Exchange Report

Macquarie University – Sydney, Australia

February to July 2016

Before going away:

Your official acceptance to Macquarie will come a little later than you wish, but it will be such an exciting moment! I went on exchange during their “Session 1”, which is back to school time for them, at the end of February.

Packing:
- I was too keen for Australian summer! I packed one large suitcase only, and filled it with all sorts of summer clothes. I went liberal with t-shirts and shorts – which are absolutely necessary.
- You are there until the end of June, which is their winter. I ended up buying a few sweaters – so pack a couple of those and a few pairs of jeans & sweats as well. Even if it is Australia, it does get quite cold. Also, pack a rain jacket, although it doesn’t rain all the time, it pours when it does.
- Pack a couple of nicer outfits for going out, even if you think you won’t be going out to any events with a dress code, chances are you probably will.
- If worst comes to worst, you can buy clothes there.

Travel:
- Flying there will always be a long flight. To save on cost and break up the journey a bit, I flew through Hong Kong and spent just under a week there before moving on to Sydney. It’s a great opportunity to see another country (or more!) on your way there, as well as get yourself used to the time change, all while saving a few dollars since it was cheaper than flying direct from YVR to SYD.
- Make sure that your flight arrives at least two weeks before the start of classes. Not only will you need some time to settle into your accommodations, but there will be Fresher’s Fest and O-week – some of the best opportunities to meet people at first and heaps of fun to participate in.

Financial:
- I brought some cash with me before I left Vancouver. I used it for my first few days there, before I could set up a bank account.
- I opened an account there and just got a family member to wire money in. It was free to open (I banked with NAB), you get a credit/debit card, and you can avoid all those pesky surcharges that you will accumulate if just using your Canadian credit card.

During Exchange:

Accommodation:
- One of the largest student accommodation areas is Macquarie University Village. This is where I stayed, and absolutely loved it. It is only a 3 minute walk from the gym, 5-7 minute walk from campus and 10-15 minute walk from the shopping centre (including supermarkets) & train station.
- It really is a village. They are not traditional dorms – you live in separate share houses. Each house has 5 bedrooms (each has their own bathroom with a shower, which was a massive blessing), and you share the kitchen and living areas. It is so much more spacious than I originally imagined, with a study desk as well as a large closet, and so much floor space to spare, which is awesome if you want to have friends over. The houses are not glamourous but serve their purpose well.
- There are other residential colleges, which I visited later on, but none are as spacious as rooms offered in the village.
- The University Village was such a welcoming and friendly community. There are always events and gatherings/get-togethers going on, and is the place to be if you want to be social! You will never be bored there.

Orientation:
- There is a large orientation session before the start of semester, where you are given some campus and academic resources and information. It is not mandatory, but recommended by the university.
- There is a mandatory orientation for new residents of Macquarie University Village, and I do recommend going to that because you get a free sausage sizzle at the end.
**Academics:**
- Although it depends on which subjects you take, you will usually have a mix of lectures and tutorials. All lectures are recorded and posted on ilearn (their version of canvas), but tutorials are often compulsory, and you are graded on attendance.
- The quality of teaching is similar to SFU, however I did notice that they are a bit more laid back with assignments; there are less assignments, but each is usually worth more.
- Midterm exams are not common. I didn’t have any and most of my friends studying various other classes didn’t either! Yay!
- There is a 2 week break in the middle of the semester. Nothing is usually assigned during that time, so use it to travel! Plan early on where you would like to visit and I guarantee you’ll meet others there at uni that will come travel with you.

**Social:**
- Possibly the most important part – and my most memorable aspect – of exchange is making friends. Get involved right away with Fresher’s Fest and O-week activities. Everyone else has just moved in and is looking to make friends, too! These first couple weeks will be the most important to forming new connections. The friends I made in my first few days there were some of my best friends during my entire exchange.
- Get involved with clubs! Macquarie has so many clubs. Sign up for as many as possible! A good failsafe was MacEx: Macquarie Exchange Society. They had bi-weekly pub nights on campus with free pizza, and you get to meet people from all over the world, possibly who are staying at different accommodations than you. They also host a variety of different trips around the city!
- In terms of on campus, the pub (Ubar) puts on some pretty awesome theme nights, which are worth checking out and a great opportunity to get all of your new friends together to have fun!

**Places in Sydney:**
- Set aside a day or two just to venture into the CBD (downtown area) and explore for yourself. There are plenty of shops and museums (which are free!) to check
out. Walk across the Harbour Bridge, through Circular Quay, and through the Botanical Gardens, which are all very easy to get to!

- Go to Taronga Zoo! Check out all those cool & weird Aussie animals.
- At the end of May & beginning of June, there is a festival called Vivid – the whole CBD lights up with coloured lights, animated projections, and music. Spend as much time out there as possible.
- Spend some nights on George Street. It was one of my favourite places.
- Hop on a ferry. They take you to some awesome beaches, like Manly. Enjoy them while the summer sun is still out. Also, on the topic of beaches, Bondi is a must. Take the Bondi to Coogee beachwalk, it’s absolutely beautiful.
- Darling harbour is a go-to during the day and night. I had so many memorable times walking around the harbour, boarding a harbour cruise, and enjoying some of the great entertainment in the area.
- If you are looking for some amazing food, check out a suburb called Chatswood which is so easy to get to. There are so many amazing restaurants and cafes there. And a lot of them are open quite late!
- During the 2 week break, or after semester is over, I would really suggest getting out of the city and travelling. I took a trip to Cairns, which is in much further north along the coast than Sydney, and had an absolutely amazing time. If you are looking for adventure travel, do it along the coast rather than in the city. You’ll also meet many more people your age, since it is a popular backpacker’s route.

After Exchange:

What I’ve Learned:

- It’s okay to take certain types of risk; making friends starts with approaching to people and talking to them! When you’re in a country where you know literally no one, you learn that this is the only way you will survive. After a while, your confidence will be boosted.
- I have never met more people, all around my age, from such a variety of walks of life, and from all around the globe. They have so much to teach you about community, acceptance, and respect. I’ve valued getting to meet every single person I encountered, and am so thankful that I can call some of those people my close friends now.
- Living independently is so much more different than I thought! There is so much to learn from independence, especially overseas where you know you can't just return to your family’s home on the weekends for dinner. You gain a sense of a maturity and responsibility. Yes, you will make mistakes, but it’s so much better to learn that way.
- I’ve learned more about myself as a person. I feel like I have more clarity on what I value and who I want to grow to be as a person. It’s a very personal journey and I’m sure it’s different for everyone.

Challenges:
- One of the biggest challenges was not adapting to a new country or making friends or even any of the academics – but coming home. I miss all of the friends that I made in Sydney so much. I miss the lifestyle I was so used to, and I miss the city itself. I never thought coming back would be as difficult as it has been. This just goes to show that my semester on exchange has been a simply amazing experience.
The Opera House and Circular Quay as seen from the Harbour Bridge:

Macquarie University Library (left) and the main campus pathway called Wally's Walk (right):

Bondi Beach:
Adventure Sports along the North Coast – Cairns (left = cayoning, right = skydiving):

And of course, a Kangaroo!