For my semester abroad I was lucky enough to visit Lund, Sweden, where I studied for one semester at Lund University. While I was really happy where I ended up, I recommend putting some thought into the school you chose to apply to, as well as the city where it's located. For example, Lund was a really small city that consisted mostly of the university, but it was less than an hour away from Copenhagen, so a larger urban space was still accessible. If you want to spend your exchange in a larger city, or a smaller town, make sure to do some research on the city where your exchange university is located.

You should definitely put thought into what courses you want to enroll in, but keep in mind that most courses for exchange students (at least in my experience) are quite introductory and basic. I was excited to take challenging courses in my area of study, and was a bit disappointed to be, essentially, in a 100 level course. It's also good to be aware that classes probably won't take up a lot of your time, so make sure to be social and make plans for your free time!

Obviously packing will depend greatly on where you're traveling to, going to Sweden I packed a lot of warm winter clothes. Even if you don't anticipate particularly hot or cold weather, it's good to be prepared just in case; I talked to people who didn't realize how cold it would be and weren't prepared at all. It's also nice to pack a few things to make you more comfortable in your new accommodation, I brought a blanket that smelled like home and a few pictures of my friends and family.

It's possible to do research on the cost of living in different cities, google your city and you'll see general prices for anything from renting an apartment to grocery shopping. This, as well as a good understanding of the currency where you'll be staying,
helps you to recognize how much things should cost when you arrive. On my exchange rent was a lot cheaper than it would be in Vancouver, but other costs like eating out and drinking were more similar, if not more expensive. Make sure to budget!

I was lucky in that I was met at the airport by Lund University volunteers. When I landed in Copenhagen (the nearest airport), there was a group waiting to take me to Lund, which is so helpful when you’re alone in a new place and exhausted by travel. When I got to Lund we were taken to a welcome event where we got information, were given keys to our housing, etc. This is also a great chance to meet some people and make plans.

I lived in a studio flat in the Eddan housing area. My housing was quite far from campus, but I figured out the bus routes pretty quickly. Lots of people bought bikes, it’s really easy to find them and it makes a commute cheaper and easier.

If you’re traveling to Sweden, you might find that you don’t connect with a lot of Swedish students, I found this too. In Lund, there are a large amount of international students, and if you go to study abroad social events, you’re likely to connect with students from around the world. As well, Swedish students can take a little while to open up—you might feel like it’s hard to get to know them. But if you strike up a conversation or invite them to hang out or go for a drink, you’ll get there.

I recommend taking advantage of events organized by international mentors or study abroad volunteers—this is a really easy way to meet people. Everybody is hoping to make friends in a new country, so it’s really easy! Even if you don’t think you’ll enjoy the activity, give it a try. I’m a pretty introverted person and I was worried that everyone I met would be extraverted, but by going to events I managed to meet people who felt the
same way as me, and those were the people I spent the most time with when I was away.

I think that the experience of doing study abroad really helped me grow as a person. I became more confident and outgoing because of the necessity for putting yourself out there and meeting new people. I also had the opportunity to travel, sometimes with new friends and sometimes all by myself, and this taught me so much. Being somewhere where you have access to dozens of countries at really low prices (look at skyscanner.com or omio.com for cheap flights) is such a different experience than living in North America!

Something I wish I had known before I left, and something people will probably tell you, is how fast time will go once you arrive at your destination and get settled in. My first week in Lund was a little overwhelming but once I started to adjust to the city, time flew by. So make sure you take advantage of every moment. Also, try to meet as many new people as possible—I knew students who did exchange with friends from their home university and spend their whole semester with them. Obviously it is great to have someone you know nearby, but don’t let that stop you from meeting new, international friends. I met some really amazing people while I was away who I’m still in contact with, and who I look forward to visiting someday!

Your exchange will be so much fun, so remember to enjoy and take advantage of the awesome opportunity! Make sure you do research and preparation if you are nervous, and be prepared for things to not happen exactly as you expect them to. Be ready to adjust to cultural differences, and take them as an opportunity to learn about how people live differently in different parts of the world! Have fun and be safe!