



THE PARLIAMENT BUILDING. DOWNTOWN VICTORIA

A Year at the University of Victoria

(Victoria, BC,
Canada)

ALL PHOTOS TAKEN BY KIERAN THOMSETT

MY YEAR AT THE UNIVERSITY OF VICTORIA IN CANADA

By Kieran Thomsett, an American Studies Student at CCCU

Leaving the country knowing that I wouldn't return for at least eight months was hands down one of the hardest things I have ever had to do. Living near to Canterbury, I didn't even have to move away from home to attend university. However, I can without a doubt conclude that heading to the University of Victoria in Canada was the perfect decision, and ended up being one of the best years of my life.

Victoria is situated around an hour and a half from Vancouver via ferry. Being a remote island itself, I was worried about feeling slightly claustrophobic,

but it was soon clear that this wouldn't be a problem. The University itself was around ten minutes from downtown close to a district called Saanich. Although fairly small, I never found myself at a loss for things to do. For the first term, I lived in student residences. It was a mixed floor with a communal lounge. George & Rae Poole House on the Gordonhead complex seemed to have a lot of other international students as well as a nice mix of Canadian first and second years. They were advertised as single rooms although personally I found there to be more than enough space. We were fully catered, and given a meal card which worked all across campus



Sydney, Victoria – just as the sun was rising



The UVic Campus Waterfall

There was a café less than five minutes from res, as well as a food hall so we were always close. I moved out into private accommodation during the second term partly for the experience, and partly because the food seemed expensive. The healthy food was always considerably more than a burger and fries, which was easier to just grab and justify. A fair few of us moved out as well, and I would say that if you have the chance (and like the people you are potentially going to move in with) then go for it. There is nothing more amusing than living in a house with two or three Canadians, learning about cultural differences and ultimately forming a friendship that will long surpass your stay.

The classes were a lot different. Having 'declared a minor/major' in American Studies (with others studying History as well) means that we were pretty limited with the modules that we could choose. What you will learn is that international universities have a lot more choice and freedom. My Study Abroad advisers provided guidance, but allowed flexibility if there was a course that



James, Simone, Jason, Kieran, Max and Ryan at the top of Mount Douglas

looked particularly interesting. Normally, each course (we have to take four or five) lasts fifty minutes, and you attend class three times per week per module. It was really interesting to learn from this perspective. The professors were usually specialists in their subjects and were always around for extra help. Even in bigger classes, they made it feel more personal and even became a friend.

The international office put on a lot of events to encourage people to interact and familiarize

themselves with their surroundings. For example, within the first few days of being in Canada, I had already signed up for whale watching and a tour of downtown. Definitely do both if you have the chance. The



Looking out over Victoria



A panoramic shot of from Clover Point Park, just off of Dallas Road, Victoria.

excursions can prove a little pricey but they are one hundred percent worth it. The university ID card also provides free bus travel for anywhere in Victoria, and I found myself exploring and hiking quite a lot more than I thought I would.

Being in a new place, you will obviously want to explore. I was extremely lucky – I made so many amazing friends who added to my experience. One of my close friends always took me back home with him when he travelled back to Coquitlam, not far from Vancouver. I was even lucky enough to be invited for Christmas! I was truly humbled to experience a traditional Canadian Christmas, and so blessed to spend time with my ‘Canadian Family’. As if that wasn’t amazing enough, during my reading break we actually travelled from Vancouver to Malibu and Los Angeles, stopping off at San Francisco on the way back.

My Canadian ‘family’ had heard about my dream of visiting San Francisco, and encouraged my friend on the twenty-three hour long drive into the states. During one of our many thrilling dinner conversations, I had mentioned that I had friends in Malibu, and that one of my life goals was to walk across the Golden Gate Bridge. Canterbury Christ Church is linked with Pepperdine University, in Malibu, so we decided to drive down and stay with some friends, which was perfect. I was so lucky to experience this once in a lifetime trip with such brilliant people, and I will never forget it.

Coming back home felt a little bit anticlimactic. It felt as if I had been away only a few weeks, and I constantly have to remind myself that the past eight months did actually happen. I know that it is not the end though. I already have plans to go back and visit, and my

friends are coming to stay with me during May for a few weeks. I have also decided that in the long run, I could see myself living in Canada.

My advice to you is that if you have the opportunity to go on a year abroad, then do it. You get to learn and experience so much. It shows you how different cultures and students live, and at the very least it looks amazing on your CV. Whether it be Canada or the United States, I guarantee you will have the time of your life!



KIERAN'S CANADA BLOG

If you would like to learn more about Kieran's time in Canada, please visit his blog:

<http://fromcanterburytocanada.wordpress.com>



The view from Cypress Mountain, Vancouver during my Christmas in Coquitlam



Kieran in front of the Golden Gate Bridge at 'Fort Point' in San Francisco