

My Exchange Semester at the University of Sydney

I'm a master student at the FU Berlin majoring in journalism and communication science. I was originally accepted for an online semester at the University of Sydney (USYD) but LUCKILY Australia opened the borders just in time for me to hop on a plane and head down under. I spent one semester at USYD, from February till July, and in this report, I will share my experience with you, mates.

It was a very hectic start because as already mentioned the original plan was to do the exchange semester online, so I was not expecting to have to travel. However, I was guided through the whole process by the exchange offices in Berlin and Sydney which made the beginning of my journey much easier. Also, the Australian government has made it super simple to apply for a visa – the whole process takes place online entirely and does not include an interview. You fill out the forms, submit the application, and wait. I received my answer two weeks later – an electronic visa which I had to simply print out at home. BUT the student visa is rather costly, I had to pay \$650 which is around 430€.

Once I arrived in Sydney and saw the city and the university, though, I realised that all the efforts and stress had been totally worth it.

I had already begun looking for a place to live in Sydney while I was in Berlin. Sadly, the student accommodations there were crazy expensive (to me, at least) and way out of my budget. I browsed on a few websites, such as Gumtree, and made some appointments for a viewing. For my first week in Sydney, I had booked a quite affordable Airbnb in Surry Hills so I could view rooms in peace. Lucky for me, I was offered a nice room in a shared beautiful Victorian terraced house already on my first day. The house was in Surry Hills, close to Central, Oxford St. and Hyde Park. My rent was \$220 per week which was a VERY GOOD deal for Sydney. My room wasn't that grand, and the house wasn't that spectacular, obviously, but I had incredible fun, and very hospitable housemates who made my stay in Sydney unforgettable. Which was the most important thing to me while looking for a home. Surry Hills is a beautiful central district with lots of parks, galleries, museums, attractions, cafes, restaurants, and sport facilities. It's rich in history and has a great night life with vibrant streets and diverse bars and clubs. But be careful, no alcohol in the streets! Also, it's very hilly, as the name might suggest. So be prepared to walk uphill a lot if you live there. Not so much fun with groceries in your hands.

The city in general is totally unique. Sydney has a good infrastructure and is not very big so it's not that busy and overwhelming, but it still offers an amazing combination of a big city and picturesque nature. One thing I miss for sure, and A LOT, is the beaches. Going to Bondi, Coogee or Manly after classes to study and swim with friends was such a luxury and a unique student experience which not many places can offer. But the city is very

expensive. Living, food and drinks, entertainment, leisure, and even public transport. Especially for a student, the cost of living there can be overwhelming so make sure you have a good financial plan to fully enjoy it. Luckily, Australia is the country with the highest minimum wage in the world, so if you can find a job, it'll help you a lot.

The university is wonderful! It's situated in Camperdown, not far away from Surry Hills. The quadrangle, a Hogwarts-like building, surrounded by palm trees, sits pretty on a small hill at the centre of campus, basking in the sun, and greets you and fills you with inspiration every day. Even on gloomy days (which sadly, were an often occurrence). The rest of the buildings were also very impressive. My classes were in the Business School and the Brennan MacCallum Building. The facilities there were spacious, comfortable, modern, accessible, and well-equipped, which makes studying easier and more efficient. And right next to the quadrangle is the Fisher library which, surprisingly, is open 24/7 – perfect for exam season. Don't fall asleep there though. The students were very friendly and easy to work with. The university is home to students from all over the world which offers a great opportunity for a rich exchange with very diverse viewpoints. Orientation week at USYD is like a small festival – stage performances, events, talks, hundreds of booths by the student societies, and many free snacks and drinks. During OW I had the chance to meet many new students, learn about the university, the educational system, the units, and join student societies. I highly recommend that you join at least one society! It's very enriching and helps you connect with full-time students. The societies organise fun events very often, and not only will you have a great time, but you will also learn a lot about different cultures. And most of them are free or very affordable. The units at USYD are quite different from the ones at the FU. It felt almost like high school, with weekly assignments, mid-term papers and exams, and smaller exercises. However, don't underestimate it. The workload during the semester is very extensive and requires a lot of work. There are many "small" assignments every week but luckily most of them are very interactive. At least in my case they were. Also, every assignment and presentation are graded individually (*x out of a hundred, i.e., 90/100*). And my final grade for the semester was calculated based on these grades.

Life in Sydney, and in Australia in general, is magnificent! Even if it's a bit too expensive for a student. During the summer (and even autumn), Sydney is dreamy. The beaches are breathtaking, and you can reach them very easily – public transport takes you everywhere in the city and is quite reliable. It's the perfect way to spend the afternoon after classes. You can enjoy a lovely BBQ with your friends there, sunbathe, or simply walk around and hike. The Bondi-Coogee walk will leave you speechless, you won't believe that you're in a city, it's quite unbelievable. Unfortunately, the weather in Australia has worsened over the

last couple of years and there was A LOT of rain and even floods during my semester. No floods where I lived in Sydney, luckily. But even then, there is a lot to do in the city. Fun activities, events, exhibitions, cafes, bars, restaurants etc. And don't forget that Sydney is home to the most famous opera house in the world. You must go to an event there at least once!

Sydney is in New South Wales which is a very beautiful state – it has many national parks, spectacular nature, and some of the best beaches in the world. You can reach most of the popular destinations by train or bus – however, it's usually a rather long ride and quite inconvenient but it's the most affordable. Otherwise, you can rent a car or a van with someone and go camping, it's very popular in Australia. Or you can book a cheap hostel – these are very popular in Australia too. And it's totally worth it, not only in NSW, but everywhere in Australia. The country has remarkable and very accessible trails, and the views left me speechless every time. And the best of all, the flora and fauna. Australia is home to hundreds of species which can only be seen there – flowers, plants, animals, marine life, and yes... insects too. But don't be alarmed, it's not as bad as people make it sound, it's very safe! You just need to be careful, mindful, and respectful toward the wildlife there. And yes, you can see kangaroos in NSW! There are so many of them. Not in or around Sydney sadly (only at the zoo), but there are many destinations only a two-hour-ride away where you can have a picnic and watch the kangaroos jump around. Koalas are more difficult to spot, and not very present in NSW, but if you travel and go camping, you will see so many beautiful animals which can only be found in Australia.

Sydney is the perfect place for an exchange semester! So, if you're on the fence which university to choose, I hope my report can help you decide. Every moment of the exchange experience was worth it, and it's really a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. Well, not really if you do it twice. But it's amazing. Have a great time down under, mates! :)