

5 Months of Amazing Aussie Life

G'day future exchange student, the fact that you are reading this means that you are interested in doing in an exchange semester. I can only say one thing: just do it! It has been the best choice in my life to do this and has given me great experiences, friends and lessons I will never forget. In this document I will tell you some practical stuff about my time in Melbourne, Australia, and in the end some of the experiences itself to help you make your decision of where to go. Enjoy!

General Information

University: Swinburne University of Technology

Where: Melbourne, Australia

When: 25 July 2015 – 6 January 2016 (semester from 3 August 2015 – 14 November 2015). This is the first semester in Rotterdam, Semester 2 in Australia.

Preparation

After hearing that I was selected to study abroad in Melbourne at the Swinburne University of Technology, the application process for the university itself started. I thought this would not take that much time, since I was doing the exchange program. However, it took more time than I thought. The main problem was to convince them that my English was of a high enough level to enrol. If you do not have any English certificates or done English courses, you will have to do a TOEFL or IELTS test. This costs money (around 200 euro) and you have to sign up quickly because when I looked into it, around March, it was full till the beginning of July (I left end of July).

Next to you application, you will also have to arrange a number of other things:

Visa: a student Visa application is rather easy, you fill in a form online and half an hour later you have the Visa. However, to do this, you will need your Confirmation of Enrolment from the Swinburne University, so make sure you start enrolling immediately after you receive confirmation from the ESE. Also make sure you have a passport that is valid until have year after your return.

Ticket: to get to Australia you will need to buy a ticket. Do this as soon as possible as well, since the prices will only rise. I booked my ticket through Australian Backpackers. They offer flexible year tickets of which you can change the dates for free (as long as they are in the same booking class) and the locations for 50 euro. This is useful if you are not yet sure about your travel plans or when you want to return. Keep in mind when buying the ticket that the semester will start the first week of August and that around Christmas and New Years the tickets are expensive more expensive (Australian Summer).

Accommodation: one of the most important things to think about is how you want to organize your accommodation in Melbourne, since it is really expensive and where you live heavily influences your semester. One option is to live on campus. This is really expensive (300 or more Australian dollar per week), but has the advantage that you don't have to travel far to uni and you have a lot of internationals and other students around you. If you want to save money on accommodation and prefer living in the city centre, I recommend doing the same as I did: book a hostel for the first week and look for a room from there (I was in the YHA hostel on Flinders Street, which was a good hostel and central) . The best way to find a room is through www.flatmates.com.au. Finding a room is rather

easy, a good one, however, is more difficult. My advice is to find an acceptable one for only one month. After the first few chaotic weeks (see Arrival), you will have time to find a great apartment, something that is very well possible. I knew multiple internationals that had an apartment in a building which included a gym, sauna and hottubs on the roof for only 200 dollar a week. This sounds like an awful lot of money, and it is, but for living in Melbourne (or Sydney) it is a really good price.

Arrival

After a nice stopover of 10 hours in Taipei, I arrived in Melbourne on the 25th of July, two days before the Orientation week started. This meant two things: I had to arrange many things in the first week, and I had a jetlag while doing it. Result: it was a chaotic week. However, it was awesome!

A guy from the university dropped me off at my hostel. There I met some fellow students of the university I met through facebook (they open a facebook group with all internationals). The next day we started looking for accommodation and organized some things like:

Sim-card: take Telstra as your provider. It has best coverage, connection and is reasonably priced;

Myki card (for public transport): at first take a week-pass, then you don't have to worry about putting money on it all the time. As an exchange student, you can get a concession card at the University, which makes public transport much cheaper. As soon as you have it, get either a pass for multiple weeks or top it up with money if you are not planning on using the public transport that much. Important: in the Central Business District (CBD), there is a free tram zone where you don't have to pay at all.

Get the PTV app: this app is like the NS app in the Netherlands, but for trams, trains and metros in one. It helps you plan your journeys, which you will definitely need since Melbourne is huge.

On Monday the Orientation week started. This is a week with some talks from university staff and activities to get to know your fellow international students. It included a tour around Melbourne, some drinks and an really cool trip on Friday where visited a winery, a chocolate factory and a wildlife sanctuary where we saw our first kangaroos! Great day to meet other students. Definitely recommend doing this, although it costs you some money. We also managed to get our hands on free tickets to an Australian Football (or: footy) match, which were offered by the footy team of Swinburne.

All in all the first week was great but also really exhausting. Next to the activities I had to look for a room, enrol in my courses and get to know my way around Melbourne. On top of that: everything is new, you meet a lot of new people and speaking English all week round for the first time can also cost some energy. Ah, and there is that jetlag. So if you want a somewhat more relaxed orientation week: book your flight a week earlier so you have enough time to arrange most of the important stuff. However don't worry: Australians are really helpful so you will be able to manage.

Courses

Consumer Behaviour

is a second year marketing course that is focused on how consumers make their choices for products and how marketers can use this. I thought it was a really interesting course with one lecture and one tutorial a week. What I liked most about it was the more practical approach than we usually get in the courses at Erasmus. In the two assignments we had to make we had to incorporate everything we were taught during the lectures. Also in the exam you had to apply the material instead of answering theoretical multiple-choice questions. The level was comparable to that in the Netherlands. If you are interested in marketing, I definitely recommend this course.

Marketing Planning and Strategy

is a third year marketing course with a practical approach and a heavy workload. In the second week I already had to do a 45-minute presentation together with two other students, but it has been one of the best assignments I had to do in my studies so far. The main focus of the course was on writing a marketing plan for a real business. In our case this was Learning for Life, an organization that treats children with autism. During this assignment, we had contact with people within the organization, had to come up with our own solutions, analyse the business' environment, make the budget, think about how to implement it, make a timeline on when to do what etc. In other words, we had to come up with a marketing plan from scratch. This has taught me more practical things about marketing than lectures could ever do. Do this course if you are interested in marketing. Don't if you want to spend as little time in the library as possible, because this course has cost me the most time.

International Politics

is a introductory course in politics. It deals with all major theories in international relations like realism and neoliberalism. It is an interesting course for more background to everything that is happening in the world these days. You are graded on two big essays you have to write. For the tutorials you have to read an article each week that you discuss in class, together with current events. The mix between theory and current events gives depth, although I would have preferred if the focus were more on current events. A good course if you want something different than economics.

Environmental management

Because I want to work in the sustainability sector, I chose this course. However, it turned out to be different than I thought it would. The focus is on hazardous substances, contaminated site clean-up, ecosystems and not so much on sustainable energy for example. Although it was not what I hoped it would be, there were some interesting subjects. However, this was my least favourite

course. The level of the course was not really high, which made it possible for me to get a high grade anyway.

Finances

The biggest hurdle for choosing Australia for your abroad semester: money. Let me be clear, it is really really expensive to live in Australia. For me it was worth every euro that I earned the year before my exchange semester. But if you do not have big reserves or support from your parents, consider going to Australia in a few years on a work and travel Visa. The wages in Australia are also really high, so working there compensates the high costs. Below is a breakdown of my costs.

The exchange rate was about 1,5 Australian Dollar (AUD) for one Euro.

Costs	EUR	AUD
<i>Preparation</i>		
Flight (including a ticket to New Zealand)	1643	
Overseas health insurance	270	
Visa	375	
<i>In Melbourne</i>		
Room (per <i>week</i>)		245
Public Transport for 3 months with concession		210
Sim-card (per month)		30
Estimation of living costs per month		800
<i>Traveling</i>		
Outback (12 days), mostly for campers and fuel		1600
East coast (2,5 weeks)		1750
New Zealand (3 weeks)		2500

In total my costs have been around 10.000 euro. As said before, it has been worth every cent. However, as I saw on my way back in Thailand, your exchange semester can be a lot cheaper! Especially if you just want to party the whole semester, choose a different destination, because paying 7-10 dollar for a beer in a bar is totally normal.

Daily life

As you can see above, Australia is one of the most expensive destinations for your exchange semester. However, if I had to choose again, I would definitely choose Melbourne again. This is why.

What they say about Australia is true, its society and people are really relaxed. Something I really took home was their “No worries” mentality. It is hard to put into words, but the whole city (and the rest of the country) just breathes a feeling like: don’t worry too much about things, life is good. People, at work or just in the streets, are always willing to help you and are always in for a chat.

On top of that, the economist has for multiple years in a row crowned Melbourne “most liveable city”. This is expressed in its great public transport, atmosphere

and innovative architecture, bars and cafés. And the food in Melbourne is just amazing. On every corner of the street there is an amazing burger place. Furthermore, it is also the most multicultural city in the world, something I really liked. You see people from all around the world and you also see this in the wide variety of restaurants, bars and events. For example, the 3rd largest Greek community lives in Melbourne, not in Greece.

For choosing where to go for your exchange semester, you will be interested in the differences between Melbourne and Sydney. There is always a rivalry between the two and I don't think one of the two is better, because they are so different. The main difference is the atmosphere: Melbourne is much more hipster and innovative, where Sydney is more fancy. Where in Sydney a quarter of the people you see are in suits, in Melbourne you don't see a lot. Another difference is the centre. Melbourne's centre is much smaller than Sydney's, making it much more accessible and everything feels more "connected". However, there are also some things Sydney has that Melbourne will never beat: the weather, the beaches and the harbour. The weather in Melbourne is not the Australian weather you expect, especially in August till October. The harbour in Sydney is just spectacular to see. And unfortunately Melbourne is next to a big bay and not the ocean, making its beaches far less impressive and surfing impossible. All in all, I think Melbourne is better to live, where Sydney is better to visit on holidays. Also the fact that Sydney is even more expensive than Melbourne helps in this.

I am in love with Melbourne and will definitely go back. I think everyone that goes there will do the same. Good luck with your choice! And remember: no worries, every choice you will make for your destination will be unforgettable!

Jasper

If you have any questions, feel free to email me on jasper.brouwers1991@gmail.com. I would love to help you organize your own amazing exchange semester!