EXCHANGE REPORT

SEMESTER 1
MONASH UNIVERSITY
MELBOURNE, VICTORIA, AUSTRALIA

ART, DESIGN & ARCHITECTURE

02.18 - 06.18
Hi! Yes, that’s me. I just wanted to start off by saying that if you’re reading this report then I’m going to assume that you’ve made the decision to come to Australia, or perhaps you’re just browsing around for a destination to settle on! Whatever you’re here for, I can promise you that life is about to get (A LOT more) exciting – well, that is if you decide to go on exchange.

The application process and preparation for pre-departure can seem like an endless slough of work, but I, and quite possibly along with the numerous of other students that have gone on exchange, can promise you that it’s all worth the effort. So, sit back, keep on reading, get excited, and I’ll tell you everything I know about Australia, including the 50 million things that can kill you in that country.

**STUDENT VISA & OSHC**

Before you even think about stepping foot into Australia, unless you’re an Australian or New Zealand Resident, you’ll have to obtain a Student Visa. Thankfully, they’re quite convenient to apply for and only require a passport, and Confirmation of Enrollment, which is provided by Monash University via email after your acceptance.

I applied for the Student Visa (Subclass 500) and at the time of application (11.17), it was $500 AUD. They have quick response rates and mine was processed within 24 hours. You’ll also need to have Oversea Health Cover ($300 AUD), which can be purchased through Monash and is part of another condition for your arrival.
ON-CAMPUS ACCOMMODATIONS

At Monash University, if you choose to live on campus, you’re given a plethora of options to pick from. Residence is located on Clayton Campus and features:

**Residential Village**
- Roberts - Richardson
- Deakin - Farrer
- Howitt - Normanby

**Urban Community**
- Briggs - Jackomos
- Turner - Logan
- Holman - Campbell

The main difference between these two groups is that Residential Village is a lot older, while Urban Community is much newer, and each room contains their own en-suite and kitchen. That being said, because Urban Community is mainly self-contained, it lacks a kind of social atmosphere that you would find in the more publicly shared spaces like the Residential Village.

As for myself, I am a very social person, so it was a no-brainer to pick from the list of options from Residential Village! In this group, Roberts and Richardson are known for its Stairway-style architectural layout, while Deakin, Farrer, Howitt and Normanby uses the Corridor-style.

This might not necessarily seem life-changing, but it does alter quite a few things in small to large ways.

STAIRWAY VS. CORRIDOR

Stairways are unique to Roberts and Richardson. In these hall, there are 8 Stairways, each with 6 half-floors. Each floor contains 2 to 4 rooms, a washroom with a toilet and a shower, and a kitchenette equipped with a sink and communal fridge. Each Stairway contains approximately 22 residents, one RA, and has a good balance of Exchange Students, International Students and Australians!

Along this, there are shared spaces like the Common Room, Games Room (two pool & ping-pong tables), Music Room (piano, drumset & guitar), Laundry, Library, Plasma/Projector Room, Social Room, and Kitchen.

The biggest concern people have with Stairways is the fact that the kitchen (which is quite large) is shared among 18X people!!! In honesty, this isn’t really a problem as you can always cook outside of peak hours (6-8pm) and people often form cooking groups. Aside from that, it’s also surprisingly the place where most of my friendships began!

Corridor-style is found in Deakin, Farrer, Howitt and Normanby. This is what you would expect a typical residential hall to look like. There are 20 rooms on each floor, usually with two RA’s, and 3 toilets and showers, a small kitchen and dining space, all located in the middle. There are entrances to the floor on both ends.

While the change isn’t much, Stairways are “more” social because they share amenities with all 18X residents, whereas Corridor Halls are secluded to their own floors.
THE VERDICT

When I was first assigned Roberts Hall, I was completely against the idea of having to share the kitchen with 18X people. But, if you haven’t figured out by now, I’m heavily bias towards the Stairway-style because I’ve made so many friends from the way Roberts is shape! Rest assured, do as you will. You can’t go wrong with living in the Residential Village.

Side Note: Normanby is situated across the street from the Residential Village, making it located “off-campus”, and Howitt is like a 20-story tall building with the smallest rooms among all Residential Village options. The biggest rooms go to Roberts/Richardson, followed by Normanby, Deakin/Farrer, then Howitt. Also, I took these pictures during Semester break, which is why it’s so desolate.

ROBERTS HALL
**MY ROOM**

During your stay at Monash, while you’re not exactly paying for a 5-star hotel, your room (or at least the ones in Roberts) has a fair amount of space for you to roam about. It includes basic furnishings like a single bed, a desk, a small cabinet, an armchair, blackout curtains, a shelf, a drying rack, a built-in cabinet, and a full or half-sized length mirror depending on your room layout. Each room also has a radiator for the colder season. Here are some photos of my room! Fair warning, it’s not phenomenal, but it’s clean, functional and liveable.

Prior to moving in, when you pay for your room deposit, you’ll have the option of purchasing a linen pack which will be available when you move in. It includes a pillow, doona, and a cover at a bundled price of $110 (11.17). I personally do not recommend this as the Residential Orientation Week includes a trip to IKEA and KMart (basically a hybrid of Target and Walmart). Here, you can purchase such items for a third of the price. Even if you don’t go on this trip, these places are easily accessible to you by public transport. (P.S. I love KMart, and I’m sure you will too)

**THE WASHROOMS**

As previously mentioned, each floor has a washroom shared between 2-4 people. The sink and mirror, shower and toilet are separated into three rooms, giving you a bit more privacy. My stairway had a rule where if someone is occupying the shower or toilet, you had to wait your turn, which is quite nice if you’re keen for a bit of extra privacy.
ARRIVING IN MELBOURNE - WEATHER

Depending on which semester you arrive for, the season that greets you will vary. If you arrive in Semester 1 (Feb - June), you’ll experience their middle-to-end of Summer. If you arrive in Semester 2 (July - Nov), you’ll be a quarter into their Winter. Their seasons are reversed! w O w Z a!!

Regardless of which season you arrive in, you’ll experience both. For this, I’ll be talking about Semester 1.

When I landed, Melbourne was coming out of a 40°C heatwave. Up until the middle of April, you should be getting consistent weather between mid 20’s to low 30’s. After that, it’ll quickly plummet into the 10’s, and eventually it’ll stay stagnant there. Even though it’s just the 10’s, Melbourne can actually feel a lot colder than Vancouver because the winds are so much stronger (but it isn’t).

I highly recommend packing a good mix of Summer and Winter clothes, especially a reliable Winter jacket. Most people suggest that you pack light, but if you’re like me who loves to overpack - just do it. A lot of exchange students (nashies) don’t actually do much retail shopping because everything is basically 30% more expensive here, despite the 1:1 currency ratio (02.18) #scam.

Nonetheless, if you plan on attending some social gatherings or would like to have a fancy night out to the city, I highly recommend bringing something more than casual for those nights, especially if you’re a guy. It’s not cheap to buy a new suit for a few-night occasions.

ARRIVING IN MELBOURNE - TRANSPORTATION

Prior to your arrival, you’ll have the opportunity to set up free transportation with Allied Car from Melbourne’s Tullamarine Airport to Monash University through MRS (Monash Residential Services). You’ll learn about this through the pre-departure emails you receive from them.

I highly recommend this service as getting to the campus by yourself can be extremely confusing if you’ve never been to Melbourne. Additionally, there is no direct train service from the airport to campus. If you choose to Taxi or Uber, this trip alone will cost a minimum of $150 AUD, excluding any potential surcharges for your luggage(s).

If you can, remember to bring a power/plug adaptor as the outlets in Melbourne are different. If not, you can purchase these at a local supermarket like Coles for $10 per adaptor.
GENERAL TRANSPORTATION

Similar to Vancouver’s Compass system, Melbourne’s transportation utilizes the Myki (Mikey) card. As a Monash student, you’ll be eligible for concession prices, which are half-priced travel fees. Unfortunately, this is only available to undergraduate students... sad reaccs only.

Victoria (Melbourne’s state) uses a combination of trains, trams, and buses. For the most part, there’s nothing out of the ordinary. The only difficulty with public transport is that some Melbourne buses do not display upcoming stops, which can make it difficult to navigate when you’re unfamiliar with the place. As such, try your best to travel with a buddy or two for your first month or so! Also, punctuality isn’t their forte, but if you’re used to waiting for the 145 up to Burnaby mountain, you are already set.

BANKING

If you’ve been overseas, you’ll know that banking can often be a hassle, but Commonwealth Bank (CommBank) is extremely student-friendly. They’re conveniently located on campus, and only requires an Australian address and your passport to open up a free student account. You’ll receive a Debit Mastercard within a week or two, and CommBank has a phenomenal app (miles ahead of TD’s)!

If you ever intend to wire yourself money, note that TD Canada doesn’t offer online wires. So your best bet is to open up an RBC account before you leave (or find a friend with an RBC account), and wire yourself money that way.

PHONE PLANS

Melbourne’s phone plans prices are relatively similar to Vancouver’s, but the “top” carriers are Vodafone, Optus, and Telstra. I signed up with Optus as it was the most convenient one for me with its shop on campus.

Vodafone is the cheapest, but has the “worst” coverage. Optus is in the middle for pricing and coverage. Telstra is the most expensive, but has the best coverage.

If you plan on travelling to remote locations like Central Australia, Telstra is the go-to. For the most part, Optus or Vodafone will work fine for day-to-day activities.

One thing to keep in mind is that most universities in Australia have an open WiFi policy. This means that they operate on the Eduroam WiFi network, enabling you to use WiFi within the vicinity of Eduroam locations, granted that you have an Eduroam-associated email like Monash.

As such, if you spend most of your time (living) on campus, you won’t need that much data, even if you venture into the city often. I lived comfortably with 6GBs of data (+300mins. of international calling for $45/month), and this also lasted me well into my week-long travels to other parts of Australia, where WiFi was scarce or inaccessible.

Notably, ALDIMobile is also an option. They’re cheaper than Vodafone, but their coverage is similar. While most people don’t know about this or find them unreliable, they have some of the best prices for load-as-you-go plans.
ORIENTATION WEEK(S)

Okay, so now that you’ve arrived, what the heck happens?

Prior to your arrival, you’ll find that MRS will give you a date that indicates the earliest possible day you can move in. I cannot stress enough as to how important it is to show up on that day. Why? Because that’s when the fun begins!!

If you live on res, you’ll have two full weeks of orientation! (Can I get a heck ya??) The first one is provided by MRS, and the second one is the University’s orientation.

The first O-Week is held among your own hall, and sometimes you’ll participate in interhall activities. This is where you’ll have the opportunity to meet everyone in your hall and stairway/corridor. You get to do a bunch of fun games and activities like Hunger Games-styled dodgeball, paint wars, Australian icebreakers, sausage sizzles* (literally my fave), scav hunts in the city (also fave), and things like that! For the most part, breakfast and lunch/dinner are provided to you for free during O-Week.

As such, because no one knows each other, this is the best time to make friends! So it’s not imperative to arrive on the first day, but you’ll find that you end up missing a lot of opportunities to socialize with Australians and other international students. It’s actually fairly common that the group of friends you make during O-Week become your closest friends throughout the semester.

*Sausage Sizzles are basically barbecues where they serve up hot dogs on wonderbread (sausage sangers)... #FAVE.
UNIVERSITY STRUCTURE

Like SFU, Monash follows a 13-week curriculum for each semester. In this, you’ll have a week long mid-semester break, and SWOTVAC, which is another break after Week 13. Exams begin after SWOTVAC and run for three weeks. While it varies between each year and semester, mid-sem is typically in between Week 6 and 7 for Semester 1, and Week 9 and 10 for Semester 2 (literally not even the middle).

At Monash, I studied Art Design & Architecture (MADA), whereas back home, I study Interactive Arts & Technology. You’ll find that MADA offers a lot more options than SIAT, and that’s because MADA has degrees relating to Visual Communication Design, Industrial Design, Architecture, Motion, Typography... The list goes on!

During my semester, I took three courses: Unconventional Publishing, Conceptual Illustration and Typography Y3. In these classes, we had briefs that asked us to create reflexive site-specific content and turn it into a book. I also created animated comics, and even redesign a cultural institution’s visual system using a typographic-led identity!

MADA courses are run differently than SIAT courses. For starters, classes are typically 4-hour long studios with roughly 24 students. There are no TAs, and you are taught directly by the professor. This means that throughout the semester, you’ll come to develop a strong relationship with them as they get to know you and your work. Additionally, on top of teaching, most of them are actively working within the industry, meaning you get valuable feedback from someone who is knowledgeable about current trends.
MADA COURSE STRUCTURE - THE PRO'S

As MADA promotes such an active environment (they feel like genuine studio spaces - background music, people walking around for feedback), you’ll find that the work you produce in the end tends to be portfolio ready. At SIAT, I personally never thought my work was portfolio ready, even after the final submission. But, because you have weekly 1-on-1 discussions with the professor, they spend a fair amount of time helping you develop your ideas and driving you in a direction where your strengths lie.

This is what I admire most about learning and practicing my craft at MADA. Strangely, they also don’t (often) have group projects, which means it gives you the opportunity to really be all hands on board, unlike SIAT where roles are often divided. It also means you have more flexibility with your own time, which is extremely useful for travelling!

Another thing - in SIAT, we’re always taught the same lesson in lecture, and then we’re expected to do the same things in lab. This then eventually gets integrated in some variation of our final project. At the end, people start and end with very similar things. This is not what it’s like at MADA. You come in with your own ideas, and they are developed and expanded based on a general criteria suitable for your project. You’ll notice a stronger diversity of ideas and projects at MADA, which I love exceptionally. In fact, it’s enhanced since everyone literally begins their specialized studies at MADA (ie. Industrial Design, Visual Communication Design, Typography, Motion, etc.) right when Year 1 begins.

MADA COURSE STRUCTURE - THE CON’S

At Monash, the units only go up to 3rd year. Their 4th year is optional and only for the purpose of honors.

Given that I’m in my final year in SIAT, I wanted to take upper-division courses. The thing about MADA’s 3rd year course is that, I seemed to have “wasted” a lot of studio time waiting on the professor to come around, as there aren’t lessons on technique/methodology, since most of this was completed in 1st and 2nd year. Everything you learn is according to where your ideas take you and what it demands. This meant that I had to chat to other students and learn from them, so expect to do a lot of DIY learning if you go to MADA assuming it will be like SIAT.

A GLIMPSE OF MY WORK (LIKE LITERALLY ONE)

Conceptual Illustration - TV Series as a book cover
QUALITY OF LIFE - LIFE ON CAMPUS

In comparison to SFU, Monash University’s Clayton campus is considerably large. Around Residential Village, there’s a lake, and a fair amount of basketball courts and footy fields. There’s also a Sports Centre within a 10 minute walk on campus, which comes equipped with a gym, an aquatics centre (which also has a steam room and a sauna), squash courts, and other things you would expect at a sporty facility. The gym membership is $252 per semester for Exchange students, and gives you access to all the aforementioned facilities!

At Campus Centre, there are multiple food joints, including the Australian version of Chipotle: Guzman y Gomez. You can find other foods like Fish & Chippies, Chicken Parma, Pho, and Sushi. If these options aren’t to your taste, there’s a Macca’s (McDonalds) 20 minutes away. By bus, you can reach suburbs like Oakleigh (which is phenomenal for brunch), Glen Waverley/Pinewood (fantastic for asian-cuisine), or Chadstone (the largest shopping centre in the southern hemisphere) which has endless options for you to choose from. There’s even a cafe (Halls Cafe) right by MRS, which offers $7.5 meals during lunch, and $5 meals during dinner for a reasonably sized portion.

As for grocery shopping, there’s a store on campus - Monash Merchant. It’s quite convenient and located within the Urban Community, but it’s known for being overpriced. By bus, you can reach major supermarkets like Coles and Aldi in 2-5 minutes. While there’s no direct equivalent (ie. Safeway), they are extremely cheap.

QUALITY OF LIFE - BUDGETING

For the most part, I was able to live off $60 per week on groceries. For breakfast, I got milk, cereal and fruits. Lunch consists of omelettes mixed with veggies, and my daily salad. Dinner was anywhere between a range of meat produce, rice or pasta, and more veggies. If you intend to eat out, expect a basic burger or pasta dish to be $20 minimum (and that’s being generous!) Yes, my meals didn’t change much because I am a boring person.

As for transportation, if you plan to drive, petrol prices are relatively similar to Canada (if not cheaper). With public transit, $100 can possibly last you a few months (assuming you apply for concession).

If you’re into the nightlife/party scene, alcohol can be quite expensive. Shots are typically $10 minimum, and other drinks can start at $20. Entry past 11pm can also be around the same price. Note: If you are not an Australian citizen, bars/clubs will only accept passports as a valid ID.
TRAVELLING IN AUSTRALIA

If you choose to live on res, your contract will typically last for 21 weeks. Within these 21 weeks, 13 go to your studies, and potentially up to 3 weeks for exams. With 5 definite spare weeks, this gives you plenty of time to travel around Australia. Your Visa also gives you extra time, if you want to stay beyond your contract on res.

Airfare, while not “incredibly” cheap, is for the most part affordable. If you can plan your trips and purchase tickets before peak times (mid-semester break, SWOTVAC), airfare to Sydney, Tasmania, Cairns, and Brisbane can go as low as $120 round trip. NZ during peak is about $500...

In my time, I was able to visit Brisbane, Gold Coast, Byron Bay, Australia Zoo (I saw the Irwins!), Sydney, Cairns, and the Great Barrier Reef*. Other popular destinations include Perth, Tasmania, Alice Springs/Uluru, Bali, Fiji, New Zealand, and South East Asia.

*Note: Everyone always raves about the Reef, but they don’t tell you about the trip there. The water gets ROCKY. Always, always, always take anti-nausea medication. When we went out to sea, half the boat was sick, and a large portion of them threw up based off a chain reaction. Also, when I say a large portion, I mean ~30 people. I was one of them, sadly.

If you don’t plan on travelling around or want to go for a more budget-friendly approach, Melbourne has its fair shares of beautiful national parks and attractions like the Grampians, the Great Ocean Road (do these together), Mornington Peninsula, and Phillip Island!
REFLECTIONS

Exchange is undoubtedly a very luxurious privilege, but if it’s within your realm of possibilities, then I cannot begin to genuinely stress how promising of an experience this can be for you. Seriously.

I went in with the expectations of simply just meeting new people, learning from a different perspective, and seeing a tad bit of the world that wasn’t from the streets of my hometown. What I got was beyond imaginable... Day to night long conversations and laughs with people all from various walks of life, to lessons from the most unexpected mishaps and successes, and even just realizing how little my world was until I saw more of it. I understand how generic this sounds, but trust me! It’s like those inside jokes... You have to experience it for yourself.

This adventure has all been about personal growth, and with everything that I’ve experienced, I would dare say I’m basically the beanstock from Jack and the Beanstock. I just soaked up everything I could. As the Australians would say, it’s character building.

That being said, no matter how much other people told me how amazing or horrible exchange is (yes, some people sadly don’t enjoy their!), REMEMBER, at the end of the day, it fell on my own to create my own story and to go after what I wanted most from this journey. And with that, here are some more pictures because ~*~ a picture is worth a thousand words ~*~ AND a bonus parting gift of 10 things that I learned from my experiences in Australia and throughout exchange. Follow through!
10 THINGS I LEARNED IN AUSTRALIA

1. Australia in its entirety is a scam, but in exchange for taking your money, you get a lifetime of amazing memories.

2. When you first arrive, you'll see a dozen of new and strange animal species you've probably never seen before. They are most likely harmless.

3. The Australian accent isn’t hard to grasp. It’s the British accent of the nashies you meet that you need to watch out for.

4. Shorts and short shorts are acceptable attire all year around, for boys, and for girls.

5. Melbourne winters ward off the spiders, so don’t panic. But just in case, Mortein is your friend.

6. Get a job if you can. Their minimum is based off of age, and even then, it’s double of what you’ll make in Canada by default.

7. Their version of squirrels and raccoons are possums. They look like lemurs and are also extremely cute.

8. Australians don’t peer pressure... Or at least the ones at Monash, so I had no problems with feeling like I needed to drink. (I also saved a few hundred, so take that, overpriced liquor!)

9. Even though it’s Australia, Melbourne actually gets cold. Like, real cold.

10. Sausage Sangers are good for the soul.
So, now that you’ve made it to the end of this document, congrats! Literally, this was so much to read. But it’s also a testament to your excitement and curiosity towards Australia. I SUPPORT THAT!!!

Just remember, each persons’ exchange experience will be vastly different from the stories you hear of. If you can do it, go for it!

It truly lies on you to make the decision of experiencing this for yourself. Besides, when will you ever find another opportunity like this?

Disclaimer: I am aware of the fact that I make the same face in every picture, as are the hundreds of people, including Australians, that have commented about it.
HERE’S TO ALL THE GREAT ADVENTURES OUT THERE!