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Adventure Ecotourism
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Canada

Where the bloody hell WERE you?

Dogsledding over frozen lakes, learning to light a fire in the snow with a flint and steel, sleeping under tarps in -30°C , backcountry skiing, ice fishing through a slab of ice 2 feet thick, and numerous days of snow camping. It was all part of my CSU exchange experience to Lakehead University, Canada from January through to June, 2008. My exchange experience was full of opportunities and adventurous new experiences. I made some awesome mates at uni who were more than happy to show me around. Not only did we go and check out sights such as Kakabeka Falls - a frozen waterfall 30m wide and 20m high, but they also invited me to come along on a 4 day hike around Thunder Bay's Sleeping Giant Provincial Park, an island in the largest of North America's Great Lakes – Lake Superior. Venturing around the shore we were delighted with the sights of beautiful sunshine, crystal clear waters with a snow covered shoreline, sounds of woodpeckers in the forest, and the smell and feel of the crisp spring air.

One of my main highlights was joining a class on a 9 day dogsledding expedition in Minnesota, USA. Leaving the only man-made tracks in the snow we sledded across numerous frozen lakes with teams of 6 dogs pulling sleds which would weigh up to 2 tonnes. All this in day temperatures down to -17°C before spending each night under tarps but on top of the ice and in temperatures which plummeted to as low as -30°C .

After the completion of my studies I travelled around North America with my dad, seeing and experiencing things un-imaginable in Australia. At times we would camp beside pristine lakes with waters that would mirror the backdrop of Canada's snow capped Rocky Mountains. And after walking 45 minutes along a track through the forest before discovering Grizzly Bear tracks (the size of which dwarfed my hand) in the freshly fallen snow is a memory that I will never forget... Or my experience at Niagara Falls, venturing behind the bellowing giant where we stood almost within arms reach from the water which was plunging 50 meters to the base.

Exchange was also a time of immense personal growth and learning in many different facets of life. At the time of my exchange I was 19 years old and in my third and final year of studying Adventure Ecotourism at CSU Albury-Wodonga. My purpose for studying was simply for fun and interest's sake. "Your course is worthless, how can you possibly make the world a better place through Outdoor Recreation?" our professors told us during a 3 day snow camp in the midst of a true Canadian winter.

Although in the name of learning I was astounded; meeting amazing people, having amazing experiences, and gaining immense amounts of confidence within myself just wasn't enough to keep the critics at bay. "Courage is the power to let go of the familiar" (Raymond Lindquist). Challenging ourselves through taking a step out of our comfort zone and having the confidence to try something new will reveal countless opportunities and extremely unique learning experiences.



It was at that point I found direction and purpose not only in my field of study, but in my life. I realised that I was studying Outdoor Recreation in order to make a difference to people's lives; to add some adventure, some risk, and some adrenalin. I realised that we as humans are responsible for making life what it is; there are doctors to fix us up when we have an accident, teachers to give us an education, parents to raise their children and give them the best possible chance to succeed in life, and outdoor enthusiasts to make life fun.

Through exchange I 'found myself' and my eyes were opened to see the broader picture of life. To this day I continue to think; would I have completed my studies for the sole purpose of fun and interest's sake instead of realising how I can make a difference to peoples lives.

I now have direction and purpose in my life, something that I may have never discovered unless I embarked on exchange. I emerged from this unique experience as a new, revitalised, and extremely happy person.



FACTS

Lakehead University's campus is in the heart of Thunder Bay. The campus features a beautiful, natural environment including the McIntyre River and Lake Tamblyn. The faculty, staff, programs and services team provide an extensive range of learning choices and alternatives, offering an unbeatable combination of quality education at one of the most beautiful campuses in Canada.

Fieldwork complements the academic component of many Lakehead programs. Outdoor Recreation, Parks and Tourism; Forestry; Environmental Studies; Geology; Biology and Geography, have been designed to take advantage of, the natural laboratories of Northwestern Ontario. Northern socio-economic issues are addressed in such programs as Sociology, Commerce, Social Work, Nursing, Psychology, Indigenous Learning and Teacher Education. Lakehead's Engineering program is unique in Canada, combining a diploma program in Engineering Technology with a Bachelor of Engineering degree program.

LOCATION

Lakehead University is located in the city of Thunder Bay. Thunder Bay is in the middle of the continent on the shores of Lake Superior. Its location made it a natural meeting and trading site, as far back as the Paleo-Indian civilisation 11,000 years ago.

The first Europeans arrived in the 17th century and established a series of fur trading outposts at the place they named Baie de Tonnerre, or Thunder Bay. In 1798, the North West Company built Fort William near the Kaministiquia River, which quickly became a lively community of Scottish traders, French voyagers and Native trappers. The Population of Thunder Bay has now grown to around 114 000

CLIMATE

Thunder Bay holds the title of Canada's sunniest spot east of the prairies. Temperature ranges (in degree

Celsius):

January -20 to -8

April -2 to 9

July - 11 to 24

October - 0 to 11

CULTURE

Ethnic diversity is one of Thunder Bay's greatest assets, and it shows most clearly in the cultural events that visitors come to enjoy. Just some of the festivals held throughout the year include, The Folklore Festival, a world tour of nations, Festa Italiana which celebrates the food and fun of Italy and Ojibwa Keeshigun, a traditional pow-wow held at Old Fort William, offering a colourful glimpse of Native culture.

The influence of ethnic diversity is especially vibrant in the city's arts community. Thunder Bay Art Gallery holds one of the nation's largest collections of Native art. Changing exhibits throughout the year feature artists from throughout the north.

Visitors can experience more of Thunder Bay's culture at performances by the Bays Symphony Orchestra or the professional Magnus Theatre Company. The Thunder Bay Community Auditorium is an impressive performing arts centre, hosting shows that range from Broadway productions to live concerts and ice shows.

SPORT

There are many sporting and recreational activities available, such as – hiking, hockey, swimming, curling, cycling, golf, skiing, snowmobiling, ice and rock climbing as well as a wide range of water sports.