CAFCE International Committee

Student Engagement Sub-Group

First Name: David

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Where did you work abroad (city, country):

When did you go abroad:

Which work term (1st, 2nd, 3rd, etc..):

1. What motivated you to seek out an international work term?

I’ve lived my entire life in Ontario, but in high school I took a class trip to Italy and Greece. I was surprised how different it was in Europe, and I really liked it.

1. How did you fund the travel and other costs associated with this opportunity?

The company paid me enough money to live and work in France, but I had to fund my own travel through money I made at co-op jobs here in Canada and with money from my parents ☺.

1. Can you tell me what steps you took to secure your co-op position? Did you feel it was hard to secure your co-op position and how would you advise other students to make the same effort?

Essentially, I picked a country I wanted to go to. Then I searched Wikipedia for large companies working there in the field I’m interested in. The international companies I found were better because they were more open to employing foreign students. Then I applied to various student internships through the companies website.

1. When conducting your job search did you find that many of the jobs available were in specific sectors? (ie: corporate, non-profit, government, etc.) Where, or how, would you suggest other students focus their search?

I only searched the private sector, and found available jobs in international oriented companies.

1. Tell me about the cost of living in (city or country). How did your expenses compare to your income based on the salary you were earning? Were you able to save any money and where did you find savings or discounts which reduced your expenses?

I lived in Toulouse, France. It is an expensive city! But I was able to cover rent, food, and going out with my salary. But that’s as far as my salary went. As a student, you can often find hidden discounts on a lot of things, especially when travelling (hostels, train fairs, etc).

1. How did you find accommodations and what rent can you expect to pay in (city or country)?

Toulouse is a beautiful city, but rent is expensive. There’s no way to get around that. I paid 450 Euros/month for rent, but some interns paid more. Finding a place is easy though. I searched the internet and was fine. And during the time it takes you to figure out living arrangement, living in a hostel is not bad at all.

1. What, if any, cultural barriers did you have to overcome and what were some of these challenges?

Where I lived, everyone spoke French! Myself, not so much. This was definitely a barrier to overcome and I learned a lot of French while I was in France. Specifically buying groceries for the first time was difficult. All the aisles were in French and the food labels were in French. I always figured it would be in French and English like at home. I figured it out, though. And I soon realized that not everyone spoke French. Thankfully, there are lots of international students around, and they all speak English.

1. Did you find it difficult to meet new people? What steps did you take to integrate yourself into your new surroundings and make yourself more comfortable in a new setting?

Working at a large company, it was not hard to meet new people. There were plenty of interns and most of them were in the same boat as I was. Foreign country, foreign language, foreign everything.

To make myself more comfortable in the new setting, I tried adopting some of habits my French roommates had. Like eating “French food” and drinking wine in a “French way.” French TV helped too.

1. Overall, what advice would you give co-op students who are seeking international opportunities?

Start to think about it early. I started about a year before I left. Apply to lots of jobs, even the ones you don’t feel qualified for. When you get there, try to embrace the culture to enjoy the stay more. And try to have some friends who are native to the area so you get a better feel for what it’s like to live there. It’s easy to get stuck just hanging out with the international kids.

1. Is there anything else you want us to know about your experience?

It was definitely worth all the work to get there, and I really hope I’ll have the chance to go back or even live there in the future.