

Exchange Down Under at University of Western Sydney

Name of University	University of Western Sydney
Country	Australia
City	Sydney (in the suburb Parramatta)
Period	July – November 2015

Preparation

Before you even decide to apply for an exchange in Australia, beware of the consequences by reading reports like this one. Not only will your life never be the same again once you return, you will also be completely broke. Make sure you have enough money to live elsewhere than under the harbor bridge eating instant noodles every night. If you do, or if you are willing to work besides your studies and have been the lucky one to claim a spot there are a few things you should arrange.

Not to worry though, if you are able to read and keep an eye on your email everything should work out in the end. First you will receive some forms from the university which you fill in and send back, after which you receive a Confirmation of Enrolment (CoE). When you have this document you can apply for a student visa. You need the subclass 575 visa. Read more about the application process on immi.gov.au. It is a bit unclear what documents you need to provide, and it seems a bit daunting at first when you read about needing 'certified copies' of your passport, bank statement and some other stuff. I just attached a picture of my passport, a screenshot of my bank account balance and a scan of my Cambridge Advanced English certificate. This turned out to be sufficient. If the immigration office needs more documents they will notify you by email. Make sure you apply well in advance. I received my student visa in 1 day, but I've also applied for a tourist visa later which took weeks, so processing times seem to be a bit random.

Once you receive your visa you should book your plane tickets as soon as possible. Prices usually increase as the departure date comes closer. I highly recommend getting a student ticket or combination ticket from Kilroy travels that lets you stop over in Bangkok or Hong Kong for as long as you want. I stopped over for a week in Hong Kong before I came to Australia and absolutely loved it.

Some other practical stuff: you're required to get a special health insurance for overseas students called OSHC. The university can arrange this for you, but I would advise shopping around and looking for one yourself to save some money. Also don't forget to notify Dutch authorities like DUO, your bank, insurance, and so on that you are moving abroad for a semester.

It's also a good idea to apply for courses before you go to make sure there are still spots available in the tutorials that fit well into your timetable. Beware that every campus has different schools and I would recommend only choosing courses at one campus because travel times between campuses can be very long. They are also quite far from downtown Sydney as well and often the public transport to get there is awful. This means you have to decide whether you prefer to live on-campus close to university or off-campus in the city or near the beach. If you want to live in CBD or near the beaches the only feasible campus is Parramatta, unless you buy a car. It takes about an hour from CBD to the Parramatta campus by train and bus. There are also night busses going to Parramatta but they take even longer.

Be sure to arrive well in advance to the start of classes, especially if you are planning on looking for accommodation on arrival (which is no problem by the way, you can easily get it within a week if you

need to). Stay in a hostel to make some friends, there are typically a lot of students in the hostels the weeks before the semester starts that are also looking for accommodation. I spent a lot of time with the people I met there during my time in Sydney.

Also, don't make the mistake I made thinking "I don't need a jacket, it is hot in Australia". July is winter over there and one of the first things I bought was a jacket since it was freezing (especially if you just got used to 35+ degrees humid Hong Kong weather).

Arrival

Get an Australian sim card on arrival at the airport. I got Vodafone because it was the cheapest at the time, but their reception outside of Sydney is not very good and often non-existent. If you are planning on going on a lot of trips or traveling during your semester abroad I would recommend getting Telstra. It's expensive but they have much more coverage. Also get an Australian bank account as soon as possible and transfer a large sum of money to it to save on international transaction fees. Commonwealth or ANZ are the most common. Beware that bank offices close very early in Australia (4PM). If you need to look for accommodation like me, www.gumtree.com.au and www.flatmates.com.au are good websites to find rooms.

The university organizes an orientation day on which you can meet some other exchange students. While you're there don't forget to get a student card as well.

Courses

To find information about the courses you can use <http://handbook.westernsydney.edu.au/hbook/>. Some units offer night classes in addition to day classes. I initially took one of these, but found staying at university until 9 in the evening and taking public transport back too much of a hassle. Luckily it is still possible to drop and add new courses a few weeks into the semester. I did this quite a few times. You need at least 24 ECTS which means you need 4 subjects. In my case I could suffice with 3 because I did the exchange in my fourth year and did not need the ECTS for my minor.

Personal Asset Management

This unit basically teaches you to compose an investment portfolio for small clients (or yourself). It contains a lot of useful information on different markets and how appropriate they are for different types of investors. One of the assignments is to write an actual investment report for an imaginary client in which you advise the client on how to invest a certain amount of money.

Derivatives

Very in depth subject on different kinds of derivatives and rehearsal of many basic economic knowledge like time value of money, different types of bonds and much more. The subject is very quantitative and therefore requires you to do a lot of calculations.

Chinese 102

As the name suggests, this subject is about the Chinese language. There is no 101 course available in the spring semester so I had to catch up on one semester which was a challenge. It was a lot of fun to learn a language so different from ours though. At the end of the course you can have basic conversations about where you are from, occupations, methods of transport, etc.

Finances

	Weekly	Total
Rent	300 AUD	4800 AUD
Groceries	70 AUD	1120 AUD
Transport	30 AUD	480 AUD
Alcohol	50 AUD	800 AUD
Hostel 2 weeks		420 AUD
Flight Ticket		1600 AUD
Visa		550 AUD
OSHC		228 AUD

In total it comes to about 10.000 AUD. At the moment that is about 6300 euros. In practice you will obviously spend more since occasionally there will be additional costs. For example, there are often entrance fees for clubs, you'll want to go on trips which can get expensive. If you're going to travel after the semester for a month on the east coast you will easily spend 3000 AUD in a month. If you want to go on a trip to the red center it will be around 1000 AUD. As you can see this can get very expensive but obviously the amount you spend depends a lot on how much of this you plan to do. Also, the cost can change due to changes in the exchange rate. Realistically I would say you need around 10.000 euros for a semester in Australia.

Daily life

In the preparation section I mentioned your life would never be the same. Even though Sydney is a big city where people are generally more stressed out, the mentality of the ozzies feels very different than at home. They are very laid back and their personal life generally has much more priority than their career, more so than in the Netherlands. For example, even highly educated professionals usually finish work at around 5 and it is very normal to go straight from work to the beach or park for a barbecue, to go surfing or drink a beer in the pub. Where we often have full agendas and run from one place to the other, Australians are much more relaxed. This difference in mentality really makes you re-evaluate what is really important in life and what lifestyle would make you happy.

I lived in Bondi Junction during my studies which is in between CBD and Bondi Beach. There are busses going both ways 24 hours a day taking about 15 min to either the beach or the city centre. I had only 2 days of classes a week, so there was a lot of time to go to the beach, relax in the park or party in the weekend. Even in winter you get some good periods with 20+ degrees and sun, and in spring and summer it can get up to 40+ degrees. The area around Sydney is green for a reason though, so it might rain a bit more than you would expect.

One peculiar thing about Sydney if you're an exchange student is that you tend to not meet many Australians. On the plus side, I did make a lot of European friends which are a lot easier to visit later.

There are also some opportunities during the semester to go on trips which you should take advantage of. There is a one week mid-semester break in which you could go on a trip to Melbourne or the red center. If you're running out of money and the weather in Australia is bad you could even take a cheap flight with Air Asia to Indonesia which I did twice during my stay. For me this was especially amazing because I got my scuba diving certificate in Sydney and got to enjoy the superb diving in Indonesia this way.

It's very expensive but if you have the money it is definitely worth going to Sydney. You'll have the best time!

If you have any questions feel free to email me.

Cheers, Martijn (martijnveldman3@gmail.com)