Practical Information

What tips do you have obtaining the visa? Length of time to obtain?
The visa is quite easy to obtain. You simply apply online on the immigration website: http://www.immi.gov.au/students/. I received my visa within 24 hours of applying!

What was your experience with immigration upon arrival in-country?
Immigration was generally easy to deal with but they are very strict about agriculture. Upon entry into the country, a dog sniffed my bag and found a paper towel which had contact with a plum I ate earlier in the flight and I had to go through quarantine where they confiscated my soccer cleats because I was harboring a "soil sample" and I was given a warning for not declaring so. Therefore be careful about what materials you are bringing into the country!

Packing
What did you not bring from home that you wish you had?
I mostly just brought clothes; Australia had basically everything I needed.

What items do you recommend not bringing?
Any fruit, veggies, or clothing and shoes which had contact with a field.

Resources
Where did you find good information on:
The host university: the University of Melbourne has a comprehensive website: http://unimelb.edu.au/
Social events: university advertising, and student discussion Movies/shows/concerts: city advertising, word of mouth. Melbourne has many festivals throughout the year which are well publicized.
Maps/tourist information: Federation square on Swanston St and the Lonely Planet Travel Guide

Academics

The University
Is there a centralized campus?
Yes, however most students commute, so it is generally only active during class time.

Where do students hang out?
Students hang out at the many cafes on campus, local restaurants, and pubs.

Are there accessible computer labs, wifi, libraries, etc?
Yes there several libraries for different disciplines, and full access to wifi at libraries and on campus. Accessibility is similar to Cornell.

Courses
How was the course enrollment process?
Course enrollment is online like at Cornell, but there is no equivalent of "schedulizer", so good luck organizing a schedule that does not conflict! The University of Melbourne allows you to have a schedule with overlapping classes which is obviously inconvenient, so choose classes wisely.

International Office at Host University
What type of reception did you have upon arrival?
I elected not to be greeted by the host university because I have family in Melbourne, however the University offers a pick up at the airport and bus service to campus.
How were the classes structured (mostly lecture? discussions?)?
The classes are mostly large lecture based like Cornell for introductory classes, but smaller discussion classes for upper level classes.

Was homework given? If so, how often? How much?
Homework is very much optional, and no weekly problem sets are given as in the engineering college at Cornell. Therefore most of the studying and homework is up to you on an as needed basis.

What types of exams were given? How do they compare to those at Cornell?
In my experience classes varied. Some had 2 or 3 tests and a final, and others had no tests. It all depends on the type of class. However on the whole final exams are worth a large percentage of your grade. My microbiology final exam was worth 70% of my grade.

How are the courses graded? (e.g., flat, curved?)
Courses are generally not curved, what you achieve is what you get, however they use the following system: H1 80-100, H2 70-80, H3 60-70, P 50-60, F <50

On what criteria are grades based? (e.g., tests? papers? group projects?)
Again this all depends on the class, however tests are a large portion of the grade.

How many classes did you take?
Four classes. I was not allowed to take any more as an exchange student.

Were you allowed to take your exams early? If so, what was the process?
I did not try to, but friends who wanted to leave earlier generally had to get their Melbourne Uni exams proctored at their home university at a similar time to the exam period in Melbourne.

Life Abroad

Did you have any language problems with faculty? With other students? In daily life?
The language was English, but there was definitely some confusion about local diction and accent. However by the end I was speaking like an Australian!

Banking
Would you recommend opening a local account? If so, which do you recommend?
Yes, I was getting charged a lot in fees for paying with my American credit card and withdrawing money, so I just transferred a large sum at the beginning of the semester for only $20. The bank I used was Commonwealth which had a 5.5% interest rate, free debit card, and free account. Also it was located right on campus, and there are many ATMs and branches across Australia.

Housing
Did your host university arrange your housing? If not, how did you find housing?
I applied through the university housing application. The application is due somewhat earlier, and apparently only places 25% of exchange student applicants into a college, but I believe 5 of the 7 Cornell students in Melbourne at the same time as me were living in colleges.

What type of housing (apartment? home stay? dorm?)?
Would you recommend it?
Definitely a residential college, which is the similar to a dorm, but has a stronger community aspect such as a fraternity or sorority. Living at Newman College was one of the reasons I had such an incredible experience. If you can get into a college I highly recommend it. I lived among mostly Australians and some exchange students. My social life was dominated by college activities such as sports, formal dinners, soirees, as well as just hanging out at local college pubs. The experience really allowed me to integrate into the culture

How much did you pay for housing? How did you pay for rent and utilities?
8900 AUD for the semester which was around 8000 USD at the time. This includes all food, college activities, and tutoring. I almost chose private student housing as a result of the hefty cost, but I am glad I chose a college, the experience was well worth it.

Where did you eat? Was there a meal plan?
The college provided 3 full meals a day in the dining room. While I travelled and on weekends, I went out to restaurants in the city. Melbourne is very cosmopolitan and the food is very international as a result. The food was generally healthy and delicious.

Transportation
What modes of public transportation are available? How much do they cost?
Trams and buses are accessible to take you anywhere in Melbourne for about $2 for 2 hours. They recently just added a bike sharing program which is easy and cheap as well. All three systems are extremely convenient and easy to use. There are also trains to head out to further suburbs, and the airport is just 15 min from the city by bus.

How/where do you pay for tickets? Are there monthly or commuter passes?
There are multiple trip tickets which can be bought at convenient stores and tram stops in addition to single tickets which can be bought on the tram.
Use tiger airways for cheap travelling around the country.
Communication

How did you call home? What was the cost? Did you use Skype?
I mostly skyped. It is only around 3 cents a minute that way.

Did you buy a cell phone? If so, what type of plan and/or provider do you recommend?
I bought an optus pre-paid plan, but they are all pretty comparable. Prepaid is expensive, but most communication is more expensive than the US. It was generally $30 a month to get by.

How long does it take to receive mail? To send mail? What is the cost?
Mail was pretty efficient. Maybe 5 days each way for regular mail. Postcards were about $1.50 to send, which is really the only thing I mailed.

Social Activities

Did you meet students from the host country?
Yes, I lived with many Australian students and became close with several of them. I even got to visit of few of my friend’s homes in the country.

Did you get involved in any social organizations or clubs?
I joined the sports teams at the college which rotated every three weeks or so, like intramurals with the other colleges.

Throughout the semester were there any special activities arranged for exchange students?
Yes MUSEX is an organization that provides many social events for exchange students. The organization held barbeques, parties, sporting events, and a ball.

What do local students do for fun?
Students go to the many sporting events that happen in Melbourne each week (AUS rules football, rugby, cricket, soccer, and tennis), go to concerts and festivals (comedy, film, environmental, etc) and on a weekly basis go to local pubs, clubs and restaurants.

Shopping

Where did you buy groceries, toiletries, house wares, and other items?
Safeway, a supermarket was only a few blocks from my college and there were many other supermarkets and stores throughout the city.

How do the prices compare to the United States? Did you use cash or credit/debit cards?
Prices were similar except food and beverages were slightly more. Alcohol was very expensive, probably triple the cost of the US as a result of hefty taxes.

Are there outdoor markets? If so, do you recommend them?
There is Queen Victoria market, open every day of the week, which is excellent for fresh food and vegetables, as well as souvenirs.

What are general store hours?
Same as US mostly.

What stores are popular? Convenient?
Cotton On, Dotti, and Sports Girl are nice and inexpensive for ladies fashion. The stores in Melbourne are pretty analogous to the US in terms of supermarkets.

Were there any items that were not available?
Oddly dryer sheets, and red solo cups were nonexistent, but everything else was accessible.

Health and Safety

How safe did you feel in your host location?
Safer than I would in New York, where I am from.

What advice do you have for future students regarding their health and safety?
You are required to get Overseas Student Healthcare, so you will be set with insurance, but it is pretty easy to be healthy and safe in Australia. I just would not recommend venturing into the outback without a guide.

What resources were available in case you needed medical attention?
I did not experience any need for medical attention, but there were many hospitals around the city.

Travel

Where did you travel while abroad?
• I drove along the Great Ocean Road to see beautiful rock formations, and experience some great beaches.
• Went on a day trip to Phillip Island to see the famous penguin march.
• Visited my Australian friends at their homes in Albury in country Victoria.
• I flew to Sydney to experience Australia’s biggest city and best night life.
• Flew to Tasmania to hike, go to nature preserves, tour wineries and breweries and go on a ghost tour of a penal colony.
• I flew to Alice Springs and toured the Red Center on a bus trip through Uluru, and Kata Tjuta National park.
• For mid semester break I went to the Great Barrier Reef in the Whitsunday Islands, went sailing, scuba dive, snorkeled, and kayaked.

Is there a student travel agency or other organization to assist with making travel plans?
I booked everything online, just by searching, and using Lonely Planet suggestions. STA is available to book trips though.
How much did you spend on traveling abroad?  
I spent around $6000 more than a normal semester at Cornell.

Are there any guidebooks or websites that you would recommend?  

Overall Exchange Experience

The experience was an incredible opportunity to leave everything I knew and just learn about myself and another culture for a semester. Enrolling directly in the university allowed me to go out completely alone and make new friends and try new things. Although the academics were not generally challenging, the classes I took were very interesting and engaging. I had the opportunity to go on a site visit at a local park and assess the feasibility of the construction of a promenade, and engage with community members about low income housing in a local neighborhood.

The real excitement of the trip however was meeting so many new, friendly people at the residential college, university, and city of Melbourne. It was great having a chat with a local store owner, joining the crew team and rowing for the first time, deciding on a Wednesday to travel to Sydney two days later with friends you met the week before, and walking up to the Melbourne cricket ground and buying a ticket to footy match for $15. The experience was incredible, and I definitely fell in love with the city of Melbourne. I feel much more relaxed now after experiencing the laid back Australian culture, and after getting a taste of travelling around Australia, I cannot wait to plan trips to other parts of the world.