Exchange Report

Introduction

I am a business major with a concentration in Finance who attended San Diego State University in the United States. I went to San Diego State University on August 18, 2013 and I returned to Vancouver, Canada on December 18, 2013. All in all, I had a blast. San Diego State, not to mention the city of San Diego has a lot to offer. The people are great and the school is gorgeous. You will definitely fall in love with the scenery and the city, whether you intend to or not.

Preparation for Exchange

When you are preparing for exchange, you are bound to feel nervous and excited. Just accept this. View your journey on exchange as a break, as a vacation, and/or as an adventure. Rationalizing my trip in these terms really helped settle down the nerves. Going to a new place where you don’t know a single soul can be difficult, but you shouldn’t let your fears get in the way of your aspirations. Everything worth having in life resides on the other side of your fears so don’t let the nerves get the best of you.

I flew from Bellingham to San Diego because it is much cheaper than flying from Vancouver. I saved about $100. After reaching San Diego, there are multiple ways to reach San Diego State University. I took a cab which cost $45. In hindsight, I should have taken a shuttle from the airport to San Diego State University which was only $14. It takes about 20-30 minutes to reach the university from the airport depending on the traffic. When you are packing for your trip, you should know that you can only bring one suitcase and two pieces of carry-on
baggage. The one suitcase can weigh no more than 50 pounds. When it comes to packing you should focus on the basics. Pack light, but not too light. Pack some sweaters as it can get chilly towards December. I packed a lot of beaters and shorts as well. The weather in San Diego is phenomenal. I was there for four months and it only really rained for two days. So be prepared for the sun. When it comes to cooking utensils, pack the basics. You can always pick up stuff from the dollar store in San Diego.

The cost of living in San Diego is very much similar to Vancouver. It can be expensive depending on where you choose to stay. Most of the places you will visit will accept all credit cards; however I would recommend that you create a USA bank account. I personally went to Bellingham a few weeks before my departure and I opened up an account with US Bank. You can always open up a bank account on campus as well. There is a US Bank on campus. It’s very important for you to do so because otherwise if you just stick to using your Canadian credit card, you will have to pay a lot of additional fees and it will stack up.

**During Exchange**

Exchange students are required to arrive at the university one week prior to the official arrival date. As a result, I arrived on August 18, 2013. Arrival was smooth. All I had to do was show the front office my early arrival form and I was granted a key to my apartment. The next day is when orientation begins. Orientation although it got boring at times and you didn’t learn much was still a blast because I got to meet a lot of people that stuck with me throughout my semester at State. Everyone you attend orientation with is an international student so take this opportunity to make friends from all walks of life; you’ll definitely start your exchange on the
right foot if you do so. During orientation you will be given several lectures from the SDSU international faculty. In addition, you will get your student ID and you will also be given a tour of the school. These sessions are mandatory. The last three days consist of activities that are not mandatory; however I recommend you definitely check these out. For an additional fee, SDSU will take you to the San Diego Zoo, give you a tour of San Diego, as well as take you to Pacific Beach. I recommend you take full advantage of this because not only will it enrich your experience at State, but you’ll get the chance to create memories with new friends and acquaintances that will stick with you for a lifetime.

**Accommodation and living**

If you choose to live on campus, you are most likely going to be living in Villa Alvarado. This is where I stayed and where most of the exchange students reside. Although costly and a tad bit far from certain locations on campus, Villa Alvarado is pretty decent. Each apartment consists of four individuals, two international/exchange students, and two American transfer students. Each apartment in Villa Alvarado includes the basics: kitchen, living room, two bedrooms, balcony, and a bathroom. These apartments are somewhat old and rather expensive ($880/month), but if you want to be surrounded with other exchange students, there really is no place better.

**Academic details**

When it comes to the learning setting, SDSU is very similar to SFU. You’ll most likely be in a medium sized lecture hall. The professors are awesome. They really go out of their way to help students. However, unlike SFU, the learning atmosphere is a lot more laid back. People are
more friendly and sociable. In addition, compared to SFU, I would say that SDSU is easier. I personally didn’t invest much time into studying and still walked out with high grades. If you can keep up at SFU, SDSU should definitely be a walk in the park for you.

**Country information**

San Diego is definitely a driving city. The public transportation system is very inefficient. As a result, it’s very important you either drive up to San Diego yourself or you make friends with people who have cars like I did. Weather wise, the sun is always out. As a Vancouverian, you are probably not used to seeing so much sun in your life (especially during the winter time) so you’ll be in for a treat. Some places to visit that I would highly recommend are the San Diego Zoo, Pacific Beach, Coronado beach, Fashion Valley, Downtown San Diego, Mexico, Los Angeles and Las Vegas. At the university itself, there is also a lot to do. San Diego State does in fact have a party reputation. It was ranked as one of the best party schools in the United States by Playboy magazine a few years ago and although the hype has died down a bit, you’ll definitely get the chance to go to some crazy parties. Your social life will be a hundred times better than your social life at SFU. That is if you network and make friends with the right people. However, worry not because almost everyone you encounter will be friendly and will go out of their way to make you a part of their life so don’t be afraid to put yourself out there. Moreover, there are tons of musicals acts performing all over San Diego as well as on campus. When I was there, Drake performed at San Diego State so you should definitely keep your eyes and ears open.

**Reflection After Exchange**
Exchange was definitely one of the highlights of my life. Not only did I get the chance to enrich my experiences, I also got the opportunity to learn a lot about myself. Whether you intend to or not, you are bound to see yourself for who you truly are. Exchange will cut you open and leave you looking at the remains, metaphorically speaking. In other words, you’ll truly know yourself after your exchange semester comes to an end. The road will be filled with many ups and downs. When I first arrived, it was a somewhat difficult adjustment. No matter where you go, you are bound to suffer from some sort of culture shock. However, if you just stick with it, your days will definitely get better. Soon enough, you’ll be acting and talking like the locals.

In conclusion, now is your time to shine. You are young and you are filled with passion so take advantage of your youth and aim to create the best memories while you are on away on exchange. Make the best of your time and create the exchange experience that you desire. Don’t depend on no one, but yourself. If you can do the above, you’ll come back as a completely different version of yourself. You won’t be the normal version of yourself when you return; instead you’ll be the strongest version of yourself. So leave your fears behind and experience all that San Diego has to offer.