

## **Part 1**

### **Could you please introduce yourself?**

I'm Lisanne and I'm in the 7th bachelor's semester studying International Information Management (IIM) with minors in Information Technology and Psychology. I spent my self-organized semester abroad at Saint Mary's University (SMU) in Halifax on the east coast of Canada from September to December 2021.

### **How was your application phase?**

After deciding on my host university, I started applying with the help of the German organization College Contact. College Contact provides free support in preparing for the semester abroad at their partner universities and provided me with all the important information about the application and also asked their contact persons at the SMU directly if something was unclear.

The application was then also processed via College Contact and was fairly uncomplicated, for example the SMU does not require German applicants to prove their language skills. Even if you should normally get an answer from the SMU within two weeks, it took me more than a month, so I didn't get my admission until May. So even though the whole process is actually quite quick, I would still recommend starting the application as early as possible because something can always go wrong and it is definitely more relaxed if you have more time for the rest of the planning.

### **Why did you decide to do a semester abroad? And what does a semester abroad bring you?**

A semester or internship abroad is mandatory for the IIM degree. Since I wanted to get to know university life in another country, I quickly decided that I would like to spend a semester at a university abroad. I also wanted to use the opportunity to improve my English skills because I haven't had any long-term experience abroad yet.

### **Why did you choose this particular country and city?**

I decided to do a semester abroad in Canada because the tuition fees there are relatively low compared to other English-speaking countries such as the USA or Great Britain. And Halifax didn't seem too big or small to me as a city, and it also has a lower cost of living than other major Canadian cities.

### **Why did you choose this university and what were your expectations?**

I started my search for a university in Canada by comparing the partner universities in the College Contact program and the IEC (an organization similar to College Contact). I mainly looked at the courses on offer, the amount of the tuition fees and the city in which the university

is located. So, SMU was quickly shortlisted because they had a wide range of Computer Science, Linguistics, Cultural Studies and Psychology courses, relatively low fees per course compared to other universities and I also liked Halifax even though I had never done it before had heard of the city.

I expected to meet many students from other countries there, because the SMU is known for having a large proportion of international students. So, after doing more detailed research on various universities, also with the help of my advisor at College Contact, I finally decided on SMU.

Thank you for your time

## **Part 2**

### **How were your first days abroad?**

When I booked my flight, it was not yet clear what the quarantine conditions would be for entering Canada at the end of August/beginning of September, so I decided to arrive in mid-August. Fortunately, as a vaccinated person, I did not have to go into quarantine. Therefore, I was in Halifax two weeks before I could move into the dormitory and before the first introductory events at the university started and stayed in an Airbnb.

I used this time to get to know Halifax, to get used to the language and to find my way around the city. I can definitely recommend everyone to arrive a little earlier to arrive in peace and get to know the city a bit, because there is little time for that once Welcome Week starts at the beginning of September.

### **Did you experience any culture shock?**

I didn't experience any real culture shock, because apart from minor differences, life in Canada is not very different from life in Germany. What is a bit special, however, is that you hear the question "How are you?" almost everywhere and from everyone at the beginning of a conversation. So, it is not at all unusual to be asked how you are before paying at the cash register or ordering in a restaurant. As a German, this may seem a bit strange at first, but you quickly get used to this obligatory small talk.

### **Did you have much contact with other exchange students?**

Since the part of international students at SMU is almost 30%, there are also many exchange students in addition to students who complete their entire studies in Canada. As a European, however, you are rather outnumbered and most students come from Asia, South America and Africa.

Especially for international students, the International Student Centre organizes regular excursions and events, such as a Thanksgiving dinner or a trip to the landmark of Nova Scotia, the lighthouse of Peggy's Cove. You quickly get to know many other exchange students.

My classes, on the other hand, didn't have quite as many international students because most tend to be in the business programs at the Sobey School of Business at SMU. Nevertheless, the people I spent most of my time with were mostly other international and exchange students.

### **Did your time abroad change you?**

I wouldn't necessarily say that I changed as a person, but I definitely became more open and was able to broaden my perspectives. Above all, it helped me to look beyond the European perspective for a bit and to come into contact with other realities of life, and ultimately to realize that people are not so different and do not think so different, even if they come from very different parts of the world.

### **What do you recommend to students who also want to do a semester abroad in Halifax?**

At the beginning, the planning effort may seem higher, but if you start early enough, the organization is absolutely doable in my eyes. Also, the high costs may seem daunting at first, but with funding, the financial effort can be reduced at least a little bit and even though it was not necessarily the cheapest semester abroad, it was still worth it for me all in all.

In general, I would recommend to use the Fall Break (the one-week "autumn vacations" in November) for traveling. It's a good time to see Toronto or Montreal, for example. Unfortunately, we started making plans for Fall Break too late, so the airfares were already very high, so we ended up just renting cars and spending a few days in a cottage in New Brunswick. That was nice too, but then I could only see Toronto on a weekend trip and more time would have definitely made sense for that. If you want to travel within Canada or possibly even to the USA, you should definitely book your flights in time.

Since you usually can't avoid renting a car for excursions, I would also recommend to get an international driver's license in Germany before the stay. It does not take long to get one and it is relatively uncomplicated. It is not always possible to rent a car with the German driver's license and we often had the problem that many of us actually had a driver's license, but were not allowed to drive in Canada without the international version.

Thank you for your interview ☺