

Profile: Ruan Chryssafis



Hometown:

Auckland, New Zealand

Program:

IEP Work Canada, IEP Work Canada Returner

Total length of time spent overseas / or intended length of travel:

I planned for 1 year, and yes, got sucked in for 2. Total time spend travelling was 26 months

Tell us in a few hundred words where you lived and what you got up to in Canada?

After flying in the westerly direction from New Zealand, with stops in Thailand, UK, Washington DC / New York and Boston, I flew into Toronto Ontario; Introduction to Canada 101.

I booked into the University of Toronto's Summer Student Residence for July and August 2007. The central location helped me have easy access to the bars, clubs, sporting arena's (ice hockey, basketball, baseball, football) and most importantly, the Employers of downtown Toronto. Public transport via tram and bus system allowed for late night excursions around this party-hungry city.

I was quickly able to score 2 jobs that would fit my lifestyle. First as a Guest Server at Milestones Restaurant and Second a front desk Customer Service person at The Global Village Backpackers. These two jobs placed me in an incredibly fun situation mixing with Canadian hospitality staff who are excellent at their job and who like to spend the rest of the night after work going to Live Music Gigs, crowding out late night pubs and taking mad staff trips to Toronto Island.

The benefits of working for the backpackers were immeasurable (free trips to Niagara Falls, Montreal, Quebec City, and Mont Tremblant all along the Moose Travel Network's route), and of course The GVB patio bar, which every night would be crowded with travellers, workers, sightseers and experience enthusiasts just like me.

Mid November 2007 came along and so did the Canadian Snow. Trudging around Toronto in the snow gave me the desire to head to the wild wild west - Alberta.

Milestones Restaurants were happy to transfer me to Calgary, my first stop in AB. Calgary is home of the greatest outdoor show on earth, The Calgary Stampede, and is also the closest city to the ski / snowboard haven's of Banff, Lake Louise and Jasper. Being a bartender in Calgary allowed flexibility to visit the slopes (an hour away) every weekend. Wicked times in Banff is all I can say!!! In January 2008 the smell of oil dollars floating around Calgary lead me to the most important decision of my entire time in Canada.

Move North to Fort McMurray, the gateway town to the huge industrious operation of the Canadian oilsands.

Fort McMurray was a huge shock to my travelling buzz but the attraction of earning upwards of \$130 K pa with little entry requirements operating the biggest mining equipment in the world made the decision easier. If you can bare the 7 month Winters, the minus 45 degree temperatures and the busy work rotations of 12 hour shifts for 14 days straight with 7 days off to follow, then Fort Mac will work for you. My desire lay in seeing more of Canada, meeting more diverse people from across Canada, and having more money to do more travelling around Beautiful British Columbia, the USA and the Canadian Prairie Provinces (Saskatchewan, Manitoba). Working under the dancing luminous green Northern Lights and experiencing the Snow-bound lifestyle with Ski-do's, igloo's and random road-trips on day's off made Fort McMurray the most influential chapter of my whole life. I stayed here till I had to leave Canada in July 2009. Unreal!!!



WORKING ADVENTURES WORLDWIDE

What are some of the experiences that you had which made an impact on you?

Living in a house in Fort McMurray for 1.5 years with a New Brunswick Chef who cooked amazing meals, a Wolf man from Vancouver Island (hilarious guy), an Ontario Mobile Kitchen businessman, a Toronto DJ and a perpetual couch surfer guy who slept on our coach for 3 months!

- Touring around British Columbia taking in the scenery it has to offer.
- Snowboarding Banff (incredible runs on incredible snow)
- Operating enormous Mining Equipment for hours and hours and hours!
- Flying with a Cessna to The Cold Lake region to no-man's land and fishing for 5 days in the silence with bears and wolves in the vicinity.
- The friendly and inquisitive Canadian people; who love to open their home doors for you and spend time sharing stories.
THEY LOVE YOUR ACCENT!!!

Were there any times that were hard?

Oh for sure! You won't go on an OE without having these, they're many in number, BUT easy to overcome if you stay positive about the situation and continue to use the opportunities available across this Great Country.

The first few months in Canada can be particularly hard as you realise you're by yourself, far from your regular friends and family and realising that you've got to work quite hard sometimes earning minimal wages to afford the experiences you came here for. For the first 5 months in Canada my social expenses far outweighed my earnings and I was constantly scraping the barrel for money, sometimes waiting for 3 days with not a single dollar for that next paycheck. It's important to manage your money well, choose the type of jobs that will pay enough to fit your social and travel preferences.

The long cold dark months of winter in Canada can be a challenge. Buying groceries, getting around town in the cold, waiting for public transport, constantly living indoors (if you're an Outdoors type of person) or the constant trudging through metres of snow can bring you to clench your fists at Canada, but later on you look back on these times and realise, they're unique, they're memorable and they strengthened the resolve to get things done in tough circumstances...

Ironically it's the hard times which have the biggest impact on you and teach you the most about yourself.

What are your recommendations for someone who wants a Canadian adventure?

Pack your bags and get ready for the Adventure of your life!! Keep a tight eye on your finances as the tipping culture and taxes above stated prices dig big holes in your pocket if not carefully managed.

Experience as much as you can; travel to The Yukon, Churchill Manitoba on the Hudson Bay, Maritime Provinces (Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Newfoundland), settle in different cities along the way (Montreal, Vancouver, Toronto). Do it all! This country has a lot of landmass and is guaranteed to give you the best experiences.

What did you find valuable in going to Canada on an IEP programme?

Anyone seeking to go work overseas understands the difficulty and time consuming steps it takes to organise work visas. The ease of access to Canada's work force with the "Open Work Visa" allowed the option to work anywhere doing pretty much anything I wanted, from Newfoundland to Vancouver. The support of SWAP Canada (IEP's affiliate organisation in Canada) made it easy to network with fellow travellers, locate employers, find accommodation, get special discount deals and use their resources and tips to establishing yourself in the country.

What next? Where to next?

I love the momentum I gained through 2 years of working in Canada. I learned how to survive, get new skills, make loads of money, travel Canada / USA and build lifelong friendships along the way. I still have working-travel experiences high on my agenda of things to do. I find that being in my twenties means that there's still a heck of a lot of living left to do.

By experiencing the world you better learn and appreciate what New Zealand means to you and what you mean to New Zealand.

As the great Country Singer Dierks Bentley says:
"These ol boots they got a lot of leavin left to do"

