the road with music and great people. It was one of the best times.

General exchange information:

1) Visa Procedures

You need to apply for visa at least one month and a half before leaving. Basically you filled in the forms, submit online. You will get a notification informing you to submit your passport to visa office. After this, do remember check your inbox carefully. I got an email named "procedure fairness", I thought it was only like an informing letter but in fact, I was asked to re-submit some documents I have already submitted before online. So I had to cancel my flight. Since they can't give me any exact date when I can get my visa so the only thing I could do is to wait and buy really expensive flight to Canada.

Be aware that we would be approved of visiting student visa, which gives you the same amount of time to stay in Canada, i.e. less than six months. While for visitors, you can have as many entries to the country as you want while as a student, it is going to be single entry. I am not quite sure if student status is required, but if not, I would definitely recommend applying for visiting visa.

2) Orientation Activities

Not much. There would be an orientation event which gathered all exchange students together. They would also organize activities such as going to Ottawa for skiing.

3) International Services & Activities

I could not remember much organized by school or international office.

4) Accommodations

You could either apply for on-campus hall or find off-campus housing yourself. There are tons of accommodations in the neighborhood, houses and apartments. I found my apartment on facebook page, whose link can be found on Queen's webpage, tons of choices and are all really cute places.

5) Courses Registration

Course registration starts way earlier than our school. What Queen's would do is to open course catalog like about three months before and you can start selecting courses. At first I thought it was just the course catalog had opened so we could browse what courses they provide. Actually, you could select courses from that time.

Remember to check the course equivalence with school office first in case you cannot transfer credits back.

Also, Queen's has lots of interesting classes you can take, such as mining & jewelry design.

6) Teaching & Assessment Methods

Queen's attaches great importance to case study. Class size is usually about 20 in business school, or maybe usually only around 20 people would come to class. We don't know. Professors are more than willing to talk to you in person, after class or by appointment. You can definitely reach out.

7) Sports & Recreation Facilities

Queen's has a really large gym, like a five-floor gym. With basketball field, tennis field and swimming pool. Many canteens on campus but sells pretty much same things. But sometimes you can see food trunks on the street, whether on campus or when you travel around. Food trunks sell the best western food. I had the best hotdogs in my life in one of the food trunks at downtown Vancouver.

8) Finance & Banking (including currency / expenses)

Canada is more expensive than Hong Kong. You'd better get prepared to cook by your self since usually if you eat out, it would be around 20 CAD, which is about 110 HKD. And the food is not that good, not many choices in Kingston. If you choose to exchange during spring semester, also you need a Canada goose or Moncler to help you survive the winter.

Housing is definitely cheaper though if you live off-campus. On-campus halls would be around 7000HKD and I lived in a house with five other housemates, right at downtown Kingston, is about 3500 HKD. In Canada, you never need to worry about area of your room, I think my bedroom was like 30 square meters.

As a Queen's student, you can easily open a bank account without too many documents required. I used scotia bank. The first day we arrived, scotia bank has come to the campus and bought us tickets to a hockey game and Queen's also set time aside during orientation for us to register with scotia bank.

9) Social Clubs & Networking Opportunities

I do not know much about clubs but I am sure there are a lot of them there. One of my housemates was on a politics group or something like this. I myself are not that into clubs but you can definitely find a club that you would enjoy at Queen's.

I got to meet new people mostly at house parties, since we did not have many things to do during cold cold cold winter but just invite friends over and drink. Queen's locates right next to the lake. They said during summer they would wear bikinis by the pier and jump into the lake. Sounds lots of fun.

10) Health & Safety

The campus is also closed to one of the largest hospitals in Kingston, though Kingston is not a big city anyway. Health insurance is a must for exchange students. You just log onto your student center and pay the fees. It was 200CAD and then you could use free health care.

I went to the hospital once. I went to the emergency at night around three in the morning. Though it is called emergency, no one was dealing things there as emergency at all. I waited three hours but still did not see the doctor. The nurse told me it would be longer if I come during daytime. I just gave up.

But Kingston is a really really safe place. Very few homeless people compared to Montreal. But none of these homeless people would scare you because they are taken good care of the social welfare system. Canadians are really really nice. People great strangers and ask them about their days. One of the charming things of Canada.

11) Food

Canada has way better Chinese food compared to America or any other countries outside China I guess. I do not think I could eat burgers or pizza everyday. You will get fed up with western food really quick. I just cook myself and get better and better at cooking. Some of my housemates are from Britain, whose food is famously bad. They also cook by themselves. They would cook strange sauce for giant amount, seal it, freeze it and eat it for the whole week. I felt so sorry for them. I tried to save them from the hell of the food but they are all vegetarians. I felt even more sorry.

Many westerners would choose to be vegetarians whether for health or for the environment. It would be really nice if you cook and offer them some of your dishes but remember to check if there is anything they do not eat first.

12) Transportation

In Kingston, as a Queen's student, you can take the bus for free, just show the driver your

student card. If you would like to take a taxi, there are some taxi companies and you need to call a cab. It is not very easy to just stop a taxi on the road.

If you would like to go to other cities traveling, there are also lots of options. If you drive, then you can just rent a car to nearby cities which would be really convenient considering you still need to go around at your destination city. You can also take mega bus or carpool platforms such as poparide and kangaride.

13) Climate

Really really cold in the winter, through January to April. I think the weather did not get any better until late April. It also snows a lot in Canada, the snow piles on the side of the street can be as high as a meter or even higher than a person. But indoors would be quite warm.

They usually have heaters in the rooms in large cities such as Toronto and Montreal. Halls also have heaters. The house I lived have a heater as well but is of a different type, which means it did not work that well. I bought myself a small heater on amazon. I also use heaters in Hong Kong. So it is not bad indoors.

In about early May, weather started to warm up. Sky was really beautiful especially at dawns. Clouds would be of rosy colors, even better than what I saw in Hong Kong.

14) Communication

As long as you speak English and are willing to talk, everything would be good. Canadians are so nice as I have said so many times in this report.

Just reach out to talk to others since I think improving one's English might also be a reason of going on exchange for many people. I used to take carpool to travel to other cities and talk to the driver for the whole trip.

15) Cautionary measures

Many Canadians have religions, most of them are Christians. Christians do not tolerate gays or lesbians in their religion. So, be aware of that.

Weed is also legit in Canada. If you are curious, for sure you can try it. But control yourself and do not even think about get any weed back to Hong Kong or any other places outside Canada unless weed is also legit there.

Winter in Canada is really cold. Make sure if you go out drink, go back home however drunk you are. I know people get too drunk and sleep on streets at LKF. But never do that in winter in Canada. You will be frozen to death. I am serious about it.

16) Other notes (if applicable)

To be honest, if you are a person like busy city life, do not go to Queen's. I know business school at Queen's has pretty high rankings but it is a small city after all. Kingston is really good if you would like to interact more with nice people and relax, it is also close to Toronto, Ottawa and Montreal so it is quite convenient getting around. All in all, I had boring but awesome time there.

Wish you all the best and enjoy your exchange life!

Items to bring:

You can basically buy everything you need there. You can find almost all ingredients at Asian markets. But here are a few things that I brought.

- Self-warm stickers.

Those things that work like a one-time heater and you can stick them onto your clothes to wherever you like. It would be so much expensive in Canada so if you need those, remember to pack a few.

- Passport

You need it to travel around just keep it safe with you.

- Clothes

It is not easy to buy cute clothes in Kingston. They do not even have Zara there. If you do not want to travel to Toronto/Montreal and bring back lots of clothes, pack some more winter clothes.

- SIM card

The cheapest package in Canada is usually about 300 HKD. So buy yourself some package if those in Hong Kong are cheaper or get some package on taobao.

- Adapter

Canadian on-wall plug-ins are of different standards from what in Hong Kong and it is not easy to get adapter there. Bring your own adapter.

- Medicine

As I said earlier in this report, going to hospital can be really annoying. Especially during winter, it is possible that you get cold often or have fever. It is better to get prepared. So buy yourself some medicine that you use quite often.

- Money

Sorry I can not think of any more things you can not easily buy in Canada. I did have some trouble with quilts. Canadians are so tough that they do not need thick quilt during their winter that surely can freeze people to death. They have down-filled quilts, which are warm but so expensive like around 5000 HKD. So I went on taobao and bought a thick cotton quilt and got it shipped to Canada.

I myself carried two 30-inch suitcase to Canada but I do not recommend it. Just leave your things at home and buy something you need there.

Useful links and contacts

You can find them easily on use websites or Queen's websites.

They would have an online video talking about all these stuff before you leave for Canada so do not miss that. For emergency, you will also know it on the orientation.