

AHASoc: Placement guides

Canada (Quebec)

Who to contact if interested?

The Study Abroad & Exchanges team on studyabroad@st-andrews.ac.uk, who will be able to answer any questions on the application procedure. They will also be able to put you in touch with students just back from Canada, and those who are here in St Andrews from Canada on exchange.

Who is eligible? Academic requirements?

Most second-year undergrad students are eligible to spend their third year in Canada on exchange. While a certain level of academic achievement is generally considered necessary, in reality it only needs to be high enough to guarantee admission into Honours. Consistent scores of 14 or above will satisfy.

However the admissions team will also be looking for signs that candidates are capable of living away from home for prolonged periods of time. That said, this does not mean you must have done so before.

British Council

The British Council operates an assistantship system throughout Quebec.

Note however that there are generally no placements available in the largest cities of Montréal and Québec. From the furthest east post to the furthest west is about a *eighteen hour drive*. Living in Canada changes your perception of distance!

Application procedure?

Talk to people! Each year there are between one and four assistants from St Andrews, so you can get in touch with the current cohort to ask your burning questions.

The French department holds regular information meetings and preliminary interviews. The interviews in St Andrews aren't too stressful and just serve to ensure that you know the ins and outs of the application process.

Unlike many other countries, you cannot further specify where you want to be placed. (Though you could try to ask in the interview, there's no guarantee)

Once the application has been submitted, you will probably be invited for an assessment at the British Council's offices in February/March. This takes form in various group activities and a short one-on-one segment. By the end of March you should find out if you have been successful. You won't find out your exact placement until the beginning of summer.

As soon as you find out you have been successful, you need to apply for a visa.

You will need a special work permit from the Canadian Embassy/High Commission in your country of residence to be an assistant in Canada for a year. The application seems a bit daunting at first but it's quite straightforward. This can then be posted, and you should receive your acceptance by post some weeks later. It costs in the region of C\$120 which is not refundable in the event of refusal. You also require a medical (which must be undertaken by a

doctor from a list of approved medical centres throughout the UK) which is rather expensive (up to £300), and neither of these costs are reimbursed.

The permit will be valid from the end of August in the year of entry for a full 12 months, allowing time for travel, etc at the end. You are not allowed to do any other work under this visa, even after the assistantship has finished. There is a small exception in that you can do some more teaching (tutoring, supply, etc) as long as it is approved by the school board.

In June there is a meet and greet in London with the future assistants. Then, at the end of August/beginning of September, there is a 3 day training session in Montreal before everyone parts ways to start the assistantship.

Costs

A student on an assistantship pays half-fees for the year to St Andrews, as we are technically students doing 60 credits.

The initial outlay is expensive, and you must make sure that you have around \$1000 for your first month as you won't get paid for about 6 weeks. Flights, visa, medical and insurance are all paid by you.

Although not eligible for the Erasmus grant (for obvious reasons), assistants in Quebec earn a decent wage. For the year, you will earn \$15300, tax free. HMRC state that you are taxable for your earnings abroad.

Quebec is, due to the exchange rate, more expensive than the UK for food and drink. All spirits are sold by the government, and there is minimum pricing on beer, so you can't really shop around. If you're near the Ontario border or the USA, it might be worth buying it there instead! Also, duty free is very cheap when outside the EU.

Accommodation?

Accommodation ought to be found by your *responsable*, at least for the first few days to let you get on your feet. But some were better than others, and quite a few assistants have been left without accommodation when they arrive, leading to a mad scramble. Unfortunately, there's not much you can do before you leave, but keep in touch with your *responsable* before you go, and they could give some helpful advice.

Thankfully, accommodation in Quebec is cheap by British standards. You can find a nice room in a flatshare with bills included for about \$400 a month, so around £250. You never sign a contract to stay in a flat or a room or pay a deposit, so be extremely wary of anybody who asks this.

Practicalities - Mobile phones, Bank accounts, Health & Travel insurance

After 90 days of being in Quebec, you are entitled to the same healthcare as other residents with a Carte Soleil. So at least cover yourself for the initial 3 months. If you cross the border into the USA, insurance is absolutely necessary. Don't think of travelling without it! Quebec has a shortage of doctors, so waiting times are much longer than in the UK if you want an appointment. Emergency care is of a high standard. Dentists are extremely expensive.

You need to open a Quebec bank account. Almost all assistants use Desjardins, which is a kind of cooperative and ubiquitous throughout the province. The downside to the cooperative

system is that you always have to deal with the branch that you first opened your account with, so don't open an account in Montreal when you arrive. Wait until you know where you're living.

Bank accounts aren't free in Quebec. You pay around \$8 a month which entitles you to a certain number of transactions, i.e. using your card in a shop or withdrawing from a Desjardins cash machine. Transaction fees are massive if you use an ATM from a different bank, around \$5 a time. Note that you can't use debit cards online in Canada; only credit cards.

Having a mobile phone in Quebec is a lot more expensive than in the UK. It's not uncommon for people not to have mobiles. It's worth signing up for a rolling contract, which for about \$20 a month gives lots of texts but not a lot of minutes or internet. 12 month contracts are almost unheard of, so it's unlikely you'll get a new phone for a good deal. You pay to receive calls the same as you do to make them, so you can't be cheap and ring someone to get them to phone you back! You pay more for calls once you leave your 'home' coverage area, i.e. your area code. UK phones which are Tri-Band will work in Quebec with roaming, however even if your phone is unlocked it might not work on some networks, which operate on different frequencies than in Europe.

You will need to purchase cold-weather gear. The most basic are winter boots and a good jacket. You can pick these up from second hand shops or in the sales in the major department stores.

Public transport is minimal at best in Quebec outside the cities, so depending where you are it might be worth getting a car. Running a car isn't as expensive as the UK, so assistants in the past have easily afforded it.

Car sharing through <http://allostop.com/> is very popular, and provides a cheap and efficient way to travel between towns and cities. You must sign up in person at one of their offices in Montréal, Trois-Rivières or Québec for a small fee and then you can book online or in person.