

Semester Abroad

at the University College of the Cayman Islands

Fall Semester 2019

written by



Picture: Seven Mile Beach Grand Cayman

My Study Program

I study tourism management at the Frankfurt University of Applied Sciences in Frankfurt (FRA UAS) and I had the chance to do my fifth semester abroad on the Cayman Islands. The country belongs to Great Britain and has two small universities – from which one is called University College of the Cayman Islands (UCCI), where I did my semester abroad thanks to their cooperation with FRA UAS.

Preparations

In preparation of my semester abroad I first needed to apply at the International Office of our university. The application required a motivation letter, a curriculum vitae and an English test, which could be done at our campus. Besides that, I needed to collect several documents for the application of the student visa for my stay on the Cayman Islands in order to be allowed to go there. The international office of UCCI told me which documents I need to apply for the visa. After collecting them, I could send them all the documents per e-mail, and they organized everything else at the immigration office when I arrived. The documents needed to include a medical questionnaire with an x-ray photograph of my lungs, a police clearance certificate, a recent passport pictures and a proof of having a health insurance for abroad, as well as, enough financial means for the length of my semester abroad. Normally, the visa sums up to a cost of around 300 Euros which needs to be paid on place. In addition to that, I applied for an ESTA-Visa in order to be able to fly to the United States, where I had a stopover on my way to Cayman.

Accommodation

Regarding the accommodation of my stay the international office of UCCI took responsibility and coordination of where I was going to stay. Unfortunately, the organisation was not so far ahead. So, I waited a long time for a feedback to if they finally found an accommodation for me or not. It turned out that I flew to Miami not knowing where I will be staying until a few days earlier to the beginning of the semester in Grand Cayman. But then, at the time when me and a fellow student from Germany, who studies international Finance, arrived at the Airport, we were received very kindly by the represents of UCCI. This was a lucky surprise for us. They immediately showed us around the campus and introduced us to the main representatives of different faculties and positions. Afterwards, we were both sent to different hosts. I was happy to stay with an American teacher working at UCCI nearby the college and my fellow

student was brought to a nice lady who lives in a different part of the island. The rent was 800-900 CI per month which is about 1.000 USD. Therefore, I had my own room with a private bathroom and a shared living room and kitchen together with my landlady.

Getting Around

In George Town, where the University is located, everything is close, BUT anyway most of the people are getting around with their cars. The reason for this is that it is either too hot outside because of the heat of the sun or it is too rainy to walk or bike to even closer places. Nevertheless, I could not afford to buy or rent a car for up to 4 or 5 months, so I decided to buy a bike, which I have used almost every day. Biking to class or the supermarket was tiring and hot, but I got used to it and my fellow student from Germany used his bike to UCCI. The way to UCCI took about 30 minutes for one way. That is why we eventually changed our clothes when we arrived at UCCI before going to classes. The reason why we didn't take public transport to university was, that there were very few busses that go directly to UCCI. The main bus line, where there were several busses – like every 15 minutes – was located at Sevenmile beach road and only went to the centre of George Town, which is still a 30-minute-walk away from UCCI. In addition to that, the bus lines don't have time schedules, so you never know when the next bus will arrive, when you need a ride to somewhere away from the centre of George Town. For instance, I once waited over 30 minutes in the hot sun, without any bus having arrived within that time, so I decided to walk all the way home instead. The good thing is, you can always find nice people at UCCI or somewhere else around the island who you could ask for a ride, as everybody is very kind and helpful due to my experiences.

School System at UCCI



Picture: Campus of UCCI

At UCCI, I did five different classes, those were Finance, Investments, Managerial Accounting, Information Technology (IT) Project Management and Business in Action. The class Managerial Accounting I liked a lot because of the teacher, and it was very different from courses in Germany. The difference came due to the high school way of teaching in this class – accordingly we had to do a lot of class work, participation in class, homework and online quizzes during the semester. The other classes were either independent study classes where we worked in groups on different projects and needed to prepare reports and presentations, or others, like in Germany, where the teacher simply presents you the content and you study those for yourself at home. Anyway, almost all classes rely on the internal program called blackboard – comparable to our platform *moodle* – where teachers upload power point presentations, quizzes and other materials to study.

The grading at UCCI is composed of online quizzes during the semester, mid-term examinations in the middle of the semester counting 20% to your final grade and the final examinations that count 40% to your grade. In addition to that, some teachers

also include your class work and participation to your grading, or they substitute quizzes with reports or presentations.

The examinations differentiated to those in Germany by always including a multiple-choice part in them. Those were often very difficult and may as well include longer calculations to find the right solution. Nevertheless, I would say the mid-term examinations are a bit easier than our examinations in Germany. Moreover, they can be used as a preparation for the final exams at UCCI. Eventually, the difficulty of the final exams is comparable to the ones in Germany, but still always depending on the subject and your English skills, as you will doubtlessly find it easier to answer the multiple-choice questions having a high English language level as if you are struggling with understanding the question or answers right in the first place.

You may as well follow UCCI on Social Media:



Picture: Instagram Page of UCCI

My English Experience

In the Oxford Placement Test I did at FRA UAS before I went to Cayman, I received the grades B2 (in the main Test) and C1 (for the listening part of the conversation exercise with an English teacher). So, my English was not the best and I was worrying if I would understand everything in class at UCCI. But when I arrived, I learned very quickly and

the teachers and classmates have always been very helpful when I had a language question or anything else. The only thing that was very confusing, was the vocabulary for accounting, I would say. The reason for this was that in America and in Cayman people use other words for accounting subjects I already knew from German lessons in accounting. Anyway, I would say my English was good enough to understand everything and to get around easily. Today, I am still very thankful that I had the chance to improve my English in such a nice place with so many friendly people around me for a longer period.

My Expectations

When they asked me how my expectations have been and how the situation actually turned out to be, the first thing I would say is: The island is not so small as you think! There are so many nice spots, especially beaches, bars, restaurants, cultural and historical places to explore. Besides that, I expected that there wouldn't be many places to go to if you want to enjoy a night out with your friends. This was also not true at all, as the Caymanians really know how to make the most of their island life. Accordingly, they offer so many events, especially in the Christmas season, that you really do not need to be scared about getting bored on this island.

Regarding the university, I expected that there would be more student life round the island, also because there was a second University, called St. Matthew's, at Sevenmile beach. This was not the case, or at least I did not get to know about many events or get together for students. Also, my fellow student and I were the only two international students at UCCI during the fall semester. This was different than I expected, but I appreciated it. In this way I had the opportunity to meet more locals and get to know the culture better. Above that, I mainly spoke English during the whole time of my semester abroad. For instance, I only met two or three other people from Germany that moved to the island.

Personal Experience

This leads me to the part where I want to recapture what the semester abroad taught me, not only study wise, but even more for me personally. I am sure I became more self-reliant and responsive for my own decisions and actions. In addition to that, I learned not only about one other culture, which is the Caribbean/Caymanian culture of the Cayman Islands, I also got to know other cultural influences by locals, that came from places like the United States, South Africa, India, Canada and some others mostly

because of their work. Moreover, I noticed the American influence daily on parts of public lifestyle like in grocery stores or also at UCCI where they have similar school systems.

All in all, I would say, I became way more open-minded in many parts of life and I am definitively more confident and secure in communicating in English now than I was before my semester abroad.

Recommendations for Internationals

Finally, I want to give you – future international students at UCCI – some tips for your stay abroad in order to make the most of this unique time of your life!

First of all, be prepared to **organize all the application documents** you will need for your Student VISA Application for the Cayman Islands as **far ahead** as possible and be patient with the international office at UCCI, as they are sort of living on another time pace like we do (I would call it “Island time”) which you better always keep in mind.

Moreover, I really advise you to save a lot of money for your stay before you go, because the Island is one of the most expensive places worldwide, which you should not underestimate if you want to have a good time overseas. So, plan at least 1.000 USD for accommodation (per month) and about three times as much money for living (food, drinks, going out and so on) as you would pay in Germany. I know that is hard to believe but trust me some simple groceries like yogurt or cheese cost a lot more on island than here. Firstly, they need to ship everything, secondly, they add a high import fee on every product that is shipped to Cayman. This is nearly everything, except from some few products which they produce themselves like for example coconut water, avocados or plantains. Besides that, think of the many tourist attractions you could do during your stay, that might also cost you money. Luckily you receive a discount with your student ID from UCCI at many renting places.

Finally, I want to give you some tips for the time when you arrive on island:

If UCCI does not find a place to stay for you or if you want to change the accommodation and find yourself a new place, discuss this with the International office first. Then, you may need to write a statement of responsibility that releases UCCI from its responsibility for your housing. In order to find another place, I advise you to look at **ecaytrade.com**, which is a website for all kinds of things like ebay. Besides, I also

bought my bike through e caytrade.com instead of buying it at a bike store, because it was much cheaper this way.

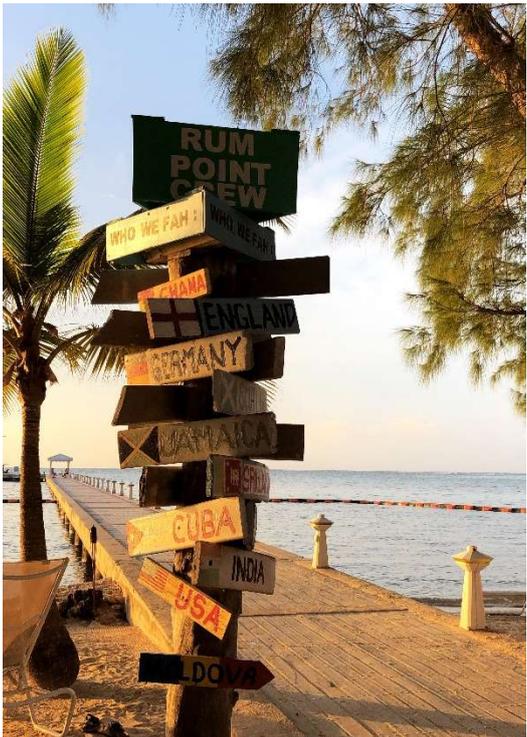
Another recommendation for grocery shopping is to go to cost-you-less. It offers many XXL packages for relatively low prices. If you go there in the beginning of your stay, you can make use of the big sizes, because you won't need to buy them again, and save money at the same time.

Regarding the tourist and local attractions on island, I can definitely recommend going to Stingray City at least once and to go on a boat trip to a place called Rum Point with your friends on a Sunday. What many people also love to do on sundays in Cayman is to go for brunch with a bunch of people at a fancy restaurant or hotel like the Marriott or the Kimpton Seafire Hotel. But here again, please be warned that the prices for a brunch are normally about 70-120 USD per person.

Boat Trip to Stingray City



Boat Trip to Rum Point



Seven Mile Beach





Pictures: Own Photography

Lastly, I only want to say, that I really enjoyed the whole experience of studying abroad and I am sure that you will learn a lot from it, too, regardless of where you want to go and which university you choose!



Pictures: Own Photography