CALS International Exchange Program Student Report
Margot, Fall 2010 [Adelaide, Australia]

Name: Margot
Major: Microbiology
Name of Host University: University of Adelaide
Period/Time of Exchange: Fall 2010 (1 semester)

Practical Information

Apply for a visa online! It takes about 30 minutes and you are accepted in 10 minutes. Immigration in Adelaide was very easy. You fill out an entrance form on the plane and, depending on what you have declared, they scan your bag and/or confiscate the items not allowed in the country.

Packing

What did you not bring from home that you wish you had? Nothing, except: they don’t use the same kind of deodorant as we do in the states (Aussies use aerosol sprays). Had I run out of deodorant, I would have been wishing I brought extra.

What items do you recommend not bringing? Don’t bring too much clothing. You don’t need as much as you think you do and you’ll regret it when you don’t have enough room for souvenirs and things you bought there.

Resources

Where did you find good information:

The host university: Online

Social events: Facebook and people I met in the Village (the apartment complex where I lived). Also, the university sent emails about hosted events.

Movies/shows/concerts: online, newspaper, university fliers

Maps/tourist information: backpackers, library, internet, locals

Did you receive (or were you offered) a buddy? No, I really wish they had offered that, though.

Were there orientation activities? Yes, pretty good ones, too. There was a tour of campus and a trip to a wildlife park and to an island.

How was the international office staff? They were ok, but always directed you to another office.

Academics

University

Is there a centralized campus? Yes, right in the Central Business District of the City

Where do students hang out? Students tend to hang out at Uni Bar and various other bars and venues around the city.

Are there accessible computer labs, wifi, libraries, etc? Yes and it is all very accessible.

Courses

How was the course enrollment process? Easy. You sign up for classes prior to departure but you can always "shop around" a bit once classes start. I ended up changing my schedule when I arrived. Everything can be done online.

How were the classes structured (mostly lecture? discussions?) Lectures and discussion in Humanity courses like history, music and philosophy. Discussion is a really important part of the education system and attendance to discussions is taken into account for your grade at the end of the semester. Lectures are considered less important. Labs are all mandatory.

Was homework given? There is very little homework at all. It is a very self-motivated and self-directed learning. Instead, there are readings you are expected to have done and be ready to talk about in discussion.

How are the courses graded? Flat, as far as I know. I think it depends on what course you are taking. Exam-based courses are curved while humanities are more subjective and flat.
On what criteria are grades based? Grades are based on a few big projects, essays or exams. There are very few if any small-scale graded homework assignments.


Were you allowed to take your exams early? No, exams are taken during finals week in a huge auditorium off campus. There are several different exams being taken the same time in the same auditorium (this year they were at the fairgrounds, everyone just took a bus there from the city).

Life Abroad

Language

Did you have any language problems with faculty? With other students? In daily life? The language was fine, but there were a couple differences you had to get used to. Besides that people were really good about explaining what something meant if they used a word that you weren’t familiar with. Although we all spoke English, we called objects or events different things so that’s what you had to acclimate to.

Banking

Would you recommend opening a local account? If so, which do you recommend? I know some students opened an account and I think it is useful if you get a job while you are in Australia so you can do direct deposit, but otherwise I don’t think it is necessary.

If not, how did you do your banking and access money while abroad? I have an account with Bank of America in the States which has a sister bank in Australia called Westpac so I could withdraw money directly from my U.S. account free of charge from any Westpac ATM.

Housing

Did your host university arrange your housing? If not, how did you find housing? The University of Adelaide did not arrange housing but they did provide suggestions for housing and different resources to use to find it.

What type of housing (apartment? home stay? dorm?)? Would you recommend it? I lived in the University run 'Village,' where they offer apartments and townhouses. I was assigned to an apartment where I lived with 3 other girls. All of us were international students. I wouldn’t recommend it because it was very restricting and came at a high cost for six months. You can find cheaper, better housing with international students elsewhere in the city. But if you are looking for convenience and security when you arrive and throughout the semester and instant friends, then the Village is a good option (there were a lot of exchange students living there, as well).

How much did you pay for housing? How did you pay for rent and utilities? If you are staying at the Village for one semester, you are required to pay the total cost of $5,247 dollars before you arrive. However, if you are planning on living there for a year, the cost is around $10,494 which can be paid in smaller increments.

Where did you eat? Was there a meal plan? There was no food plan with the 'Village' housing, so I cooked for myself. The location of the Village is very convenient. It is only 3 blocks from a grocery store and a huge farmer’s market called ‘the Central Markets” where you can buy fresh produce, meat, nuts, chocolate etc. at a much lower price than the grocery stores. Otherwise, you can shop at 'Coles' or 'Woolworths' (the two grocery stores in Adelaide).

Transportation

What modes of public transportation are available? How much do they cost? There is a free bus that does a loop around the city. You can pick it up right outside the University. There is also a Tram that runs down King William Street (the main street in the city) that is free between the terraces; otherwise it costs $2.30 for a 2 hour ticket. Any 2 hour bus ticket also costs $2.30 and can be used for any transfer onto other buses or the tram system within those 2 hours. However, between 9am and 3pm (non-peak hours) during the week-days, the bus and tram system costs $1.20. There are also hundreds of taxis in the city that are fairly cheap as well; they are a good option to use for getting to the airport from the city.

How/where do you pay for tickets? Are there monthly or commuter passes? Tickets are paid for on the bus or you can get multi-trip tickets that you buy at any convenience store(or the metro-store on the corner of Currie and King William street) You get 10 bus rides for $14.90 peak time and 10 rides for $7.90 non-peak time. I don’t think there is any sort of monthly commuter pass, it seems like the multi-trips tickets are the substitute.

Communication

I called home using my pre-paid cell. I think it was like 5 cents/min. Skype was the best way to get in contact with home though because it was free for the most part. The only tricky part with Skype was coordinating a good time to do it because he time change was so different (13-15 hours).

Did you buy a cell phone? If so, what type of plan and/or provider do you recommend? Yes, I bought a pre-paid phone from Vodafone. It was about $30 a month.
How long does it take to receive mail? To send mail? What is the cost? About 10 days to receive post, probably about 2 weeks to send. A post card costs $1.45 international but I don’t know about a package, depends on the weight and how fast it has to arrive. I was receiving packages that cost about $12-$14 to send from the U.S.

Social Activities

Did you meet students from the host country? Yes, I participated on the University of Adelaide Women’s Soccer team, where I met most of my Australian friends.

Throughout the semester were there any special activities arranged for exchange students? The University of Adelaide Exchange society organized pub crawls and during orientation there were trips to take to different parts of South Australia. They were short day trips but we went to a harbor nearby and a wildlife park, where we got to pet native Australian animals.

What do local students do for fun? Go out to bars, surf, spend time on the beach.

Shopping

Where did you buy groceries, toiletries, house wares, and other items? Since I lived in the Central Business District, everything was really close by. I bought produce at the Central Markets (a huge farmers market that was open 4-5 days a week). Other groceries, toiletries, house wares etc. were purchased at the Supermarket called Coles right next door to the Central Markets. There was also a supermarket called Woolworths near the university. In addition, there were shops called Cheap as Chips and The Reject Shop that sold random house wares for really cheap, I think you could even get towels there.

How do the prices compare to the United States? Did you use cash or credit/debit cards? Things were substantially more expensive in Australia. For example, a standard box of cereal cost around $5 and a regular coffee cost around $3. I used cash most of the time because there was an international fee deducted from my account if I used my debit card.

Are there outdoor markets? If so, do you recommend them? Yes! The outdoor markets are really cool, I definitely recommend them.

What are general store hours? Monday-Thursday shops are open 9-5. On Friday, shops were open until 9PM for late night shopping.

What stores are popular? Convenient? Woolworths and Coles are convenient for groceries. There is also a mall right in the CBD called Rundle Mall that has clothing stores, sports stores, souvenir shops, food etc. Rundle Mall is right across the street from the University.

Were there any items that were not available? Anything available in the U.S. was available in Australia with slight variations on brand or style.

Health and Safety

How safe did you feel in your host location? I felt very safe. Although Adelaide is a city, it is a modest size and very easy to navigate. I still made a point to walk with at least one other person at night and sometimes during the day.

What advice do you have for future students regarding their health and safety? Make sure to walk in groups at night and if you are going out, keep an eye on each other.

What resources were available in case you needed medical attention? There was a medical office on campus and a hospital right in the city.

Travel

Where did you travel while abroad? I travelled to Perth in Western Australia, Sydney, Melbourne, Northern Queensland (Magnetic Island, Townsville, Cairns, Port Douglas: Great Barrier Reef, Cape Tribulation: Daintree Rainforest) and New Zealand (South Island only).

Is there a student travel agency or other organization to assist with making travel plans? There was a travel agency called STA but it was a bit pricey to travel through the company.

Did the host university organize any trips? They did not organize anything after Orientation week.

How much did you spend on traveling abroad? I spent around $2,500, including food, airfare, accommodations and tours.

Are there any guidebooks or websites that you would recommend? I highly recommend the Lonely Planet tour book series. It lays out Australia by sites and cities and provides accurate lists and suggestions for accommodation, including prices and often has a map of the larger cities so you can navigate them a little more simply.

Overall exchange experience

Did you get a good picture of the country? The local and school culture? Definitely, immersing myself in the culture, getting to know locals, and taking classes with local students allowed me to get a really good picture of the lifestyle, values, and uniqueness of Australia.
and social viewpoint? The exchange experience didn't affect my cultural and social viewpoint until I returned to the States and experienced the social differences immediately upon stepping off the plane. Going abroad taught me a lot about Australia but also about the United States that I didn't notice until I left that environment and compared it to another.

What influence do you think the experience had/will have over future career possibilities? In terms of education, it forced me to adapt to a different learning environment. In terms of careers, I'll definitely look into working abroad for a few years because of the experience, which I hadn't considered or been comfortable with prior to study abroad. Studying Abroad at the University of Adelaide provided a great opportunity to begin traveling and understanding other cultures. I had the opportunity to meet people from all over the world and travel part of the globe I probably wouldn't get to see otherwise. Throughout the semester there were experiences that provided personal and intellectual growth and provided new insights about Australia and the United States.