

# Texas A&M

*Fabrizio van Tilburg*

## **General information & daily life**

From August 2015 to December 2015, I studied at Texas A&M university. The university is based in a city in the middle of Texas called College Station. The city itself is not very interesting or large and neither are the cities close by but that is not what it is about at Texas A&M.

At Texas A&M it is all about.. Texas A&M. The university is huge and has about 60.000 enrolled students. As a result, the campus is enormous and the city College Station is basically owned and run by the university. This is what makes the experience at Texas A&M so special. It is the typical American college life with perfect weather conditions during the entire fall semester (College Station was recently even ranked second best college town in the US).

Football is religion. The football stadium, Kyle Field, was renovated in 2014 and now has a seating capacity of over a 100.000 people. Normally about 40% of them are students, which all go totally crazy during the game, a great experience by itself. The games are every other week and depending on who they are playing cost about \$20~\$35 each. I have been to all of them and even though the team did not do particularly well this year they were more than worth it.

During the second week of school a student organizations fair at the MSC building takes place. Where all the student organizations (fraternities, sports teams, charities etc.) present themselves. I would advise going there and joining one. As they are great ways to meet new people and organize nice activities. Myself I joined the Wakeboard Team. The team has their own boat which is taken out twice a day to wakeboard at the near Lake Bryan. They also organized drinks, house parties and other wakeboarding events.

Initially I had planned to do as much traveling as my finance and time would allow me. Therefore I had picked my courses in such a way that I had Fridays off, making it easier to travel during the weekends. In the end however I travelled far less than I had expected, the reason being that the weekends at A&M were just so much fun. There always was a party, be it organized by the wakeboard team, the rugby team my friend Tom was in, by the dorms we were in or just random parties. And else would just go to Northgate, the bar strip right off campus with about 20 different bars/clubs. Add to that the football games we did not want to miss and other activities organized by my wakeboard team and pretty much every weekend was filled. Luckily I did find time to travel some places. The cities I have been to are basically the large Texan cities (Houston, Dallas and Austin are all within about 2 hours from College Station), New Orleans and Miami and were all definitely a great experience.

For housing there is two options, you can either stay in an on campus dorm or rent an apartment off campus. I chose the former, this did mean that I would have to share my bedroom with a roommate, something I was not particularly looking forward to, but in the end that did not prove too bad. Both options are about \$500 a month. A dorm has the advantage of being on campus, near everything

(classes/parties/gym/dining options) and is perfect for the 'American college life experience'. But an apartment is often more luxurious(own bedroom/bathroom etc.) for the same price and most apartment complexes have their own pool. It is what you prefer, but personally I did not regret my choice for living on campus.

Even though other destinations may offer better traveling options I would definitely recommend going to Texas A&M. It is the perfect opportunity to experience the American college life and everything that comes with it. Also the Texan culture is something in itself, make sure to visit Harrys on a Thursday for some classic two-step country dancing! And, well, just enjoy every day as your four months will be over before you know it.

### **Preparation**

The exchange office of Texas A&M is really well organized. As soon as you get selected they will contact you by e-mail and guide you through the process. There is an online course including quizzes which you have to complete that will tell you everything you need to know. The only thing it forgets to tell you is that if you want to buy a sports pass (so that you can go to all the American football games) that you have to apply for one as early as possible as they sell out over summer already. However, if you do not have one, like me, you can always still buy tickets for each individual game, it is just a bit more of a struggle.

And also, keep in mind that the Visa application for the US takes a few weeks so do not wait too long with that either.

### **Arrival**

As for the preparation, the exchange office of Texas A&M will tell you everything you need to know for when you arrive. If you fly in from Houston, the Ground shuttle service is the easiest and cheapest way to College Station. On campus housing opens the 23<sup>rd</sup> of August but early move-in is possible up to a few days in advance. If you decide to arrive even earlier, something I would not advice as during breaks College Station has little to offer, you should book yourself a hotel.

### **Courses**

After you arrive you will have a meeting scheduled with a student advisor who 'helps you subscribe for courses'. She was not the best advisor as she said that all courses were either full or not possible for me to subscribe to. But actually you do not really need her help, subscription to courses is possible through 'Howdy', their equivalent of sin-online. If any course has specific requirements which you do not meet just email or call the department and tell them you are an exchange student, they will be more than willing to help you.

My courses:

- Programming 1 (CSCE 110)  
Beginner course in programming.  
Was a nice, 8 ECTS, course which will teach you the Python language. If you want to learn programming and have no prior knowledge then I would definitely recommend this course. The professor first explains every concept clearly in her lectures. Whereafter you will have to apply the concepts yourself in solving the weekly assignments.
- Fundamentals of Human nutrition (NUTR 202)  
I think the name speaks for itself, no prior knowledge is required and it is an interesting course. Only studying the chapters on vitamins and minerals was time quite consuming as it takes a lot of memorization.  
6 ECTS
- Analytic Geometry & Calculus (Math 171)  
Basic math course, 8 ECTS, not really interesting but a good way to refresh your math skills.
- Economic Development (ECON 330)  
The Economics Department at A&M is not really what the school is famous for and most econ course are less demanding. Some are still really interesting though. This Economic Development course was one of those. The course material was fairly easy but about 50% of the course was reading articles about developing countries and their economies. Most often really interesting and easy to read. 6 ECTS

## Finances

- Visa	€ 300,-	
- Housing	€2000,-	
- Insurance	€ 791,-	
- Flight	€ 788,-	
- Vaccination	€ 90,-	
- Meal plan	€1150,-	(120 meals, various dining places on campus)
- Wakeboarding	€ 250,-	
- Books	€ 240,-	

Overall I think that prices were 15% higher than here in the Netherlands for food, alcohol and other basic needs (with an exchange rate of: €1 = \$1,08). Sports facilities are all free, including a huge gym, pool (indoor and outdoor), track fields and well basically any sport is offered.

Feel free to contact me if you have any questions.