Hej Hej! I am a 4th year Bachelor of Science student majoring in Health Science. I went on exchange to Uppsala University because not only did the university sound reputable with a vibrant student life, Sweden has been on top of my go-to list.

I personally went on an exchange because I was getting bored of Vancouver and really wanted a temporary getaway, especially before I graduate. Furthermore, I wanted to improve my independence, meanwhile get to experience student life on residence.

Uppsala is a great place for students. The whole town is the University, that may sound strange but when you're there you will see. There are 13 student nations, which you can choose from to join. In these nations you can participate in all sorts of activities, from choir to soccer, to work and partying. Only students are allowed to enter, which makes it even better, because you all have something in common. They are always open for lunch, brunch, dinner, party, study, Fika (coffee time) or just if you want a place to go with friends.

Travel & Visas

The best way to get to Uppsala is to travel to Stockholm Airport and then take the train to Uppsala C or you can save money and take the bus, which takes 35 minutes instead of 17, but at half the price of the train ride. Getting around is straightforward, especially because almost everyone is fluent in English. Make sure you arrive with a credit card that has a chip and pin; most places in Sweden accept credit cards, and some (like the bus) don’t even accept cash.

Prior to my departure, I applied for a student visa online. It was not the most intuitive process, and for some reason my application got mixed up and the decision was sent to Sudan (instead of Canada). You get the actual visa when you arrive in Sweden at the Migration Verket. Make sure you line up at the Migrations Verket at least 1 hour before they open, or else you will commute all the way there and wait in a cue for 3-4 hours, and then realize they wont even get to half of the people waiting. Other than that, the process is free and straightforward, mine just happened to be the odd mishap.

Financial Details

Studying in Scandinavia will obviously be more expensive than Canada. However, there can be some ways to maximize your dollar’s buying power. For groceries, the cheapest places are Willy’s and Lidl, which are worth the commute if you go once every week to stock up. In most restaurants and bars, a beer will cost you SEK 40-50 ($7 cad), a glass of wine perhaps a little more. Dinner starts at around SEK 100-150 ($15-20 CAD) drinks not included. Eating out at lunchtime is cheaper; expect to pay somewhere around SEK 55-85 for a meal including a soft drink, salad and tea/coffee. Here is an average monthly budget to give you some idea of the cost of living in Sweden; Food: SEK 2,000. Accommodation: SEK 3,200. Local travel: SEK 500. Telephone/internet: SEK 300.

Sometimes you just have to remember that you are after all living in Sweden, and it doesn’t help to compare constantly to Canada. Taking the bus can get expensive (30 kronor/1 hr ticket), but you can get a monthly student pass for cheaper or purchase a bike. Bikes average around 500-1000 kronor. I would suggest getting a really cheap bike that can get you from point a to b, since the nice bikes often get stolen (4 of my friends had there’s stolen within the first 2 weeks of purchase). I personally purchased an expensive bike because I arrived a little late and couldn’t find any decent deals. I thought at the time that I will be able to sell it… bad idea. The problem is, most students leave Uppsala at the same time near the end of the semester, which is when bikes get sold for dirt-cheap. Hence, you either let your bike go for a ridiculous price (at least 1/10 of what you paid new), or you just don’t sell it and hope it doesn’t get stolen if you plan on coming back.

I personally didn’t find living to be too expensive compared to Vancouver—deemed to be the most unaffordable city in North America. Something important to note however, Uppsala is much cheaper than Stockholm. The prices I have approximated are only reflective of Uppsala, whereas in Stockholm they can be significantly more.

**Accommodation & Living**

This is crucial, so pay attention! There is a housing “crisis” in Sweden. There are simply not enough rooms and flats to go round. Fortunately, there are still towns and cities where conditions are better and where all or most students do get accommodation in time. That being said, as an SFU student, I was guaranteed housing! If you plan on being a free mover (getting your own dorm for a better rate), you are not guaranteed accommodation, and I advise against this (since you will not save much anyways). Remember that the situation will vary according to where you choose to study. Some universities or university colleges have more rooms than others. Personally, I guaranteed my student housing in advance because I did not want to arrive with no place to live.

If you want to meet international students, experience dorm life, be walking distance from parties, while being relatively close to town, Flogsta is definitely the place to be. This is where I lived, which is a large student community with a mixture of Swedish and international students. It is a lovely place with your own bathrooms and a shared kitchen.

Although it is a somewhat of a far walk from the city center (35-40 minutes), if you don’t mind biking, this could be the choice for you (15 minutes) or bussing is only 5 minutes. Another positive is that most events happen in Flogsta. For instance, a residence wide snow ball fight was held here, eating tournaments, dress up parties, and other fun activities.

Flogsta is right next to ICA (local grocery store), which is actually fairly priced and often has deals that no other ICA in town offers. To conclude, if you get any form of housing, just take it instead of living in a hostel for the first month or two of your stay!
Academic Details

An academic year in Uppsala is divided into two semesters. Classes can go for the whole semester (e.g., September to December) while others only last for two months. Some even last for one month! Although it is true a semester goes until January 14, many classes end before Christmas. If you fail a course in Uppsala, you have an additional 5 chances at retaking the exam until you pass, and on your transcript, it will not indicate how many times your re-took the exam or course.

The Swedish course is a little bit of a waste, but it’s very enjoyable if you make some good friends in the course (which is very easy to do since most people are international students). You learn basic words that can definitely help in Sweden.

I personally took 1 theology course and 2 medical science (master’s level) courses. I found all courses to be very easy, while the grading schemes similar to SFU, but at the end of the course you get a pass/fail on your transcript anyways. Professors are extremely friendly, and one had all of the students over for an amazing end of semester celebratory dinner.

Country Information

The weather in Uppsala is very similar to Vancouver. It was very sunny and warm during September and a bit of October. In November, it became cold, rainy, and windy. Days get dark by 4pm and most of the time it just stays gray the whole day. In December, it did not even snow, but this is rare in Uppsala.

Swedish people are extremely lovely once you get to know them. Initially, they can be a little difficult to break, but I was lucky enough to become friends with some amazing Swedes who taught me a fair bit of the Swedish way of life.

Everything and everywhere in Sweden relies on cues. Accessing any service requires you to take a number and wait for your number to be called. So when you enter a store, make sure you look for the “take a number” machine! Furthermore, most stores are closed on Sundays so try not to run errands on that day!

Social and Extra Curricular Activities

Depending on where you decide to live, your corridor will determine a lot concerning your stay. My corridor in Flogsta hosted a massive Halloween Party, had corridor Fika nights, and we had a Tour de Chamber (this is where each room in the corridor has to come up with a new drink and everyone in the corridor goes to each room and try it). So where you live will determine a lot of what you do.

If you have read the other reports, you will know that nations are a huge thing in Uppsala. You have to be part of a nation in order to get a student card. It really doesn’t matter which nation you belong to. I personally joined Stockholm’s Nation (really good nation), but if I could do it again, I would probably just join the cheapest one. Each nation has different things happening on different nights. If you want to make more friends, you can also work at a nation, which can be a lot of fun. Furthermore, you should definitely attend Gasque or a ball while you are in Uppsala. Gasques are a themed 3 course dinner where there is lots of singing and drinking involved. It is a ton of fun and I sometimes wish there were traditional drinking songs in Canada!
What you’ve learned and the challenges you faced

The biggest challenge was definitely the bike issue. When I got here, I tried to get a deal on a bike, which is impossible because I arrived 1 week after the semester had started. I was running out of time and decided to just purchase a new bike from Biltema. The reason I bought a bike was because I realized how unreliable the bus system in Uppsala was, and the last bus ran at 11:45pm. I bought a poncho, which I soon realized is not Swedish at all, but it sucks to bike in the rain (you get soaking wet). That being said, buying a bike was the best decision I made.

The greatest challenge about life in Sweden was the language. It was fun learning, and while most people spoke English, there are a lot of older people who struggle, so you need to be careful when booking tickets, accommodation, transport and so forth, because that’s where problems arise.

Don’t be offended either if Swedes don’t seem friendly, they really are, you just have to approach them first. Just realize that they are not as “outgoing” as some Canadians, but when you approach them and they realize your not from there they are super friendly and helpful. Despite any challenges, be patient, and make the most of every day, because before you know it, you will be home.

What you wish you knew before you left

The importance of arriving before orientation week! This is the only thing I wish I had not missed. During orientation, everything is laid out for you, and you get to meet tons of international students. So arrive in Sweden 2 weeks prior to classes starting. Also, do not, I repeat, do not, get an expensive bike. It will get stolen or you won’t be able to sell it.

If I could do it all over again, I wish I went on exchange sooner. I completed my exchange with 1 more semester to go until I graduate. Had I known how amazing it would have been, I would have done this exchange much earlier, and took some of my hard pre-requisites in Sweden. I also wish I took fewer electives in SFU and completed them in Sweden.

Words of Wisdom

Just have fun. How amazing is it that you are living in Sweden and meeting fantastic people?? When things come up, just go for it. I’ve made so many new friends around the world and have gone to so many places in Europe it is unbelievable. One semester will pass by so fast that it is just a blur of craziness. Try to savour every moment because it is definitely an experience you will never forget. The best thing is the feeling when you return home, that you went on exchange, and only you know what it was like, you cannot begin to compare or explain to anyone else, because they will never fully understand!

Do/Don’ts

Do: buy a bike. You will regret not buying one when you are walking home at 3 in the morning cold and tired.

Do: make sure your bike has lights and a bell! If you don’t, you may get caught by a police and pay a hefty fine!

Do: work at a nation and go to their events! It is the best way to meet Swedish people and also experience the Swedish culture first hand. You can also practice your Swedish
while you work and get free food and vip access to their events! [ISS Note: be sure to check the length duration of your ability to work on a study permit, if applicable - http://www.studyinsweden.se/Living-in-Sweden/Working-in-Sweden/]

Do: travel! Flights are not very expensive in Europe (check Skyscanner and Eurobus). Get a couple friends, be spontaneous, and go on weekend trips to anywhere you desire!

Don’t: travel too much, Uppsala has a lot of activities that you don’t want to miss if you went travelling.

Don’t: worry about costs. You’ll wish you didn’t try to save those extra few dollars and tried that amazing Swedish cake when you come home.