

Selkirk College has a fine chemistry program which is an odd way to start a review of David Ellis's Lonely Planet Guide to New York City, but there is a connection. First, Selkirk's chemistry program.

Advantages of studying chemistry at Selkirk are small classes, well-equipped labs and good instruction. Help is accessible directly from your instructor, not from a frazzled graduate student working long shifts as sole tutor for hundreds of confused students. Selkirk's labs are tip-top, a point to which I shall return, and the instructors are as qualified as you will find at any North American university.

As for up-to-date chemistry labs, Selkirk recently replaced three older analytical instruments with new systems. Analytical instruments determine exactly how much of a particular compound is present in a certain sample. At Selkirk, instruments are solely for student use.

I teach courses in water and air pollution chemistry in the Selkirk College Integrated Environmental Planning Technology program. I teach how to determine the presence and amount of contaminants in water and air samples using analytical instruments. The new instruments are fully-computerized so I needed to learn their operation. With a grant from the faculty professional development fund, I was off to Buck Scientific, the manufacturer's lab in East Norwalk, Connecticut. I spent two days there perched in front of a gas chromatograph learning the operational software, and practising trouble-shooting.

Being so close to the Big Apple, I scheduled a visit. I borrowed the Lonely Planet Guide to New York City from the Castlegar and District Library. Using hotels.com, I discovered that The Pennsylvania Hotel, across from Madison Square Gardens and a block from Macy's Department store was having a summer special, \$US 89.00 per night.

I arrived in the evening, I registered and took a walk up 7th Ave. through Times Square to the Park Plaza to get my bearings. In the morning, armed with the Lonely Planet Guide, I bought an all-day subway pass at Penn Station and travelled downtown to the lower Manhattan. The Guide describes a walking tour that took me to City Hall, the Federal Court House, the Woolworth Building, Ground Zero, and Battery Park. It finished at the Fulton Fish Market. From Battery Park I could have taken a ferry to Ellis Island and the Statue of Liberty. I took pictures instead. There were narrow, winding streets, monumental buildings, street vendors, helpful cops, parks, and churches. For me, the most moving site was the Vietnam Veteran's Plaza: a wall of glass blocks onto which were inscribed passages from letters home.

I took a subway to the American Museum of Natural History. It's classic revival with ionic columns and statues on a grand scale. I tried to do the impossible and see it all in an afternoon. There was a special exhibition on chocolate, an Imax film on changes to global coral reefs, the halls of biodiversity, human evolution, and ocean life. I saw some of the dinosaur skeletons that had inspired Stephen Jay Gould and I gaped at the vastness of it all. After five hours, I was defeated. There was still so much to see.

I walked across Central Park West past sunbathers and frisbee players. I watched a game on the beach volleyball court. I returned to the Pennsylvania. It had been a great day, but I had missed the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Millionaire's Row, a walking tour through Harlem and more of the AMNH. Would I go again? Without hesitation, but not without the Lonely Planet Guide to New York City.