

I first started thinking about going on exchange back in grade 12. I'd recently come back from a two week school trip in Greece and I was thinking about how awesome it would be to truly experience another culture by *living* in it. So when I applied to university at UVic, I always knew that I wanted to go on exchange.

Near the beginning of second year, I began seriously looking at the logistics of an exchange year. Because I was primarily going to learn about a new culture, I decided to go for one year. I easily narrowed the list of partner universities down to nine choices that met my main requirements: taught in English and taught my major physics. I did a little bit of research about each location and then I somewhat arbitrarily chose Uppsala University in Sweden, partly because I figured Sweden would be different from Canada, but mostly because a lot of famous physicists are from Uppsala. This may seem like a risky maneuver and I was definitely a little scared. As I left Canada, I was wondering why I decided to move to a country that I knew nothing about and only knew two words of the local language. Within days of being in Sweden, I'd fallen in love with the country. I don't know a single person who did their exchange in Uppsala and didn't love it. Many people from other universities even extended their exchange.

Personally, I absolutely loved how physics was taught at Uppsala University. Not everyone will love the new school system, but for me it was exactly what I needed to refuel my enthusiasm for physics. I even found their method of teaching better for learning and understanding the material. Even if I had hated the school, the exchange would have still been an excellent learning experience. I learned so much about myself. I was already living away from home while attending UVic, but moving to a country where I initially did not know anyone or the language forced me to grow. I realized all that my parents do for me, even when I live a city away.

I have several recommendations for going on exchange, the first being to go on one. Going on exchange was one of the most incredible and life changing experiences I've had.

Go for as long as you possibly can. For me, this meant spending ten and a half months in Sweden going to university. Just like when you first go to university, it takes several months to settle in, and so the extra term is important for really getting the most out of the experience.

Make lots of friends. As an exchange student, you tend to meet other exchange students. This is in no way a bad thing. I now have very close friends in the US and Australia. Also, become friends with the locals; immerse yourself in their culture. This meant learning their language and taking part in cultural activities.

Take part in their traditions. Uppsala has been a university town since 1477 and is therefore rich with traditions. Go to a formal dinner in a castle or watch the boat races down the river to celebrate the coming of spring.

Learn the local language. I started learning Swedish by taking a three week long language course in August when I first arrived. I learned the most Swedish by taking dance classes in Swedish and joining one of the university's theatre clubs. I was even in a play that was mostly in Swedish.

Diane  
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Try new things. My favourite memory from Sweden is from when I went dog sledding in Northern Sweden with a friend and we stood outside in  $-26.4^{\circ}\text{C}$  to see the Northern Lights.

Travel lots. Throughout the year I went on several trips to Norway, Finland, and Denmark. I went with other exchange students and we always had a blast. To finish my exchange, I travelled Europe for a month and a half by myself. This was an experience that will stay with me for the rest of my life. I've heard from a lot of people that one of the main reasons that they don't travel is money. An exchange is comparable to going to UVic. You pay the same university fees, and food and housing are similar. The only new expenses are the plane tickets and any extra travel that you do. As someone I met in Europe pointed out, when you look back on your life in twenty years, will spending a little extra money matter? I always found it worth it to pay a little more to go on the most amazing experience. The things I regret the most are the opportunities that I didn't take.

When I first thought about going on exchange in grade 12, I never could have imagined how incredible of an experience it would be, and I certainly never expected to love another country as much as I love Canada. I also didn't see myself finding  $-10^{\circ}\text{C}$  was warm or riding my bike by a castle everyday on my way to class.

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