Hello fellow students!

I am a fourth year International Studies student at SFU, and during my Spring 2013 exchange I studied at Uppsala University in Sweden. I had an incredible experience abroad and now I am here to share with those of you that are planning to go abroad some advice.

**Preparation for exchange**

1) Research: before going on my exchange I did a little research about the country where I wanted to go to, and the partner universities that were available to me. Use Wikipedia, travel guides, and other reports written by exchange students to get a general idea about the country and city you are travelling to. Doing so can give you a pretty good idea about the customs, food and culture of the place and may make it easier to ease into your new surroundings. On the other hand, it may be very exciting and surprising to just jump into a new country without any prior knowledge.

2) Packing: What to bring will probably depend a lot on when and where you are going for exchange. If you are travelling to Scandinavia during the winter, a warm jacket, scarf and sturdy shoes are a must. You should also consider what you can purchase at your destination and how much luggage you are able to travel comfortably with. Generally, I think it is wiser to pack less than what you can carry, since there is a chance you will be bringing some merchandise back.

3) Travel, transportation and financial details: prices of flights and other travel-related accommodations can usually be found online. It is a good idea to book your flights early since it will cost less, but also check regularly for special deals. When travelling, you may want to prepare for all sorts of situations such as delays and cancelled flights. In my case, my transfer flight was delayed over 10 hours and I ended up having to sleep at the airport and ended up arriving a day late. To get to Uppsala, you need to fly to Arlanda airport in Stockholm and then take the train from there to Uppsala Central station. The train ride should take around 15 minutes. Before traveling to Europe, it is also a good idea to make sure your credit card pins will work abroad, since European credit cards only have 4 digits (and we have 5).
During Exchange

1) Arrival and orientation: Uppsala is a small city, but it can be hard to find your way around with heavy luggage (and snow). I recommend reading through the provided instructions thoroughly and asking for directions as needed. The city buses will take you almost anywhere you need to go and the main best stop is just right outside the Uppsala Central Station. If you plan on taking the bus, make sure you have your credit card ready to use. Buses in Uppsala do not accept cash, and payment can only be made with a prepaid bus card, credit card or via text message (which you will need to set up with a Swedish phone number).

Orientation in Uppsala University is very comprehensive. It is hosted by the student nations (student clubs unique to Uppsala), and provides a great opportunity to meet Swedish and other exchange students. There is a very diverse mixture of activities which go on through the week. Tours and guides are offered during orientation week, and I highly recommend going on them to familiarize yourself and to learn a little about the city and university’s history.

Accommodation: The student dormitories in Uppsala are great, there is a sense of community in each area and many of them have their own traditions. They are all located fairly close to the city center and university, and with a bicycle you can get around town in less than 20 minutes. My living area, Kantorsgatan, is 10 minutes away from the city center and is located in a rather quiet locale. The corridors are small (5 students), with individual toilets and a shared kitchen. Most importantly, get to know your corridor mates! You will be spending a lot of time with each other, so make it fun!

Academic details: Classes at Uppsala are very different than the ones at SFU. In some classes, there are multiple professors, multiple meeting places and a fluid schedule. It is not unusual to have many course conflicts, and when that occurs, it is up to you to decide which class to prioritize. Labs and workshops feel a lot more open and engaging and students will regularly be asked to challenge the ideas of others and defend their own arguments from others. Grading is also on a different scale, it is simply separated into: Pass with distinction, Pass, and fail.

Country information: Sweden can get fairly cold during the winter, with temperatures up to negative 20, accompanied with heavy snowfall. Weather aside, Uppsala is a beautiful city, it has one of the biggest cathedrals in Northern Europe, a castle and a beautiful river that runs through the city center. It is also very close to Stockholm, the capital of Sweden. From Uppsala Central station, it only takes about 30 minutes by train to Stockholm central (although the ticket can be quite pricey). Standards of living are very high in Sweden, and this is reflected in the prices of clothing, electronics and food in restaurants.
Social and extracurricular activities: In Uppsala, most of the student social events are hosted by the student nations and can range from sporting events, pub nights, club nights, shows and workshops. Physical activities are also very popular in Sweden. Going to the gym, cycling, snowboarding, cross-country skiing is all popular activities. One thing to look out for is Valborg at the end of April. Valborg is an enormous gathering of students from all over Sweden to Uppsala, where festivities and activities take place the entire day. Valborg activities include concerts, bonfires, champagne gallops and boat races.

**Reflection after exchange**

I’ve learned a lot during my exchange. I learned about Sweden, about Europe, culture, sustainability, value of education, of friendship and mostly about myself. Throughout my exchange I have constantly challenged myself to experience new things, to go beyond my comfort zone and to keep an open mind during my travels. To those going on exchange, I urge you all to challenge your limits, maintain a positive learning attitude, stay curious and most of all, love your new temporary home.
Photos

Top Left: Culture festival at Botanical Garden
Top Right: Uppsala Cathedral
Bottom Left: Valborg Bonfire
Bottom Right: Fyris River, Uppsala