Visa

I applied for my visa online through Australia’s immigration website. Once you receive your certificate of enrollment, you can fill out the visa application. It took about 30 minutes to answer all of the questions and it was approved within minutes. It cost about $500 dollars to get it. It’s all electronic so it’s just associated with your passport number; you don’t need a paper copy.

Packing

I would recommend not filling your suitcases when you leave home so that you will have plenty of room to bring stuff back with you! I brought mainly summer clothes because I was (incorrectly) under the impression that Australia was always warm. In the winter, it can be in the low 50s, which is a little too cold for shorts and a t-shirt! Bring more pants and sweaters than you think you might need and less of the shorts. You also don’t really need to bring any sort of toiletries with you. You can buy it all when you get here and avoid having to haul around all the extra weight in your suitcases.

Arrival

Getting through immigration in Sydney was very easy. Arriving in Sydney, they took my passport to ensure that I had the proper visa and then they stamped it and let me through. I had to get my bags there and then re-check them for the next flight to Adelaide, though. When I arrived in Adelaide, someone met me at the airport to give me a voucher for a free taxi ride. Other than that, there was no buddy. The orientation program began the day after I arrived. The first day was full of meetings where they had a Powerpoint and gave us a bunch of information about the university and the city. The next day we had a beach day in Glenelg, a short ride away on the tram. They gave us lunch and had volleyball and cricket. They also took us to a wildlife park where we got to see kangaroos, koalas, echidnas, and dingoes! Then we went to Victor Harbor and got to spend the day there. Overall, it was a very nice orientation program.

Academics

The University

The university is located on the main street right in the center of Adelaide. The whole campus is probably less than a quarter of the size of Cornell, with most building very close together. The hub is the main center on campus to hang out when you don’t have class. In it are computers, printers, the library, cafes, and even a video game station! The spring semester at Cornell is their first semester. It runs from the beginning of March to the beginning of June. Then there are a few weeks without classes and then finals begin. Finals end in the beginning of July. Their second semester runs from the end of July to the beginning of November. The global exchange office is the main point of contact for exchange students. They organize a lot of events throughout the semester, like tickets to footy games, pub nights, and beach days. They have a facebook group for each exchange semester where you can (virtually) meet the other students and communicate throughout the semester.

Courses

Enrollment was over the internet in February before I arrived. There is a class list available online before then when you can see when each class is. Exchange students have the last enrollment slot, so be prepared to have some back-ups in case your first choices are full. Final grades are based on a combination of tutorial attendance/participation, papers, and final exams. Weekly homework to hand in was never given. You are just expected to do the reading assigned and be ready to discuss it. There was not much work expected from you weekly, but grading is done on a different scale. An HD is only given out very infrequently, but consists of any grade from 85-100. Getting a grade in the 70s is considered a very good grade so that’s something to get accustomed to.

Life Abroad

Language

Even though they speak English, I did have a few language difficulties when I first got here. People tended to talk very fast and have very strange sayings or different words for things. After a few weeks of getting used to the accent I didn’t have any more troubles. I even picked up some of their sayings! I would recommend getting a fun Australian
dictionary for Americans. It can come in handy, but is mostly just fun to see all the different words they use!

Banking

I had to open an account when I got here due to a scholarship. My bank account was at ANZ and had a branch a block away from the school. They waive the fees for the account because you are a student and give you a debit card for easy access. This also made paying rent easier, as they can only take direct deposit from Australian accounts. Without the account, there would have been a 1.5% fee on top of the 1% international fee for using a credit card for rent. My American debit card worked fine for ATMs, as did my American credit card. Keep in mind that all American cards incur a 1% international fee. ATMs also charge for use.

Housing

The university did guarantee housing at Urbanest. It is an apartment complex a ten minute walk from campus. I had a single room with my own bathroom in a 6-person apartment. The common room included a small living area and a kitchen. The complex also had a large screen TV, pool and ping-pong table, study room, and grill for barbequing. The rent was all-inclusive. Every two weeks they would charge $570. You can choose to pay it all upfront, however. I bought my groceries and made dinner every night for myself. There was no meal plan. Living in the apartment, I did not get to meet many other Australians, as most people living in it were all international students. You could also choose to live in the University housing. They offer a meal plan and I have heard very good things from people who lived there. This option would expose you to more Australians and really immerse you in their life. I was in an apartment with 5 other boys who were not very clean or social, so I would have preferred to live in the University housing. The rooms were very nice, though, and it was very nice to have my own bathroom.

Transportation

There are buses and trams in Adelaide. You can buy a metro card on campus and then refill it at any metro store, on campus, or at a tram stop. The metro card works for all modes of public transportation. The bus and tram costs a little over a dollar to ride each time. You can also just buy a one-ride pass each time you get on the bus or tram if you don’t expect to use it very often. I bought a $20 metro card and only used about half of it.

Shopping

Living costs are more expensive in Australia than at home. Things like shampoo and soap are especially expensive. I spent about 70 or 80 dollars a week on food. I went to the store probably every other day because you can only buy what you can carry back to your apartment. Housing was very expensive at $285 a week, which is over $1100 a month. I rarely took any public transportation as you can walk anywhere you need to go within 10 or 15 minutes. I didn’t have any textbooks to buy, either. I just had to buy a few novels for my English class, which ended up being about 70 dollars. Books are much more expensive in Australia than at home, too.

Health and Safety

I felt very safe in Adelaide. You should take the regular precautions at night like you would anywhere else, but I never felt unsafe. Adelaide is a relatively small city. Australia mandates that you must have Australian health insurance, a cost of about $300 for the whole semester. It is called ‘Overseas Student Health Care’ and only covers certain things. During the orientation, a speaker will come and tell you everything that is covered or not covered through the insurance. There is a health facility on campus, as well as many doctors and hospitals around.

Overall exchange experience

The best thing about the semester was the ability to travel around Australia and see things I have only dreamed about. I got to see the Great Barrier Reef, the Sydney Opera House, Bondi Beach, the Twelve Apostles, and so many other amazing sights. The lack of work is definitely something that I had to get used to. I went the whole first 4 weeks without doing a single piece of work or writing. It was challenging to stay caught up on everything when there was no work to force me to learn it. The best piece of advice I can give is to take advantage of all of the breaks they give you. There is a mid-semester break for 2 weeks. Travel then! There is also a week after classes end that is an optional teaching week when no one teaches, in addition to another week after that for studying. Travel then! Take advantage of the time off to go to all of the cool places in Australia! It’ll be worth it! I’ve made memories that I never thought were possible and friends that I will never forget!