Hello!

I am an English major who was determined to combine travel and school. Why choose when you can have the best of both worlds, I thought? I exchanged to Macquarie University, located in beautiful, sunny-Sydney, Australia! Official dates were July-November 2013, but they’re more easily encapsulated as “fall of 2013.” Bearing in mind that Australia is in the Southern hemisphere, the seasons are switched. So “fall of 2013” is really summer of 2013, by Aussie standards. (Technically it was spring, but Australia doesn’t seem to have spring. They have two seasons: fall and extended summer.)

If you can follow that and are thrilled by the idea of sunshine, Australia is the place for you!

**Packing:**

I went for 8 months (I left 4 months before my exchange started to travel and work first) but my packing methods should still be helpful. You need to downsize your entire room/house and categorise it into things deemed “important/relevant enough to bring” and “dust collectors for the next 4+ months.” Thinking myself clever, I brought one suitcase and one backpack that could size down as a carry-on bag but size back up for suitcase-less travel.

As to what you will pack in those bags, it varies person to person.

**Standard items aside- Special notes:**

**Bring 2-3 pairs of pants max. You won’t wear them often after “fall” has ended. September 1 was a gorgeous 25 degree day. Be generous with the shorts allowance.**

**Bring one or two sweatshirts (Aussies call them jumpers, just like the British.) Evenings will be chilly at times. (Not Canadian chilly, but it’s surprising how quickly you adjust.)**

**Sunscreen. Cancer is not your friend.**

**Any jacket/wind-breaker you want to bring, wear it onto the plane. It saves room in your luggage for stuff you wear more than once.**

**If you can, unlock your phone and bring it. Oz has pay-as-you-go plans that recharge monthly. Most are $30/month for 500 mb of data, unlimited texting, and calling. Vodafone, Optus, and Telstra work well.**

******The golden rule:

Put the clothes you want to bring in a pile. Halve that pile. Decide on an amount of money to bring/have access to. Double it. Again, there is variance among people, what
you need/want to have, but it’s a good guideline. Plus, you will buy clothes while there.  
This is a given.

Travel:

Book flights early. Flights prices increase closer to departure dates (sometimes there are deals, but don’t count on this) and around any major holiday (including end of summer “holidays”).

Direct flights are nice, but I prefer the inconvenience of stopovers if I can shave $400-500 off. Air New Zealand was cheapest for me, with one stopover in Auckland, but I scored a direct flight home from Air Canada for a similar price.

Travelling within Australia is similar to the US in that small companies vie for the same customer base, meaning domestic flights are ridiculously cheap. Tiger Airways, Jet Star, and Virgin Australia are among the best. Trains connect major cities, enabling you to cross the width and breadth of Australian scenery from the ground. But bring friends for that trip. Train rides are less fun as singletons. Lastly, Greyhound Australia operates between major cities and most smaller ones too.

Financial Details:

Being there for 8 months and working, I opened a bank account, transferred money and emptied it upon leaving. Others preferred to charge credit cards and pay online. (The only difficulty is accessing cash without incurring larger interest rates. Money can be withdrawn from ATMs with credit cards, but it has higher interest rates and needs to be paid off quicker.)

Either way, just like sunscreen, the credit card is your friend. If you don’t have one, look into acquiring one. Just be careful where you use it, avoiding sketchy circumstances. Be wary of the exchange rate too, but Australian and Canadian dollars are usually close to parity.

Macquarie Centre, a large shopping centre near the University, houses various banks. Commonwealth Bank is a good choice (the one I went with) as is Nab Bank and others.

Things tend to be a tad more expensive in Sydney, from rent (paid weekly instead of monthly), to food, to even beer sadly. But look for deals at the shops and you’ll be fine.

During Exchange:

Before leaving for Sydney, take advantage of the free transfer provided. Book min. 48 hours before you arrive, providing all the details of your flight, and they meet you at the terminal.

Try to arrive days before the (compulsory) orientation session. You can meet flatmates and participate in early-bird activities the University provides.

Some sights include:
- Sydney Harbour Bridge
- Darling Harbour
- Sydney Opera House
- The Blue Mountains (so they claim)
- Manly Beach
- Sydney Skytower (put a blue jumpsuit, attach yourself to the tower and walk around outside of the tallest building in Sydney.)
- Bondi Beach
- The Rocks- cultural and historical hub of the city
- Taronga Zoo- koalas, emus, and whistling spiders, oh my!
- Surfing lessons (My flatmates did not stop talking about how awesome they were for weeks.)

Accommodation options:

1. Parklands Apartments. (I stayed there). This is the cheapest. Located 15 min walk from campus but perks include being kitty corner to The Ranch pub/nightclub (I.e. the shortest walk home after a night out.) Up to 3 flatmates and no meal plan.
2. University Village. More expensive, but heard to have great parties. A similar system to Parklands but 4 flatmates and an individual bathroom. Deluxe!
3. Herring Road and Balaclava Road Apartments. Herring Road is across from the shopping centre and Balaclava houses mainly grad students. Both are slightly more expensive than Parklands, but have similar layouts and no meal plan.
4. Robert Menzies, etc. These are ridiculously expensive, private residential dorms. Only recommended if you have money to burn and a lack of matches.

Academic structure is similar to SFU’s with a higher emphasis on independent work. You spend one hour in class and one in tutorial per week. I was dismayed to realise they only offer 3 credit courses. They tend to mark harder than SFU professors but I believe a curve was used.

Sydney has a great commuter train system running till about 1am enabling you to reach the city within 25-30 minutes. Buses run later and taxi services connect North Ryde (Macquarie’s suburb) to Sydney.

**Days and Festivals:**

- Australia Day- Jan. 26
- O Week- equivalent of “Week of Welcome”- March 3-6

- Conception Day- early Oct - massive party celebrating the founding of the Uni

**Places to Consider Visiting on Breaks:**

- Cairns- North Queensland, nearby Whitehaven Beach and Airley Beach.

- Byron Bay- 9 hour drive/1 hour flight north of Sydney. A popular tourist location, especially for surfing.

- Gold Coast/Surfers Paradise- Just an hour over the NSW/Queensland border, it has many fabulous beaches and several theme parks.

- Uluru/Ayer’s Rock- located at the red centre of Australia- a famous monument

**Social Life:**

In terms of getting involved on campus, I cannot stress enough, JOIN A CLUB! I joined the Mac Ultimate Frisbee club and it completely altered my exchange. I met so many people, especially Australians, whom I would not have met if I just went to my classes. Because we had something in common, the friendships are so much stronger; these are the people I talk to almost daily and miss the most.

Macquarie’s (*FREE*) Global Leadership Program is worth looking into. (An excellent resume booster.) A set of colloquia (fancy term for workshops) must be attended and the Distinguished Speaker Convention. It’s hard to beat free and useful.

Other than that, get to know your flat-mates, and the local nightlife. On campus there is U-Bar, and just off-campus there is the Ranch; and a short train ride away, there are the wonders of the Sydney nightlife.

**Reflection:**

Homesickness does happen, usually in waves. Some days you will be fine, and others the world appears to be caving in. Some days you’ll wish you were home (holidays, etc.) and others you will wish your exchange would never end. Skype is excellent for keeping in touch, as is the app, V-mobile, if you have a smartphone.

Remember that your friends have lives outside you and your exchange. This applies more to the Australians, as they have work, school, and family things that take up time. Just try to keep the perspective that they may not have just as much down time as you.

It is important to be cognisant of the passage of time while you are there, as it helps you appreciate things while they are happening; the end does sneak up on you regardless, and it hurts to leave, but just remember to enjoy yourself every single minute you possibly can.
Take the pictures that you think might be cheesy. Do the things you think are silly and perhaps stereotypical. You will regret it if you don’t. A picture is worth 1000 words and you would hate to realize that after you’ve returned home.