

A semester Down Under

General information

University: Swinburne University of Technology (SUT)
Where: Melbourne, Australia
Period: 20 July 2016 - 30 December 2016

Preparation

From the moment you get selected to study at Swinburne University of Technology, the hassle starts.

First of all, you have to go through the **application process** of Swinburne. Swinburne sends you an application form, which you have to fill in carefully. This shouldn't be too complicated. However, you have to keep certain things in mind:

1. In this application form you have to nominate four units/courses you want to study. In order to speed up your application, it is convenient to check which units you would like to study and check if you meet all the prerequisites before applying.
2. You are required to submit evidence of your English proficiency. You can do this by sending them your TOEFL or IELTS test score, providing evidence that Erasmus University is teaching in English or providing other evidence. Since I have never taken a TOEFL or IELTS test and I study in Dutch, I had to prove my English proficiency by sending them my Cambridge test results. However, Cambridge test results are not as easily accepted as TOEFL or IELTS results and therefore it took a long time before my English proficiency was accepted.

When you receive an e-mail with the information that you successfully applied, you have to fill in an **International Student Offer Acceptance form**. This form is to finish off your application and get accepted by Swinburne as an international student. In this form you are required to apply for Overseas Student Health Cover (OSHC) provided by Swinburne in association with Allianz Insurance. This ensures total coverage for any health issue you might get during your stay at Swinburne. No matter if you are already insured by your own insurance, the OSHC is required and will cost you about \$400.

Secondly, you have to arrange your **Visa**. It is fairly easy to apply for an Australian student visa. You first have to create an account on the Australian immigration website. When you are done with that, you can immediately fill in the student visa application form. The website says it can take up to 6 weeks before your visa request gets granted, but in my case I received an acceptance e-mail in two days. Note! To apply for a student visa you need evidence of enrolment at Swinburne University. Make sure you finish your application and enrolment before you request a visa.

Thirdly, when your visa is granted and you finished your enrolment, it is time to book your **flight** to Melbourne. Remember, flying to the other side of the world is expensive. To minimise my costs, I booked my flight as soon as my visa got granted. I flew with Emirates from Düsseldorf to Dubai to Kuala Lumpur to Melbourne. It was one of the shorter flights (about 23 hours of flying) with 30 kg of baggage and costed me about €1500.

Fourthly, after booking my flight and knowing my exact date of arrival I started looking for **accommodation**. Since the 2nd semester at Swinburne starts on the 1st of August, I decided to arrive 1,5 week in advance on July 20th. There are two main options for accommodation in Melbourne.

1. The first option, which I chose, is to live on **campus**. Living on campus is relatively expensive (\$278 a week), but it is worth all the money. First of all because you live with other international students in the same building which for me resulted in having friendships for life with people from all over the world. Secondly, all the lecture rooms, information desks, supermarkets, restaurants and public transport are within a radius of less than a two-minute walk. Thirdly, you live in Hawthorn, which is one of the wealthiest suburbs of Melbourne. Next to campus you have Glenferrie Road, which is a beautiful busy road with heaps of cool cafés and restaurants. Fourthly, the apartments on campus are very spacious compared to apartments in the city in the same price range. I had my own bedroom and shared the bathroom, kitchen, living room and balcony with my two roommates. Finally, throughout the semester the university organizes heaps of activities for residents. Think of: free pizza nights, residents ball, sport activities and parties. There is always something going on on campus!
2. The second option you have is to live in the **city centre (CBD)**. A major advantage of living in the city centre is that it is relatively cheap (\$150-\$200 a week). However, if you want to live this cheap in the city centre you almost always have to share your bedroom. Another advantage of living in the CBD is that most of the time you get a modern apartment with shared facilities like a gym, sauna and swimming pool. And of course the main advantage is that you live in the beautiful city centre of the second biggest city of Australia. The main disadvantage of living in the CBD is that you have to take the train to university, which takes about 15 minutes and costs \$4 return. In addition, you miss out on all the fun happening on campus and it is harder to get in contact with the other international students.

Finally, I applied for an **International drivers license**. You can do this at your local ANWB shop where they will give you one for €18. Officially you need an international drivers license when renting a car in Australia. However, most of the time they also accept your national drivers license. But for just €18 you are sure you can drive in Australia.

Arrival

I arrived at 3 am at Melbourne Tullamarine airport where a taxi service was waiting for me. Swinburne arranged this taxi service for free. The driver can drop you off wherever you want, in my case at campus. When I arrived there, I pressed a bell at the residence office after which an employee came down to give me my room key and bed linen for the first nights.

The first week I had to arrange several things:

1. I bought my own **bed linen** since Swinburne doesn't provide that for the full length of your stay. They only borrow you bed linen for the first nights until you bought your own.
2. I made sure that everything was arranged as far as my study concerns. I applied for a **student card** and made sure I was enrolled in all the right units.

3. I got myself a **Myki card**, which is the public transport card of Melbourne. Before you get yourself a Myki, you should apply for a concession card at the university HQ. Since I was an international student I managed to get a concession card which means you can travel with 50% discount. After you get this concession card, you can get yourself a Myki card at the nearest station or 7/11.
4. I got myself a **mobile phone plan** at Vodafone. I chose Vodafone because I had a Vodafone sim card in The Netherlands as well. Vodafone is a good provider and I never had any problems with it. However, I heard Telstra is a better provider since they have better coverage throughout Australia for almost the same price.

After a few days of arranging all the formal stuff, the fun started. The week before the start of the semester, Swinburne organizes an opening week (O-week) for all residents at campus. This week consists of parties, activities, tours and trips to beautiful places. For me, this week was the best week at campus. I met heaps of international people and made friends with whom I spent my whole stay at Swinburne.

In addition to O-week, which is just for residents, the international office of the university also organised some activities. First of all they organised a meeting with all international students where we could meet each other for the first time. Throughout the week they also organised some activities like a treasure hunt in the CBD, an opening BBQ and a party in the local campus bar.

After the exciting first week with parties and activities, the serious business started when it was the 1st of August. This was the official start of the semester and I attended my first lectures and tutorials.

Courses

Introduction to Entrepreneurship

Introduction to entrepreneurship was my favourite unit. Mainly because my professor was very passionate about her discipline and she managed to get me enthusiastic too. This course is all about the way of thinking like an entrepreneur. This course doesn't have a final exam, just fun assignments. For example, you got to work together with your classmates on starting your first theoretical business. I also had to interview a local entrepreneur and implement the theories I had learned in class. This course is very practical and your grade depends on your willingness to work hard and participate in the group.

Asia Pacific Business Perspective

This course is very theoretical but really interesting. It is about the way of doing business between Australia and different countries in Asia. Think of: Japan, China, Malaysia, Singapore, Laos and Cambodia. Since these countries have major upcoming economies it is really interesting to study how they do business. For this course I had to do a lot of research and write several papers. It also contained an online mid term but no final exam.

Sports/Advertising/Media

I took this unit because I am passionate about sports and wanted to know more about the business side of sports. However, this unit disappointed me. Since Australian Rules Football is the most popular sport in Australia, the major part of the course focuses on this sport. For me this is a totally new sport and therefore I was disappointed that the major part of the course was about this sport. I hoped to get to know more about the business side of more European sports like soccer, tennis and hockey. The course is mainly focussed on how

different clubs are active on original media and social media and how they engage with fans. It was quite interesting but way less 'business' related than I thought.

Professional Communication Practice

In this unit you learn how to present and write essays in English. I took this course because I wanted to improve my English written and verbal skills. At some points this unit is fairly easy since we are used to presenting and writing essays at Erasmus, but I found it really helpful to get to know how to do this all in English. It is a good basis for a future international career.

Finances

Before you decide to go on an exchange to Australia you should be aware of the costs this adventure entails. As most people know: AUSTRALIA IS EXPENSIVE! Please be aware of this and please take the financial part very serious when choosing your exchange destination. However, for me it was worth every dollar I have spent!

Below I made an estimate of what I have spent during my 4 months of university and my 2 months of traveling:

Preparation Costs	AUD
Flight return	\$2100
Visa	\$500
International Drivers License	\$25
OSHC	\$400
Living Costs	
Accommodation (per week)	\$280
Food and drinks (per week)	\$150
Myki (per month)	\$50
Phone plan (per month)	\$40
WIFI 15 GB (per month)	\$30
Day trips/Weekend trips/Activities	\$300
Gym (per month)	\$60
Traveling	
Mid-semester break to Sydney (5 days)	\$550
East coast (5 to 6 weeks)	\$3000
New Zealand (2 weeks)	\$2000
Total in \$	\$16.000
Total in €	€11.425

Used exchange rate is €1 = \$1,40 AUD

Daily Life

How I spent my days

In my daily life I had lots of spare time. I only had classes in the morning, approximately 2 hours a day, after which I had free time the rest of the day. Most of the time I finished some assignments or did some homework after my classes. After that I had lunch with my friends at university and often went to the gym/swimming pool. After a month I got tired of having that much spare time so I decided to start working. For 2,5 months I worked around 15 hours

a week. As you know Australia is very expensive, but the wages are also relatively high compared to the Netherlands. It is very common to earn between \$20 and \$25 for an easy job. So the next 2,5/3 months I spent my days by going to class, doing homework, going to the gym, working and hanging out with friends.

Most of the nights at Swinburne I had dinner with my roommates or friends on campus. I was free almost every night so most of the time after having dinner I hang out with friends, watched a movie or went out to the CBD or a bar.

The people

The people in Australia are the most relax and kindest persons I have ever met. The Australian motto is 'No worries' and you will hear it at least once in every conversation you have with an Australian. For me this relaxed attitude was amazing to experience and it was a real eye opener. In The Netherlands everything is focussed on performance and achievement. Work hard, make as much money as you can and keep everybody happy. In Australia however the attitude is focussed on having fun, live the day, no stress and above all NO WORRIES. I absolutely loved the atmosphere among Australian people and how open they are to internationals.

The City

In the time that I was studying in Melbourne, several agencies chose Melbourne as the most liveable city in the world. And I can confirm this all to well. Melbourne is THE student city of Australia and has many different nationalities living there. Swinburne is located in Hawthorn, which is a wealthy and beautiful suburb of Melbourne. Everything you need is in walking distance and there are nice restaurants and bars on every corner.

The CBD is beautiful and it is packed with little cafes and restaurants. For me Melbourne is THE food city of the world since there is a possibility to eat on literally every street you can find in the CBD. If you want to escape from the hectic CBD you can chill out in the beautiful botanical gardens or take a calm coffee near the Yarra River. You can also go to several beaches, where you can spend your afternoon sunbathing. From Hawthorn it will take you about 10 minutes by train to go to the CBD and 45 minutes by tram to go to the main beach, St Kilda Beach. In short, Melbourne is the total package.

The University

Swinburne is a really nice university and has some beautiful parks and places where you can hang out with friends. The professors are all really kind and there is a way more personal approach as we are used to here at Erasmus. You can contact your professor personally and make an appointment with him if you want to discuss something with him or her. They are very willing to help and this makes it easy to create a bond with your professor and successfully finish your course. In addition, in my opinion the educational level of Swinburne University is a bit lower than Erasmus University. I found it quite easy to pass all my courses so don't worry too much about that.

I hope I gave you guys a clear view on what it is like to study a semester in Australia. If you still have questions, don't hesitate to e-mail me on basvandenboomen@gmail.com.

Cheers,

Bas van den Boomen