Preparation for exchange

As I decided to drive down to San Diego, I was able to bring more stuff than if I had flown down. With the extra space in my car I was able to pack my clothes, bedding and cooking utensils. This saved me the hassle of finding and buying living essentials when I arrived in San Diego. It took me 5 days to drive from Coquitlam to San Diego but could probably have been done in 3 if I hadn’t stopped so much and taken the I-5 instead of the coast. Driving down saved me the cost of a flight down and enabled me to bring more stuff. However, the cost was the price of my motels, food and gas. I drove down with a friend so we ended up splitting most of those costs, and we drove down in the offseason so our nights were a cheaper than usual. Financially, I set up a US bank account through TD Bank the partner of TD Canada Trust before leaving. TD Bank has no branches on the West Coast but the account I set up had unlimited debit card uses and withdrawals from other bank machines so that was not an issue for me. As well, I would recommend applying for the International Exchange Bursary.

During Exchange

I arrived in San Diego for international student orientation; however, I was not admitted into student housing when I arrived since it was not available yet. There was an option to apply for early arrival for 40$ US a night; however, I stayed with a family friend in order to save cash. Orientation was important and I recommend signing up for the orientation events before arriving as they were where I met my core group of friends while abroad.

I stayed in Villa Alvarado, the on campus housing for upper division students. It consisted mostly of transfer students and international students. It was great since most of my friends I made during orientation lived near or with me. Additionally, I received an e-mail saying that I was eligible for a housing scholarship. I filled out the application and received the award. It saved me from being totally broke on exchange. I had friends email the Housing Office asking if they were eligible or not and did not receive a response, so I am not too sure on the criteria to be selected. The best option is to keep an eye on your email in the weeks leading up to exchange because I do not believe the application was available publicly. Everyone I know who received the email and filled out an application also received the award. If you know people attending the school before hand I would look into renting a house with them either near Pacific Beach, which is a bit of a commute to school, or near campus. Living on campus had its perks, especially as it was free for me; however, all the friends I met down there wished that we had our own place together.

Academically, classes were fairly similar to SFU. I would highly recommend taking the intro to surfing class. However, the credit will not transfer back home. Just make sure that you secure a method of transportation to the beach and back because it is a difficult commute without a car. As well, at SDSU I had no tutorials or labs, so there is much more time available in the week to get out and explore California.

During my stay I was able to explore both San Diego and the surrounding areas. Some of my favourite experiences outside of San Diego were, Los Angeles, the Grand Canyon, camping in Joshua Tree National Park, Disneyland, and going to Anaheim Ducks games. Within San Diego the always perfect weather made it easy to hang at the many beautiful beaches (La Jolla, Sunset Cliffs, Mission
Beach, the list goes on!), my favourite being Pacific Beach. Other than the beaches, I’d recommend visiting Old Town, Balboa Park, Coronado, and the Downtown area. As well I did a couple really cool hikes in San Diego, including Torrey Pines, Cedar Creek Falls, and Stonewall Peak. Be sure to bring lots of water and check if you need to register for a hike before doing one. There are weird regulations and rules for permits to go hiking in certain parts of San Diego. Its always a good idea to find out if you need a permit before doing a hike down there. I also loved the sports experiences I had in San Diego. Definitely check out a baseball game at Petco Park, and a SDSU basketball game. I wasn’t there during football season but if you can try and check out the San Diego Chargers, and the SDSU football team.

We also made a couple of trips to Tijuana throughout our stay in San Diego. We went down for 3 different nights out throughout the year, and although we did not run into any problems we had friends and friends of friends who did. When we did decide to go across the border we had a couple of big rules. These rules are not fail-proof but the key to traveling there is being smart. Be sure to do research and understand exactly where you’re going before hand. (If you’d like to ask me about my experience travelling to Tijuana or about the exchange in San Diego feel free to contact the exchange team and get my contact info to talk about it!)

Reflection After Exchange

I think the biggest lesson I learned from exchange was that I can explore and adventure anywhere. The biggest factors are my mindset, the mindset of the people around me and time. In San Diego all three of those factors aligned. I had more free time as I was not working, volunteering or spending as much time in class (I had to be in class less often, I wasn’t skipping!). The friends I made were mostly international students who had travelled a much farther distance than I had and so being in America was a bigger deal for them. This led to them wanting to explore every nook and cranny of America and pushed me to do more than I would have done. Finally, my mindset changed as I was also looking to explore more often and take advantage of this experience. So my biggest lesson and biggest piece of advice would be to always be looking for exciting experiences, surround yourself with people looking to do the same (this is easy on exchange! Almost everyone is!), and schedule the time to those exciting things! Apart from that, I feel like I really did grow as a person. Having to live away from home was a huge learning experience. Although the details are rather boring, I’ll recommend to anyone still living at home that exchange was such a great time to develop into an actual self sufficient person. I’d recommend San Diego State to anyone looking to travel abroad! It may not have been very far away, but I still got a wonderfully international experience from the friends I made.