

Erfahrungsbericht

My time in Canada went completely different from my expectations. There have been some ups and some downs.

I expected to experience the typical North American family and school life that gets portrayed in movies and series. Therefore, I was really excited to experience something similar to that. In total we were ten exchange students from all over Hesse. However, I was the only one not continuing the plane transfer to Edmonton. My host family was waiting for me in Calgary. When I first arrived in Canada at the airport, shortly before exiting, I was greeted with some unexpected machines that asked me about certain things that I could have been carrying in my suitcase. Since I didn't expect that and I was all by my self (being the only German exchange student in Calgary) I was somewhat overwhelmed. I was also tired after the long flight, therefore I kind of panicked. Anyway that was my first experience in Canada. Towards the end, everything did work out and I got to exit finally.

Before this exciting journey commenced I started creating expectations, which involved how my life in an high school would be like. Maybe high schools were completely different from how they are portrayed in movies and series. Or the crazy weather differences I would experience in Canada during late fall. I was also keen on seeing everyone around on Halloween and how people celebrated it. Meanwhile I expected to see some Hokey games as well. But I was also afraid that I would not feel comfortable in my host family. Or worst case scenario, not getting along with them at all. However, that was not the case at all. My host family was a great match and we have created some great memories together that I hold dearly onto.

My host family consisted out of a host mother and host father that were divorced. Although I had to change households this wasn't a problem for me as I got to experience a different life or routine as I was used to anyway, so why not see two different perspectives. Part of family was also my exchange student and his sister. On the mother's side we also had two Guinea pigs named Charlie and Eid. On the father's side there were three dogs with names Oli, Bandit and Copper.

I can say that everyone in the family had a rather extroverted personality that contrasted my family's slightly introverted one.

As I was trying to integrate myself somehow into the host family's lives I noticed some habits reoccurring. Since school lasted everyday til 3:36 pm my host parents made sure to have dinner together as often as possible. Therefore, we always discussed serveral topics at the dinner table. Sometimes we talked simple small talk, often about how our day went or sometimes about even some more serious or philosophical topics.

I tried to help out the parents with some simple things in the household. For example I offered to load the dishwasher or to wipe the floor or to bring out the trash.

They appreciated my engagement and I made sure to help as much as possible.

I felt sometimes uncomfortable within situations where the family would argue, moreover because I had nothing to do with it but still had to witness it at the dinner table sometimes. But every family argues from time to time. On the positive side I really felt comfortable whenever we would have conversations about a movie we would have recently watched or just when we talk about some events that happened during the day and what intrigued us about it.

Sometimes we would also take the dogs out for longer walks around the city of Calgary. Hence, we had more time to even explore some sights. We also had to try a lot of ice cream cafes. Though I am not fully vegan (but still rather drink oak milk than a cow's milk), I was amazed at how many vegan options the cafes and restaurants offered. You could really find anything for everyone's taste preferences. A moment I really enjoyed was with the sister of my exchange student when we went together to the Centennial Planetarium which is nowadays a museum. The exhibition at the museum was called Utopia factory and discussed the topic of Calgary's relationship with the indigenous roots of the place and indigenous people with the state. There was held a workshop where we could work

with ourselves and reflect on how we are connected to the land that we came from. It was an art that we could even take home afterwards.

Overall, I made great experiences with every single host family member.

Generally I was most shocked by the school unfortunately. The huge difference between the school in itself in Canada is very different from German schools. The mentality of Canadians is very different too. It seems that most people prefer small talk in school, but that doesn't mean that I wasn't able to hold a serious, important or deep conversation with anyone. Though it is more seldom. Overall, I also got the feeling that most students were somewhat more childish(not always the case), whereas German students are somewhat more mature(also not always the case). Maybe it could also be the fact that the teacher-student relationship is, again, completely different. In Germany there is more mutual respect between students and teachers, however I got the feeling that Canadian students have to speak up for themselves in front of the teacher. They have more courage and tend to be slightly more rebellious too. Another example is that students use their phone more often during class or that they can just randomly stand up and leave class. The teacher's job in Canada is mainly to teach and to pay attention to the student's mental health and not to push too much homework or assessments in general onto them. Apart from the teacher also teaching obviously, in Germany there is much more requirement and pressure on academic performances from students. I was mostly not very exhausted in school, even though it lasted longer than my school day in Germany.

For me, personally it was not easy to make friends in school. And most importantly, because each course, or class as Canadians call it also, has a different group of people, since you decide your subjects not the school. However, it is not impossible to make friends. Sometimes Canadians approach you first but sometimes I had to do it. I still keep in touch with a girl that I met in Social Studies since we had a lot of interests in common. With other people I kept it friendly and enjoyed spending time with them in class. Every day school days lasted until 16:36 or 4:36 p.m (yes school really ended at minute 36)

So, a little bit more about the school life. Our schedule or timetable was very individualized. We had to choose four classes which each lasted 90 minutes long. However, big plot twists, our breaks were only three minutes long. Moreover, every student in the school had to change their class in these three short minutes to get to their next period. So, over two thousand students rushed through huge crowds to the next period. The classes that I chose were fortunately in close proximity. I attended Social Studies (which is basically a mix of politics, history and geography), Photography, Math and Psychology. I was in grade eleven the same year as I am in Germany. However, the Canadians were behind in some topics in Maths and Social Studies. Photography and Psychology were on the other hand, very pleasant since normal public German schools do not offer such specific subjects for individuals with different interests. There were several subject I could choose from that were very creative.

While I was the only German exchange student in Calgary I still kept in touch with some of the exchange students in Edmonton to listen to their first impressions of Canada for comparison and out of interest. We also had a group chat where if we wanted to mainly ask something. It was helpful to keep up with the other exchange students. But being the only German exchange student in a city should not be disencouraging. If not it is even better for someone to improve their English skills. On weekends my host family and I would look for fun activities to do. More often than not we would find ourselves out camping, visiting the movie theater or watching a sports game in the Saddle Dome.

In summary, I was overwhelmed by Canada. My worries thankfully did not come true and I was paired with a wonderful host family. Although the school system in Canada surprised me and was not how I imagined it I still learned things and enjoyed the experience.

Some advice for future student. This might seem impossible, but you will have a better experience if you do not set any expectations for the exchange. Prepare of course yourself mentally but do not think too much about it. Let it surprise you in a good way. Maybe in the host family, try to offer them help or agree on times where you help out in the household. The relationship with your host

family will improve eventually. Do not be shy to talk to people, even just small talk. Canadians do it all the time. Do not worry too much about Germany, your friends and family there and even if you do have homesickness, try to distract yourself with stuff in Canada. If you do not get along with your exchange student too well, do not let it bring your mood down. Try to negotiate, maybe even with the parent's help. Otherwise just look for nice people that you will meet in Canada instead. And don't worry about your English, Canadians are friendly, helpful and they will be patient for you. Some expectations however you should prepare yourself for. You will not always fit in in a group you might not understand their jokes. That happens, so look for a two people friendship at first to them integrate yourself better into the group.

I was very content with the organization and I would definitely recommend this for possible future exchange students. Three months are a very comfortable time to experience a new culture (or many different ones). 😊