I spent one semester at the University of Ghana in the spring of 2017. The University of Ghana is located on the outskirts of Ghana’s capital city (Accra). I am a Geography major, and part of the reason I decided to spend my semester abroad in Ghana was because of their excellent Geography department.

Before you Go/What to Bring
I needed a visa from the Ghanaian consulate in Vancouver. I found the phone number online. The consular general made an appointment with me, as well as directed me to the documents I needed to fill out and bring to the meeting with him. It didn’t take long to process my visa once I was there; about 45 minutes.

Make an appointment with the travel health clinic. I needed a yellow fever vaccination, and a few other ones. Talk to the doctor about taking malaria pills as well.

Pack loose, light clothing. It is very hot so you can expect to sweat a lot. Don’t bring anything too valuable. If you plan on going out, however, many of the fancier restaurants and clubs have dress codes so a nice pair of shoes and more formal clothing may be necessary. I would recommend bringing shower shoes as well. It is recommended to sleep under a mosquito net, so you can either get one before leaving or buy one there. Some toiletries are hard to come by in Ghana, such as floss, and sunscreen, so purchasing those before leaving is a good idea. A universal adaptor is a good thing to have as well, but many of the student in my hostel had issues with the wall outlets destroying their electronics. You can buy small adaptors on campus for around $1.

Travel and Transportation
Before you leave, you should be sent an email from the University of Ghana International Programs office to ask if you’d like to be picked up at the airport. When you arrive, have their contact information on hand in case they are late (as they were when I arrived!)
The airport is only a few minutes drive from the University, and you will also be dropped off when you are leaving.

Getting around Ghana is quite an adventure. Locals take small buses called ‘trotros’ which are by far the cheapest way to get around. You can use them to get around Accra, or between different cities. There is a tro-tro stop just outside the University. Buses exist at a slightly higher cost for longer journeys. Taxis and uber are common services as well, and cost a little more money.

Taking a weekend trip to the Volta Region, and hiking up to Wli Falls, with some friends from Sweden who lived at the hostel with me.

Finances
Ghana’s currency is called ‘cedis.’ There about 3.5 cedis to each Canadian dollar (at least that was the exchange rate when I was there). You can use your debit/credit cards at ATMs to get cedis. There are ATMs all over campus. However, you will probably be charged about $5.00 each time you take out money unless you have a Scotiabank account, in which case it is free. If you wish to open a Scotiabank account, it is possible to do so on campus.

If you wish to get a phone plan while in Ghana (which most international students do) it really helps to get your phone unlocked beforehand. There is a mall very close to the University where you can find a phone provider to start a plan, and you can buy data credits on campus. Most of the locals use Whatsapp to communicate.
Arrival and Orientation
The University of Ghana provides a 2-day orientation for students the week before classes begin. A lot of valuable information is provided here, and it’s a great chance to meet other international students.

Visiting a local village on a fieldtrip

Accommodation/Living at the University
International students get to stay at one of two International Student Hostels. They are comprised of a mix of international and Ghanaian students. Unless you specify that you would like a single room (which costs a little more) you will be paired with a roommate. My roommate was from Manitoba, but many of my friends were paired with roommates from countries other than their own. The hostels are quite basic. You need to buy your own toilet paper and bring your own bedding. There is no hot water. The Wifi is often slow or off completely. There are shared kitchens on each floor that include a fridge and two hotplates. If students wish to cook they need to either bring or buy their own cooking supplies (pot, kettle, cutlery, etc). There is a market very close to the hostel that sells fresh fruit, hot food, and many other basic supplies. There is also laundry services available at a cost, in the hostel. You may choose to use the service, or hand wash your clothes.

The campus is beautiful. There are many small restaurants open during the week at various spots. There is also a pool, a gym, and an athletic oval. There is a large library that provides a good place to study. International Programmes Office, about a 25 minutes walk from the International Student Hostels, has a computer room and decent wifi. This is the place to go if you have any
questions/concerns/comments. There is also a small medical clinic open on campus from 8-2 pm, and a hospital located just off campus open 24/7.

There are usually 3-4 Ghanaians that work for the International Programs Office that live at the International Hostel. They are there to assist international students and attend to any questions/concerns students have.

Kenkey, a traditional food, made from fermented corn flour dough served inside a corn husk with spicy sauces.

**Academics**

Classes are structured differently than they are in Canada. If you choose to study in Ghana, you
will have to be open-minded and aware that the education system is different than ours. Classes
don’t tend to start until the second or third week of the semester. Lecturers don’t provide a lot of
concrete instruction for assignments, so you may have to ask them or the other students for
clarity. There is less homework throughout the semester than you will be used to. Usually, 30%
of the grade comes from an Interim Assessment which can either be a test or group project, and
70% from the final exam. It really helps to make friends in the class to ask them questions. Each
class usually has a class rep who is often very friendly and helpful. All of my classes had
whatsapp groups so students could alert each other about lecture rescheduling, due dates, etc.

Before you go, take time to look at the courses offered, and which semester they are offered in.
Be aware that you will have to apply for course credit through SFU. You will need to ask your
instructors for a course outline and some other information when you are going through this
process.

Culture and Travel

The culture in Ghana is very different from in Canada. I found that it helped to read a bit about it
before coming. It is really interesting to get to know the Ghanaians and ask them as many
questions as you can. There are dozens of local languages in Ghana, but the main one spoken
around Accra is Twi. Twi classes are offered for international students. Ghanaians are very
appreciative if you try to speak a few twi words with them.

Despite what many people believe, Ghana is not a very dangerous country. However, you do
need to exercise caution at markets and places with large groups of people, as pickpockets do
exist. Women travellers may feel like they get heckled or cat-called at a lot. It helps to travel in
groups. Use your own discretion as to whether or not a situation is safe or not and don’t do
anything you are not comfortable with.

You may find yourself with more free time than you are used to in Canada during the semester.
It is exciting to get out of Accra and see other parts of the country. Ghana has a rich culture to
explore. There are many beautiful beaches, historical sites, and hikes to do. For nice beaches,
head to Kokrobite, Busia, Ada Foah, Takoradi, and many others. Watch out for strong rip tides!
If you are looking for time away from the big city and want to visit the mountains, visit the Volta
Region. In Cape Coast you can see and take tours of old slave castles and other historical
monuments. It helps to have a good guide book to help you along on your adventures. It is also
quite easy to visit other countries as well. I visited Togo and it was really fun! Other international
students went to Cote D'Ivoire and Burkina Faso and had great experiences.

If you are ever lost or unsure while traveling, just ask someone! Ghanaians are usually very
approachable and easy to talk to.
Social and Extracurricular Activities
One of the highlights of my trip was taking a traditional dance class. It was an official class offered at the University through the Performing Arts department. International students are also able to take African drumming and theatre classes as well. If you are interested in plays/performances, the Performing Arts department offers plays and shows almost every weekend on campus.

Many of the international students chose to spend 1 day a week volunteering for an organization or charity. Information will be provided about this during orientation week.

Advice for other students
It takes a little while to adjust to a new way of living. Be patient with yourself and give yourself lots of time to learn. Making friends - both local and international - really helps. Having some books and music or even pictures from home can be a great way to unwind if you feel homesick or overwhelmed. Try to say yes to new experiences! Spending a semester at the University of Ghana is both challenging and very rewarding. Make the most of your experience, learn lots, and have fun!