**Preparation for Exchange**

Because I was preparing for two consecutive exchange semesters at San Diego State, I felt I would be living in San Diego long enough to justify living off-campus and better experience local life. If living off-campus is something that interests you, you will find that rent is comparable to Vancouver. However, in most instances, a car will be a necessity as transit options in San Diego are limiting. I wound up finding a small apartment in centrally-located North Park, which is a young, fun and diverse neighbourhood situated north of Balboa Park and about a ten-minute drive from campus.

If you haven't been to Southern California before, it is good to keep in mind that it is very auto-centric. Although relying on transit and ridesharing is manageable, having a car opens up so many opportunities. Because I was living in the area for close to nine months, it made sense to drive down from Vancouver so that I would have a vehicle with me. Beyond the convenience of having access to a car, another benefit to driving rather than flying included how much more I was able to pack, not having to worry about paying for baggage. The trip took about twenty-three hours driving straight through, but there if you give yourself extra time, there are lots of great places to stop along the way and make a trip of it.

San Diego State requires that students have health insurance before you can enrol in classes. Make sure you check to see which forms of insurance they accept before you purchase anything. The school has a partnership with Aetna, which is one of the largest insurance providers in the US. I chose to buy my insurance with Aetna and found that the coverage was more than adequate.
When packing for your semester(s) at SDSU, anticipate a variance of weather conditions. San Diego can get very hot, but during the winter months, it will get chilly, especially once you have acclimated. San Diego State is about fifteen minutes inland, so it is always warmer on campus than it is closer to the coast.

**During the Exchange**

San Diego State has a multi-step orientation, so it's essential that you arrive in San Diego on time and attend the events. You'll need to make sure that our visa status is up to date and that you have all of your documents with you during the orientations. One thing I found during my time at SDSU was that the International Student Services office could be very slow at getting back to you when you have questions, and it can be hard to see an advisor. If you ever need assistance, make sure that you plan accordingly.

SDSU expects that you take a minimum of twelve units to maintain your exchange student status. The classes at State don't have tutorials, so it is simpler to plan your schedule, and you will have a lot more time to enjoy the city and all it has to offer. Courses at SDSU operate on a 4.0 GPA scale, and it is expected that exchange students maintain a certain GPA to maintain their status. If you can, try and submit your exchange-credit requests before you register for your classes at SDSU. Not all courses will transfer back the way you anticipate. For example, a 400-level class at SDSU might equate to a 200-level class at SFU. By submitting your exchange-credit requests in advance, you can better plan your courses if you want to ensure that the classes you take at state count towards your degree in a way that works best for you.

San Diego State is a large university of about 35,000 students, so there are countless programs, extracurriculars, and classes to try. One of the best aspects of SDSU is that they offer single-unit
Exercise and Nutritional Science (ENS) classes in dozens of sports and activities. During my two semesters, I took courses in sailing, yoga, tennis, and rock climbing. Exercise and Nutritional Science classes were a fantastic way to get out and enjoy the Southern California weather, get some exercise, and try something you might otherwise never do. Each ENS class was only an additional $90.00 for the semester, which makes them a very inexpensive way to explore new hobbies and have time with certified instructors.

There is also a multitude of activities available to students on campus. The student union building has a bowling alley, a movie theatre, a recording studio and several restaurants. Students have access to the ARC, which includes an expansive gym, several basketball courts, a swimming pool, tennis courts and more. SDSU is not a commuter campus, so there is always lots going on and plenty of fellow students to meet.

San Diego is a super friendly city, so make sure you get off campus as much as possible and meet your fellow San Diegans. If you've never visited before, be sure to check out La Jolla Cove, the Coronado, Pacific Beach, Little Italy, the Gaslamp Quarter, Balboa Park and Point Loma. If you have a car, Laguna and Newport Beaches are only an hour and a half north, and Disneyland is not much further. If an opportunity presents itself, head east and visit Joshua Tree and Julian. San Diego is one of the craft beer capitals of the world, so if you are twenty-one, take advantage of the craft brewery scene, it's a great way to meet locals.

Studying in Southern California presents you with so many opportunities. Although getting the most out of your classes is essential, don't forget to take advantage of everything California has to offer. Your time abroad is going to go by fast. If there is something you want to do while you are there, don't push it off because too often you will run out of time and miss the opportunity.
Because there are no tutorials, take the time to get to know your professors. If you ever need extra help, they will be your best support. Lastly, International Student Services hosts lots of events for international students. Don't hesitate to take advantage of these opportunities, but be sure to branch out and get to know students outside of the international community. You will find that domestic students will often have great suggestions for things to do that non-locals would not think of, and the connections that will allow you to make the most of your time.