

School programs overseas

Taking learning on the road

By SHARON ASCHAIK, SPECIAL TO QMI AGENCY

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Doing homework, completing an assignment or studying for an exam sounds so much more enticing when it's happening on a beach in Australia, at a café in France, or on a bench in Hyde Park in England.

Indeed, the notion of studying abroad is being embraced by Canadian high school graduates seeking to experience a new culture, expand their professional network and enhance their employment prospects after graduation.

"Studying abroad offers a huge potential for personal growth and enrichment, because it fosters an incredible amount of maturity, resourcefulness and self-reliance," says Jeff Minthorn, editor-in-chief of Verge magazine, a national quarterly publication covering study, work and volunteer abroad opportunities.

Not only does an international education give you a new way to look at the world, Minthorn says, it also makes you more marketable to employers operating worldwide.

"In our increasingly interconnected global marketplace, this experience can be a big plus on your resumé," he says.

Reaping these rewards requires considerable planning and decision-making to find the right program, at the right school, in the right setting.

First, Minthorn says, make sure whatever academic program you're considering will be relevant to your career plans.

Then think about the culture of the country in which your prospective school is situated, and whether you want to study in a big city or small town.

"If you grew up in a small town, you might be more comfortable going to a St. Catharines-sized town (approximately 130,000 people), or, maybe your attitude is, give me as big as it gets, and you're thinking the University of London," Minthorn says.

Unless you're adept at a second language, he says, it's best to pursue a program in another English-speaking country, to make your transition and education easier.

Tuition fees at American or overseas schools are usually higher than at a Canadian school, Minthorn adds, so carefully consider your budget.

Other expenses to research include accommodation, meal plans and flights for trips to and from home.

Scholarships and financial aid can help mitigate some of these costs, Minthorn says, advising students to research options at their prospective school, and the professional association of their desired field.

If it's affordable, Minthorn says, visit your desired school before registering to get a first-hand impression. Otherwise, research the school and country online, or talk to members of local cultural groups related to the country.

Finally, Minthorn says, develop a good understanding of why you want an international education, so that you can get the most out of it.

"Think about what you hope to gain and learn, and keep those ideas and goals in mind when you get there, so that you can make the most of your experience."

Beyond Canada's borders

Check out these organizations online for information on study abroad options:

Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada
www.aucc.ca

Association of Canadian Community Colleges
www.accc.ca

Canadian Bureau for International Education
www.cbie.ca

Canadian Information Centre for International Credentials
www.cicic.ca

Canadian International Development Agency
www.acdi-cida.gc.ca

Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade
www.dfait-maeci.gc.ca/culture/youth-en.asp

Human Resources and Skills Development Canada
www.hrsdc.gc.ca/en/gateways/nav/top_nav/program/iam.shtml

International Council for Canadian Studies
www.iccs-ciec.ca

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