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Florence is a Graphic Design student at Seneca who took part in a Summer Academic Program at Artevelde University College Ghent in 2019. Read more about her experiences in Belgium below.

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Where do I begin!? I had the amazing opportunity to go to Ghent, Belgium for a Flexible Packaging Honours Class in Graphic Design course at Artevelde University College Ghent. I learnt a lot about the technical aspects of graphic design like colour, printing, packaging, production work flow.

It's funny because I was so excited as we got there but I was so jet-lagged and cranky I was actually home sick on the first day and that was the only day that I was home sick or even missed it, as odd as that sounds! I just missed my room and comfort zone. That soon dissipated, as we started to explore the city, get a feel of the atmosphere and of course take a million photographs like tourists do. As I got acquainted with my classmates and made new friends, I really started to enjoy it. Talking to the locals and having random conversations with other tourists made it feel refreshing, along with the beautiful and romantic architecture that added a charm to the city called Ghent.

Even though I had to get up early in the mornings for 8 hour classes (nice thing was that the school provided us with lunch) I noticed my stress levels drop. It's crazy because I realized how much stress I put on myself and I brought the 'hustle bustle', 'stress you're a mess' vibe from North America on the first day. As I assimilated, I noticed how laid back the atmosphere is, people just seemed more relaxed (almost everyone rode a bike, the bike had a right of way, then pedestrians then cars). On top of the fact that you can drink alcohol in Belgium once you turn 16, you can drink openly in public which is unheard of in Canada. Most stores close by 6pm on weekdays and almost everything is also closed on Sunday. It seems as if there is more of a balance between work and play and more emphasis on socializing with family and friends, which resulted in this warm, relaxed ambiance that North America lacks.

The more I explored with the friends I had made towards the end of my trip and soaked in and absorbed the environment, the people, and the places, the more I realized I wanted to stay longer and really be a part of it. That new exciting feeling that I got resembled new fresh ideas - it felt like inspiration over and over again (or even a romantic love affair, I couldn't get enough of). But of course I had to leave, which felt abrupt, although I enjoyed my stay and tried to consume all of the waffles and chocolate that I could before leaving.

If you ever have a chance to go or stay in Ghent, Belgium I would suggest:

- Get place or an AirBnb by the City Centre (around Koren Maar). We were a few minutes away from a beautiful view of the bridge, couple minutes away from the grocery stores, bars and overall entertainment.
- Take a boat ride. Yes it sounds tourist-y, but it's super gorgeous and romantic (whether you're single or not). Plus you get a nice view and mini tour of the city for only about 6-7 euros!
- Try WAFFLES! There are two types of waffles I noticed: the thick dough-y ones and the light airy ones, both are yummy! But I really liked the ones from this place called 'Fetch' I would suggest trying their fluffy rectangle waffles, drizzled with Nutella, strawberries and whip cream. If you have a big sweet tooth like mine, it's so delicious, super filling, and you could probably share it with friends
- Graffiti Alley. If you're a street art connoisseur check out Graffiti Alley. It's a cool spot because it's filled with vibrant graffiti, great for selfies and cool shots but also awesome because it's LEGAL to

do graffiti there. Yes you guessed it, I got a can of spray paint and went wild
- Churches and Cathedral. Check out their churches and cathedrals, they are so beautiful.
- Belfry Tower. Check out ‘Belfry of Ghent’ it’s a tower that you can climb to get a beautiful view of the city
- Talk to the Locals. Befriend a local, they are very friendly and can tell you the hotspots to check out!

If you have never really traveled before and get the opportunity to I would definitely say take it, it really opens your eyes up to new languages (even though I only picked up a few words that I forgot quickly because everyone speaks English there along with Dutch), new cultures, landscapes, people and experiences. A definite recommendation for any creative, this will help to fuel your creative juices.

Read more on my personal blog.

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