

Rotman School of Management, University of Toronto, Canada

Student Exchange Summary - Spring Semester 2016

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First of all, the exchange semester abroad is by far the best experience that a university can offer its students, and you will be doing yourselves a big disfavor by not taking advantage of it. Break your routine, get out of your comfort zone, change environment, experience and challenge yourself with a new language, another culture, and different academic methods. Live in a different country, make new international and multi-cultural friends, go on trips that you never would have as a tourist, and develop yourself as a person.

The City

I did my exchange semester in the University of Toronto in Toronto, Ontario, Canada. Toronto is everything people say about Canada (which Canada usually isn't, by the way) – multi cultural, fast and slow paced at the same time, exceptionally nice people, and delicious food from every corner of the earth. If you come for spring semester, then you will also get a taste of the Canadian winter, which can be brutal, if you are not well prepared. That being said, Toronto is well prepared for the winter, and therefore it is manageable.

The city is located on the Ontario Lake and has nice beaches to go to in the summer time. The city holds many cultural events all year, from Toronto International Film Festival (TIFF) in the summer, to many Christmas and holiday events in the winter.

Toronto boasts a wide variety of tourist activities, from the CN tower downtown, strolling through the streets of Chinatown, Little Italy, Kensington Market, and so on, or taking an hour drive to the Niagara Falls or the Thousand Islands. Toronto's Jewish community is one of the biggest in North America, and even has its own Beit-Habad. The University of Toronto (UofT) is considered one of the best Universities in Canada, and Rotman is the best management school in Canada. The university buildings are almost 200 years old and are part of the city's landscape. In fact, most of them are buildings from the 19th century and even older, which were converted into faculties, so it has a classic feeling to it.

Toronto is the third largest financial center in America (Bay Street in Toronto is equivalent to Wall Street in New York), and therefore the school is well known for its finance orientation, however I hate finance and the other courses were terrific.

The School

Rotman has dozens of private study rooms available for students (you book them online). Each room hosts up to 6 people and has a screen which you can hook your computer to. Besides that, there is a computer lab, there are personal learning tables, etc. Anything you need to make your Rotman experience powerful and to help you learn. Rotman has about 400 students per year, with more than 50% of them international (not Canadian), so don't worry about your English skills. Unlike at TAU, most of the students in Rotman are in the full time program, which means that most of them take time off work for two years in order to do their MBA (except for a summer internship). The exchange students join the second year Rotman students for their elective courses. Therefore, you will find that many of them are already friends and have their own little groups, but don't worry, they are all very nice and welcoming and you will have no problem making friends and finding team mates for projects.

Rotman also has many clubs for different subjects, from geographic origin, to hobbies and so on. So you will find the Middle East club, African club, as well as the photography club or the debate club. These clubs run events that you could participate in, but you will not be able to join them, as registration must be for a full year. But ask, they might be able to include you somehow.

Courses and Other Activities

The university encourages group studies, and it is a great way to make new friends. I suggest taking 5 courses if you want to take advantage of the academic opportunity, or 4 if you want a more relaxed semester (which will also have its hard peaks). You also have access to off-academic courses that the university offers, like improving your Conversation skills (for non-English native speakers), or different Canadian cultural courses (you can find it in ELWS / CIE).

As far as Rotman and the University of Toronto are concerned, exchange students are considered the same as regular full time MBA students. We have free access to the athletic center (gym, classes and pool), the Rotman career center (they can help you write your resume or help you prepare for job interviews), and all the events that the school organizes. Many interesting speakers come to speak, with such an event happening at least 3 times a week during the semester, and it is free access for Rotman students. There is a club fair at the beginning of the year at which you can learn about the clubs and sign up. There is usually a small fee of \$15-\$50 to register.

Nightlife is also in the schedule, and every Tuesday there is a nice class get-together at a different bar.

Accommodation

Rotman is located in a very central area, practically downtown. I suggest looking for a place within walking distance from the university, just because I think it's nice to walk and get to know the city and breathe some fresh air. You could also look for a place a bit farther way but then see that you are close to a subway station (there are 2 subway lines and both stops close to school). There is also the option of a streetcar or a bus, but they take very long, especially during rush hour.

There is a wide variety of options for accommodation:

1. The university housing department helps students, especially internationals with their needs, and can provide on-campus housing. This is the easiest and cheapest option. Learn more at: www.housing.utoronto.ca.
2. Websites similar to yad2 in Israel (so you can also get other things on there such as bicycles or used phones or whatever):
 - a. <http://toronto.en.craigslist.ca/>
 - b. www.kijiji.ca/
3. Airbnb.com
4. Ask other exchange students that will be coming to Toronto on the same semester as you (you can ask the exchange coordinator at Rotman for the list) – we also created a WhatsApp group which helped a lot.

If you end up renting an apartment, expect rent to be \$600-\$1,200 a month depending on location, housing quality, and number of roommates (1CAD is currently worth about 3 NIS).

Transportation

I bought a used bicycle on kijiji.ca a little bit after I arrived. I recommend buying a used bicycle because it's much more economical. You can also get one from one of the many bicycle shops spread out around the city, which sell used bicycles after the take care of them. This was extremely convenient, even in the really cold days, depending on how brave you are. However, this is only if you will be here for spring semester which is January to April.

The public transportation in the city is called the TTC, which is one company that runs all of the subways, street cars and buses, which means that you can easily use any combination of the above for the price of one ride. Torontonians complain a lot about the TTC but I found it to be extremely efficient, especially compared to Israel. One token is 3.25\$, if you buy 4 or more it becomes 2.9\$ each, and there is also a monthly pass which is 110\$ for students (check the TTC website for update cost, since they tend to change).

Other Costs

- University Health insurance (UHIP): about \$240 for 4 months. Make sure to purchase it before your arrival so that you are always covered by some sort of insurance.
- University books and case packages (\$20-\$80 per course). You will have many case studies or other activities that will require you to buy access to articles or online course packages. Yes, it is possible to get these articles through “other sources”, consult your peers on the pros and cons of each.
- Living expenses (groceries, restaurants, entertainment) – Some are more expensive than Israel and some cheaper. In total, the monthly expense is similar to Israel.

Visa

Israelis are not required to get a visa for a stay of up to 6 months in Canada. However, new regulations require you to get an eTA which is an electronic signup form for people arriving in Canada by flight. Just google it. You could also apply for a study permit which will theoretically might allow you to work **on campus**. However, the regulation is not very clear on this manner and some sources say that exchange students are not allowed to work anyway, so I wouldn't bother paying for the study permit. However, in any case, make sure to bring your acceptance letters from Rotman with you on the plane so that you can show the immigration officer (just in case).

Summary

My exchange semester at Roman was an amazing experience! I took 6 courses (for different reasons) which killed me, but it was totally worth it and I learned a lot. Courses are taught very differently than in TAU, with more emphasis on class discussion and participation, and learning from your peers as well as from the professor. Moreover, not many courses have an exam, and they mostly use projects, class participation, case analysis and/or learning journals (a fantastic way to learn). Learning with people from all over the world allows you to learn first-hand things that you would have never learned in Israel, such as business in Iran or Saudi Arabia, taxation policies between the US and Canada, clean energy, different types of healthcare systems, the provincial system, and so on.

On the Social side, it was unbelievably fun to meet people from all over the world and make friends with people from different backgrounds. Some of my favorite people were from Pakistan, Egypt and India. Toronto is a great city to live in, and I will be staying here, so let me know if you need any assistance. I will be close by.