

The down under way of life

Welcome to the Student report about Western Sydney University. If you are reading this than congratulations. You are preparing yourself to make one of the best decisions you'll ever make in your life. An international exchange is, if you get the opportunity, truly an experience that will last you a lifetime.

General information

During my exchange I studied at the University of Western Sydney. So for the record: Sydney, Australia. It changed name however and it is now called Western Sydney University. It is only a name change, so don't be confused if you see older reports mentioning UWS.

Western has seven campuses of which Parramatta is the biggest. This is where I spend my exchange so this will be the focus point of this report. I stayed here from July the 9th until November the 18th 2015. My Dutch summer break was thus cut short because it is the winter break between the semesters in Australia. The upside is that you'll almost have 2 months to travel after you finished your courses in Australia.

Preparation

First things first, make sure you have a passport. Afterwards there are a couple of things you will need to do before you can go on your exchange. First thing is to get accepted at your exchange university. So apply. This is the first step because you will need your confirmation of enrolment (CoE) in order to apply for the temporary student visa.

Application. You'll need the following:

- A filled in application form (check the website of the host university)

- A copy of your academic transcripts (obtainable in the E building)

- Proof of meeting our English language proficiency. It is stated that you'll have to do a TOEFL test, which is a costly joke and thus I didn't do it! Pro tip: I e-mailed their exchange coordinator asking if there is another way to show my English proficiency because I had already completed two bachelor years of a study that was fully in English. I requested a letter from the student service centre at the Erasmus which stated that my study (classes, literature and exams) were in English, got it stamped and signed and uploaded it instead of my TOEFL score.

So now you have your CoE, you can almost apply for a Visa. Australia requires you to get an Overseas Student Health Coverage. This is easy to get because in your application to Western you can just tick the box "Yes I want an OSHC and I want Western to fix it for me" the only thing you have to do yourself is to pay, just follow the to-do list Western sends you.

Now apply for a Visa, again follow the to-do list Western sends you, all the links and info are in there.

Accommodation: two of the seven campuses have accommodation on campus. Parramatta is one of them. There are plenty of rooms available and I recommend you to rent a room on campus. Living on a campus village is a wonderful experience and it might look expensive, but that's just Australia. Cheaper accommodation outside campus is very hard to find.

On arrival

Western offers a free airport pickup so make sure to apply for that a couple of days in advance. If you don't have accommodation yet you can stay in a hostel for a couple of days before you sort your stuff out. I know multiple people that did it this way. Google is your friend here.

If for some reason you don't have the airport pickup, get a taxi or take the public transport. To travel by public transport you'll need an Opal card, this is their equivalent to the Dutch OV card. You can get an Opal card almost everywhere, even the 7-eleven sells them. Busses can be tricky because they don't indicate what the next bus stop is going to be and the stops themselves don't have a sign with the name of the stop or something so ask around where you need to get off or be prepared and know your route in advance.

Another thing that might come in handy: make sure your debit card is usable abroad.

Courses

Courses at Western count for 10 points which translate to 7.5 ECTS at the Erasmus. In order to get your 24 ECTS you'll have to follow 4 courses. I followed:

Markets of Asia. Better be called Markets of India and China because almost no information about the Tiger countries or Japan is provided. The upside is that it provides more than just a shallow glance into the markets of China and India. It dissects the culture, teaches about habits and lets you discuss very contemporary developments within the world economy. For example the current change in Guanxi habits (the importance of informal relationships in the business environment in China) with regards to corruption and westernisation of business practices.

Australian Macro Economics. Comparable to Macro Economy at the EUR in some ways. However, it is interesting to see that Western takes a completely different approach at teaching the theories and focuses on completely other things that Macro at the EUR. As suggested by the name, it teaches a lot about the current state and future developments within the Australian economy.

Business Society and Policy. This course really focuses on perspectives. How do decisions from one party affect the other parties? What level of management or government is involved? How do different societies interact with their government? How much power does the business sector really hold? This course is less about teaching you theories and more about teaching you a way to think about problems or developments.

Behavioural Finance. In contrast to Business Society and Policy, this course is very theory heavy. It looks at the Economic Theories that are currently dominating the neo-liberalistic western economies and in what ways certain critiques have held up over the past decades. The economic crisis of 2007/2008 is a much discussed topic and the role the financial sector plays in an economy is evaluated.

Finances

First things first. Australia is expensive. During my exchange I had a favourable exchange rate (1 euro to 1.50 AUD) and still almost everything is more expensive than in The Netherlands. The upside are the wages in Australia. Normal wage for a 21 year old is almost 20 dollars per hour. I managed to finance almost half of my exchange by working during my exchange. That's basically the travelling and social part of my budget.

Housing 20 weeks	4280 AUD
Costs of Living	1800 AUD
Sport (gym)	350 AUD
Social	1000 AUD
Pre-paid sim card	150 AUD
Transportation	200 AUD
Flight to and from Australia	1300 Euro (booked single tickets)
Other traveling	5200 AUD
Total	+/- 14.880 AUD or 9.920 Euro

Daily life

I doubt I'll have to convince anyone that Sydney is one of the best exchange locations that you can imagine, but still here is a look in what my daily life looked like. Followed by some tips and things I highly recommend doing.

Crucial part of the daily life is the weather. I'm not lying that the weather in Sydney is always, ALWAYS beautiful! It rained twice during my exchange and on a normal day the sky is as blue as it can get. In winter it can be a bit cold in the early morning or evenings, that is down till 15 degrees Celsius. After spring it doesn't really go below 25. The lovely weather just changes the whole atmosphere. People get active, people want to go outside and do stuff. The community in the campus village was amazing. Around 300 international students all looking to make new friends and make the most out of their exchange so little trips to the harbour, beach of Blue Mountains (huge nature reserve west of Sydney) where a weekly thing. The university and the campus village management organise a lot of things. Western was mostly able to get crazy discounts for students on things like kayaking trips or skydiving (sold out quick to look it up once you get there).

That said here a couple of tips to make your life great in Sydney:

Sydney is stuffed with dive shops, they get most their customers during the summer holidays so up until October they give crazy discounts on their diving courses. You can get your diving licence (either PADI or SSI) for 150 AUD. Normal price is 400+.

Free walking tours. The guys who organise this are amazing. They don't charge you anything for the tours they provide through different parts of Sydney, simply ask you what you feel like paying them once the tour is done. Fair to say they go way overboard to make it awesome.

Plan your courses/reschedule your courses so you get a 4 or 5 day weekend. In the first week it is still okay to switch courses, make sure to use this opportunity. There are at least 4 mayor beaches and uncountable smaller once in the Sydney area. 2 days in a weekend just won't cover it.

Beach to beach walks. Walking routes short and long across the nature reserves in Sydney.

Rooftop-pool-parties. Ivy is one of the biggest clubs in Sydney, entry is free on Thursdays and their pool area opens somewhere in spring.

Jelly Bean pool in the Blue Mountains.

Travel tips: Fiji is around the corner. Only a 4 hour flight from Sydney, sounds crazy but believe me it's paradise on earth. That said other alternatives are road trips on the great ocean road (Melbourne – Sydney). Up or down the East Coast (Cairns – Sydney). If you have your diving licence and your budget allows it, the Great Barrier Reef is truly the most wonderful place on earth, best to reach from Cairns. While you're at it, New Zealand is absolutely stunning. So many places to go, so little time.