

Personal report: Carnegie Mellon University, PA, USA

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Overall impression

I spent nearly 7 months at The Robotics Institute of Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh, PA and I really enjoyed every single day. I was quite lucky to find good friends in my office, with whom I traveled from time to time. At the end of the research period, I wished I could have stayed a bit longer in Pittsburgh. Probably it would be wise to spend a full year in Pittsburgh, as each season offers different benefits. On the other hand, I was really happy to be back in Austria again as well.

Carnegie Mellon University: The Robotics Institute

The Robotics Institute of the Carnegie Mellon University is one of the top five places in the world to study robotics. Many famous robot companies such as Boston Dynamics have their roots there. Additionally, all major players in robotics, such as Facebook robotics, Disney robotics, and numerous autonomous self-driving car startups, are strongly connected with CMU. Due to those strong bonds, you can expect to visit talks of Mark Raibert, CEO of Boston Dynamics, and many others.

There is a free robotics seminar each Friday afternoon, where a 45 min talk is given about the newest research followed by an open discussion and dinner party. During those seminars, I learn a lot and got many new ideas which I could use for my own research. Additionally, I had a lot of interesting discussions with people from all over the world.

Integration

I was really lucky to have a great integration into the social life on and off campus. During the first weeks, I tried to meet as many people as possible and join various different sports activities, such as soccer, swimming and going to the gym. The Carnegie Mellon University offers a wide variety of sports possibilities for free for all students. Those include a new gym, two swimming pools, soccer

fields, football fields, tennis courts and more. During the summertime, many students play ultimate Frisbee on the campus and everybody is warmly invited to join the game.

Additionally, I had a great experience with the integration with my professor. Usually, the students meet a few times per week with their professor, but as I and my host professor were both interested in aviation, he took me and a few other students to an air show.

The students in Smith Hall, where my office was located, were from all over the world. Therefore they did not know the surroundings of Pittsburgh that well and we did a lot of traveling.

I thought it was easy to connect with other students from all over the world, but I had a hard time to meet Americans, as most of the students are from Asia or South America.

Recommendations

The following two sections shall provide some recommendations for living in Pittsburgh and exploring the east coast. I tried to spend about one weekend per month in a different city, as many big cities are not too far away.

Pittsburgh

Pittsburgh is a lovely city surrounded by nature. Despite being not as huge as other American cities, Pittsburgh has a ton of interesting things to offer. If you like sports, you should definitely watch the football team, Pittsburgh Steelers or the ice-hockey team, Pittsburgh Penguins. Both teams are well known in the united states for their champions ship victories.

The two rivers, Monongahela River and Allegheny River, surround Pittsburgh Downtown and merge into the Ohio River. During summertime, the Point State Park, where the rivers join, is crowded and the rivers are packed with motorboats.

During wintertime, it can be quite cold in Pittsburgh. In general, the temperatures are a bit more extreme than compared to Salzburg. So definitely bring warm clothes for the winter and shorts for the summer.

It is not very easy to find a good place to stay, which is in a safe neighborhood, cheap and close to Carnegie Mellon University. I can really recommend AirBnB as I paid way less than other students and had a nice flat in Squirrel Hill, which is a nice and safe neighborhood.

East Coast USA

To travel to the surrounding cities near Pittsburgh I mostly used MegaBus. You should book as soon as possible, as the ticket prices rise constantly. To get a little bit more comfort, especially on routes above 4 hours, I definitely recommend to reserve a seat for a few extra dollars. If you prefer to fly, I would recommend using SkyScanner. I got some great deals from Pittsburgh to Orlando and back.

During my stay in Pittsburgh, I visited: Washington DC, Philadelphia, New York, Boston, Chicago, and the Niagara Falls.

Washington DC impressed me most, as it has many marvelous museums about aviation and science. Additionally, it was very interesting to see the White House, the Capitol and many different monuments. If you are planning to visit the Niagara Falls, I would definitely recommend going to the Canadian side, as the view is way better on this side.