Participating in Exchange and travelling to Melbourne, Australia has been my favourite moment of my business undergraduate degree, and I would strongly recommend Monash University for anyone who is considering it.

**Preparation for Exchange**

The preparation aspect of exchange is definitely the most difficult and involves the most work, however it is important to be well prepared so that you can enjoy your time abroad as much as possible. While I was researching courses that I would take at Monash, I personally used the SFU Course Planning Database to choose the majority of my classes. The database shows classes that students have previously taken at Monash, and which credits they received back at SFU for these classes. I found it very useful as many students have previously gone to Monash and I was able to choose three classes that would transfer back as a core course.

Some important information about Melbourne that I would have found useful before my exchange, is that it was slightly colder than I was expecting. Before my exchange, I had the misinformed belief that all of Australia is a tropical paradise. It is warmer than Vancouver still, and it rains a lot less which is nice. My recommendation if you are travelling during the Spring semester would be to pack more pairs of pants than I did. Other than this, packing your bag shouldn’t be too difficult.

During my exchange, I chose to live off of campus mainly because my girlfriend was also going to Monash for exchange, and we planned to share a room together which you cannot do on campus. I found that sharing a room and living off of campus was a good option because it was much cheaper. I believe that living on campus costs approximately $1000 per month, while me and my girlfriend split a room for $1040 a month between the two of us, and it was a much larger space than the dorms on campus. However, finding a room off of campus is a lot more difficult than living on campus where your room will be ready for you once you arrive. I flew to Melbourne on the first of February, nearly a month before school starts. This was an awesome
decision as I got to enjoy more of the Melbourne summer, when the temperature would be 35 degrees. However, the reason that I arrived in Australia this early was mainly so that I could search for a room to stay for the duration of my exchange. For the first two weeks, I stayed in multiple Airbnb rooms. It took approximately ten days of walking around in the heat, looking at available rooms before I finally found one. Whether or not you plan on living on or off campus, I still recommend flying to Melbourne as soon as you can so that you can enjoy more of their summer season.

A quick note on what you can expect living in Melbourne is like, other than the change in weather, in my opinion it is actually quite similar to Vancouver. There was not much of a culture shock for me. The public transportation situation is pretty similar, except Melbourne might have a few more train lines which are nice. When I first arrived in Melbourne, the public transportation was actually very expensive for me. This was because I did not receive the student discount (which is half off the normal fare) until I could receive it through the university which was during the first week of classes. For other expenses, such as groceries, restaurants, and rent, I think that the cost of living is very similar to Vancouver. The prices at restaurants were a little surprising at first because they seem quite high, but once you consider the factors that in Australia the tax has already been included in the price, and people don't tip in Australia, the prices at restaurants seemed reasonable.

Finally, an important thing to remember is to convert a few hundred dollars into Australian dollars and bring that with you on your trip. It took me approximately a week to get my bank account figured out in Australia so that I could transfer money from my bank at home to my bank in Australia. This means that you will have to live off whatever cash you bring with you for the first week to buy things such as food and a phone plan. If you have a credit card, this will most likely work in Australia, but even if it does you will still be paying higher fees for using your credit card then you would be if you had cash.

During Exchange

When you first fly into Melbourne, the university has a shuttle service that will pick you up from the airport and drop you off at your specified location. This was a very nice service as
that probably saved a $50 cab fee for me. Once you have settled in, the first things I would recommend doing are finding a phone plan and setting up your bank account. The phone plans are extremely cheap in Australia when compared to Vancouver. I would recommend buying a prepaid plan, so that you are only locked into a phone plan for a month, and you can just renew it each month. My current phone plan is with a company called Optus and I only pay $30 a month for 35 GBs of data each month, with an extra 10 GBs a month for Netflix only. The other major phone providers that you could look into are Vodafone and Telstra. Vodafone is generally the cheapest option, but they are also known to have the worst coverage of the three, whereas Telstra is generally the most expensive option but they supposedly have the best coverage. For my bank account, I chose to bank with Westpac because they have a branch on the Monash Clayton Campus and they also had an offer where they were giving students $50 if you opened a new bank account with them. Figuring out your banking might require quite a bit of research if you are trying to keep bank fees as low as possible. Another popular bank that I will recommend because they have a branch on the Clayton campus is called Commonwealth Bank.

There was a lot of orientation events at Monash that were cool. There were approximately 500 other exchange students so these events were a great opportunity to meet other people and make friends! Since I arrived in Melbourne a few weeks before the start of orientation, I found another good way to make friends was to meet up with other exchange students who had arrived early. There is an inbound exchange student Facebook group for Monash students, and quite a few people would make posts asking if anyone had arrived early and would want to meet up. This is actually how I met some of my best friends from Exchange.

Class at Monash University was not too different from SFU. One of the differences that I noticed however is that most classes are recorded and then posted online. This was very nice while on exchange, because it meant that I only had to be at school for my tutorials. Knowing this, I scheduled all of my tutorials to be on either Wednesday or Thursday, and then I had the option of going on a trip for the other five days in the week and not missing any school. It was also very nice that all of my classes provided the textbook online and I did not have to buy any textbooks.
The best part about Exchange is all of the amazing new places that you will see. Melbourne is a beautiful city, the CBD (central business district/downtown area) and St Kilda are definitely worth exploring. There are also so many trips that you can do in Australia and I would recommend doing as much as possible.

Photo 1 – Taken at the St Kilda pier with Melbourne’s CBD in the background. If you go to the end of the pier at sunset you can see penguins just a few feet away from you!

Photo 2 - Taken at the 12 Apostles along the Great Ocean Road.
Photo 3 – Taken in Sydney with the famous Sydney Opera House and Harbour Bridge in the background.

Photo 4 – Taken in Cairns right before snorkeling the Great Barrier Reef.
Reflection after Exchange

Overall, I have learned how to be independent and with all of the challenges I’ve faced from adapting to a new country I’ve become a more confident person. A summary of my tips for other students would be: research what the weather will be, come as early as possible to get away from the rain and enjoy the sunshine, plan for your banking in advance, meet as many people, and do as much as possible! Also wear lots of sunscreen, there are so many UV rays that people say there’s a hole in the ozone layer above Australia.