

Table of Contents

Introduction	1
Before	2
Visa	3
Health and Disability	4
Costs & Funding	5
During	7
Accommodations	7
The Semester Itself	8
Outside of Uni	9
After	10
Conclusion	11

Introduction

This will probably be a less organized overview of an exchange semester at the University of Melbourne than most of the other reports; first because this is being written about a year later, and my brain has erased the details of the difficult parts of organizing this to better remember all the good; and second, because I'll focus a lot on my specific experience as someone doing this exchange with a disorder that I had to plan for and around. Other reports do a fantastic job explaining the minutiae of the exchange, so my aim with this report is to share how the exchange may look if you have additional needs to keep in mind. However, I can only explain how it went for me in my specific situation with ADHD: even without additional needs, organizing this exchange requires a lot of research! If you have specific health problems on top of that, it just involves some more research to cover that part of your life. As a result of this focus, most of my report will talk about preparation, because doing an exchange with disability or support needs does end up frontloading a lot of work before you fly.

A note upfront: You will find that I talk a lot about the stress and difficulties of preparing an exchange. This is because I don't want to lie and say it was easy: it obviously wasn't.

Medical things added a layer of difficulty, but (crucially) not to the extent that it was so much more than what other exchange students were dealing with, only a different type! There are systems in place to help you, and exchange student without specific health/support needs make use of them too, because an exchange takes a lot of work: but you're not going through it alone. My main point is that, even if you are a student like me (disabled in some way, or also chronically anxious/neurotic/overthinker on top of that), the exchange semester is *still absolutely worth it*. I wouldn't trade this experience for anything. You may just have to ask for more specific help along the way!

Before

Organizing the exchange started long before flying to Australia. Applications for the program started the year before the semester started, and if you have to take English tests, you have to do them even earlier. (Since I study an English MA, this wasn't an issue for me.) For my master, it's recommended that you do the exchange in semester three, which means you'd be applying in your first semester. (This would be relevant if you're aiming for *Regelstudienzeit*, e.g. for scholarship reasons.) I ended up applying in my third semester, for an exchange during my fourth/fifth semesters. I can't remember this causing any issues for my application: The main problem with this approach is that you end up losing eligibility for a lot of scholarships, since the exchange is taking place outside of *Regelstudienzeit*. If there are exceptions to this, I didn't find them, except for PROMOS.

After receiving a yes from the FU, it's time to apply to UniMelb, whose deadline was the 1st of May for a semester starting in July (though I recommend applying much earlier: see Visa section below). UniMelb's website is incredibly helpful for this. Generally, you'll be able to find all the information you need there, and rather than give you false information by misremembering something, it's best that you check out their guide for incoming exchange students! If something isn't answered there, don't be afraid to ask. I've found that UniMelb staff are incredibly friendly and ready to help, and in fact I wish I had asked for help far more often, since it would have made my exchange far less stressful! (As they said at UniMelb's welcome day: you're new, and not expected to know everything!)

Another thing to keep in mind is that planning for your semester abroad takes a lot of time. Don't necessarily expect yourself to be able to do a normal courseload at the same time! I'm sure there are students who can manage it, but I personally had to drop a lot of classes to be able to get everything done on time. You will also most likely have to travel to Melbourne before your FU semester ends, which can impact *aktive*

Teilnahme and your exams. I was able to get a deadline extension for my term paper before leaving for Australia so that I could hand it in after coming back; talk to your instructors and see what options there are.

Visa

I was only able to start applying for my Visa once I had my confirmation of enrolment (COE) from UniMelb, since the first Visa application page asks for information from your COE and you can't proceed until it's filled out. There are around 25 pages of information to fill out for your Visa, so *plan enough time for this!* I was able to get my COE processed more quickly despite handing it in kind of late, because they asked people planning to apply for an Academic Adjustment Plan (AAP) to notify them, so that the AAP application process at UniMelb could be started as soon as possible.

Something I wish I had known: While planning the timing of applying for your visa, plan as if you'll be required to do a medical examination. (Generally plan as if things will go wrong somewhere if you want to avoid last minute panics.) I was flagged for the medical examination requirement after submitting my Visa application mid-June, only weeks before my flights and the beginning of the semester. There were only two possible examination centers for this, one in Frankfurt, and one in Berlin. Initially I was only able to get an appointment a month after I was supposed to be in Melbourne! There is a hard deadline for being in Melbourne at the beginning of week two of classes, after which you are required to withdraw from the program, and suddenly it looked like this would be the case for me.

I had not planned for this (obviously), because my research had suggested to me that filling out the information on my ADHD in the visa app (they ask about ongoing medical issues) shouldn't trigger the examination. I initially thought that my research had been wrong, but what I now believe happened is that, after the pandemic, filling out medical information triggers the exam regardless. It could be that people without chronic medical conditions don't get flagged for the exam; I don't know. Regardless, I recommend planning as if the exam will be triggered, especially if you have any ongoing health problems that you would have to enter during the visa application process. Then you'll have plenty of extra time if it isn't triggered. The only reason I was able to arrive on time for orientation in Melbourne is because I looked for appointment slots in both examination centers *religiously* and moved my appointments forward every time a slot opened up. I got lucky and snagged an appointment in time for the results to be processed and for my Visa to be approved before my flights.

Learn from my mistakes: do everything as early as possible. What helped me stay on top of things was creating a "send by [date] latest" guideline for each step, calculating

backwards from the day of my flights in the order that each step had to be done in (e.g. orientation←travel date←visa←coe←etc.). Plan in buffer time for each step! Even if things go wrong, it will usually be fixable, but you still want to avoid crisis situations if possible simply for your own peace of mind.

Health and Disability

On top of these application processes, I registered for ongoing support at UniMelb's Student Equity and Disability Services (SEDS). Beyond disabilities, SEDS helps organize support for many things that impact the shape of your studies, including religious/cultural practices. I applied for an academic adjustment plan because the Student Visa requires you book and complete a full course load, something I do not do at the FU as because of my ADHD.

I do not have a Nachteilsausgleich at the FU, but this had no effect on getting one at UniMelb! Similar to how it's recommended that you apply for Auslandsbafög even if you aren't eligible for normal Bafög, I highly recommend applying for an AAP if you suspect you'll need one and are eligible. I noticed very quickly that many of my strategies that work at home no longer helped in the new semester structure of Australia, especially without my normal support network. Even though my AAP was meant to only be a just-in-case safety net, I ended up needing it for every class I took. It's more work up front to set up, but I highly recommend it if you're worried about the academic side of things. My AAP allowed me to focus on academics to extent that I wanted to, while leaving enough time outside of uni to actually experience Australia.

Your AAP is made after discussing your needs with a disability support staff member. The adjustments you're granted are heavily based on what is written in your psychiatrist's/doctor's letter (part of your SEDS/AAP application), so try to make sure that everything relevant is already included there. However, if you end up remembering necessary accommodations too late to get them added to the letter / to your AAP, don't be afraid to bring them up in the SEDS meeting / get in touch with subject staff to discuss them, respectively. My professors were happy to accommodate requests beyond my AAP if I asked early enough. (Also, if you're not disabled but think you'd need certain accommodations—just ask! Professors at UniMelb tend to be incredibly friendly and accommodating, so don't be afraid to ask for help when you need it.)

Additionally, I had to organize my medication for the semester, because my medication is a controlled substance possibly everywhere on earth and requires a lot of paperwork for both leaving Germany and for entering other countries. This added lots of time and effort in terms of researching and acquiring the necessary paperwork (in English!!). Speak with your doctor/psychiatrist as early as possible to see if they will be able to

provide the required paperwork in English. Luckily, my psychiatrist had an assistant who was able to translate everything in-house (before my psychiatrist went on vacation! Another factor to keep in mind when planning for an exchange that starts in Berlin's summer).

I was allowed to enter Australia with three months of medication. For specific ADHD meds, to get more medication from Australian pharmacies you have to be diagnosed by, and get a prescription from, a specific type of *Australian* doctor. This is expensive, time consuming, and should not be attempted only weeks before your medication runs out and you plan to leave the city (learn from my mistakes!!!). If I could have done something differently, it would have been to discuss my prescription with my German psychiatrist so that we could have made three months cover six, or to have started the diagnostic process right when I arrived in Australia, instead of having to ration my medication right when I was finishing all of my final work for the semester because the diagnostic process would take longer than I still had in the city. (Learn!! from my mistakes!!!) Obviously, the details will be different depending on the medication, specific treatment plans, etc., but I'm explaining how it went for me to make it clear that this is something to start researching and preparing for from the start of organizing your semester abroad if it applies to you.

For travelling afterwards, some countries are stricter than others when it comes to medication! If you plan on visiting Singapore, for example, it's worth researching the requirements before leaving Berlin, so that you can bring all the necessary paperwork with you. Communicating with your doctor over the Berlin-Melbourne time difference can be time-consuming and difficult. Some countries (like Singapore) even require you to apply for permission from their health department *weeks* before entering the country with controlled medication. Things may be more or less strict when you actually arrive at customs, but it's worth having all the necessary paperwork prepared, because you don't know when you'll need it.

In terms of ongoing medical care such as therapy: you have to keep paying your German health insurance to stay matriculated at the FU, so there should be no issues with continuing treatment from your German doctors while abroad (e.g. via online calls).

Costs & Funding

Living in Australia is expensive, even more so after the heavy inflation that took place during Covid. There are many scholarships you can apply for, and other reports talk about successfully jobbing next to your studies to cover living costs! These are both great ways to finance your exchange, but if you're like me (already outside of

Regelstudienzeit/limited in your ability to study full time and work simultaneously) these options may not come into question. I was personally able to finance my studies by:

- saving up for a *while* by working in Berlin beforehand, where I did not have a full-time courseload requirement. (I was also very lucky in that I had savings from several years of birthdays, Christmases etc.)
- getting support from my parents
- applying for a PROMOS scholarship (highly highly recommend!!!!!!). Make sure you know the deadline and the requirements for PROMOS for your specific semester. It involves another letter of motivation among other things, but after writing one for the FU and after planning more of your exchange, it shouldn't be too difficult.

After the semester was over, I had to rely a lot on savings, since the scholarship from PROMOS ends around when classes end.

I also sublet my room in Berlin while I was gone, which meant that I was netto only paying rent in Australia instead of in two places.

There are plenty of options for saving money on flights to and from Australia: look around to see if airlines have student discounts and miles programs! Especially if you're tall, I recommend saving money that way rather than with budget airlines if you can. 6 hours in a Jetstar flight were more uncomfortable than 12 with Turkish Airlines, and depending on when you book, not even less expensive to make it worth it. (Also: if you don't know yet when and from where you're travelling back, it may be cheaper to not get a round trip, especially if you tend to procrastinate moving flights around. The fare difference when I finally changed my flights back to Germany was *pretty* hefty.)

In total, I spent up to 14000€ during my semester abroad and travelling afterwards, with around 9500€ dedicated to the actual semester (getting there, living expenses, things I bought/did during that time, etc.), and around 4000€ falling outside of the semester (travelling around Australia/New Zealand/Singapore, etc). I am by no means a gold standard of budgeting, and I definitely could have spent far, far less while abroad! However, I could have also spent far more (see: During→Accommodations below). YMMV, and your final expenditures depend on things that we probably don't have in common, but hopefully knowing what one person spent can help you get a vague overview of what to expect and plan for.

I used Wise in Australia and while travelling afterwards, which made it much easier to transfer money from my home account into AUD and the various other currencies I encountered. I was also able to pay rent and other living expenses that way.

During

Accommodations

One particularity about Australia is that rent is usually paid weekly. It is also *very expensive*. If you have the funds and the desire, there is plenty of student housing around UniMelb: International friends I made there that lived in student accommodations said it is definitely worth the money if you can afford it, because you can save on public transport costs and also have access to lots of communal areas like study rooms within your own building. However, I chose to live further away from campus, since rent was cheaper and I wanted to be closer to green areas!

I was able to stay with a friend when I first arrived in Melbourne, which helped make the weeks leading up to my trip less stressful, since I didn't have to look for a place yet. This *did* mean I was looking for a place after classes had started and while organizing extracurriculars, which was its own type of stress, but both methods work!

The house I ended up at was in Brunswick West, which has a great tram line directly going to uni and is generally a lovely neighborhood, especially if you're a quiet person like me. I still bought a bike second-hand early on from The Bike Shed, which helped a lot for grocery shopping (my neighborhood didn't have good budget supermarkets, so I biked to Moonee Ponds regularly for groceries and to visit the library). The woman I was renting a house from and living with was... intense, and as a result, living there was stressful. I chose to stay because I loved the neighborhood and my other housemate was cool, but because rent was paid week to week, finding a new place would have definitely been an option had I decided to look.

Melbourne has some fantastic biking/pedestrian paths built underneath their railways! For people who like walking and running, there's also lots of places to walk and run in the city, and there's water fountains absolutely everywhere. I lived right next to the Moonee Ponds Creek Trail and walked it practically every day after breakfast or when I needed a break from uni work during "finals" season. The Merri Creek Trail is also beautiful, and my housemate would regularly take the tram to the Royal Botanic Gardens for her walks.

Random tip about living somewhere completely new (and 8-10 hours away from your home time zone): if you're feeling ungrounded or like you haven't fully arrived yet, it can genuinely help to have a piece of random tableware that sparks joy and that you can use frequently. I only really felt like I'd arrived when I got a novelty mug that I could use for my morning coffee, and my housemate had a specific bowl that reminded her of home that she'd use for breakfast every day. A semester abroad can involve a lot of big emotions, so don't be afraid to use fun or silly strategies to deal with them!

Another thing for students going to Melbourne for the July-November semester: July is winter, and *surprisingly cold*. Melbourne is no Canada, but the insulation on a lot of houses is practically nonexistent, so you can really feel the cold even if it's "only" 10°C out. I don't recommend packing your heaviest winter coat, but a late-fall jacket, scarf and hat are definitely recommended.

The Semester Itself

Choosing my classes happened at some point early in/before the semester: You first have to supply a proposed study plan when applying for UniMelb all the way at the beginning of the process, because they need to be able to double check your evidence for fulfilling class prerequisites. I think officially you need approval for adding and dropping subjects even in the first two weeks, but I don't recall having any issues when I dropped a subject after getting into a preferred subject later than the others. (This could have something to do with prerequisites/lack thereof for specific classes). *The platform for all this is uncharacteristically difficult to navigate*, though. Unless they've overhauled it by the time you plan to study at UniMelb, plan in some time and patience for it, and don't be afraid of sending subject coordinators an email if things go wrong.

The semester at UniMelb is set up very differently to classes here (at least humanities classes). There are more readings, and every class had three graded projects/exams spread throughout the semester. The final project was due right at the end of classes, not during the semester break afterwards. You are required to take at least three subjects, and the recommended courseload is three to four subjects total. I struggled with three, but ultimately was able to adapt to it!

As a master's student, UniMelb's exchange program allowed me to attend post-graduate classes, which isn't the case for all of the Australian unis partnered with the FU. I am glad for the opportunity, because even though keeping up with exams/projects was difficult, the overall level expected of students felt lower than at the FU, so it balanced out. In addition, class discussions felt somewhat less advanced, but in return, the reading load was also much higher.

The structure of several smaller assignments allowed me to explore multiple areas of interest during the semester, and new assignment formats (like podcast interviews for *Writing and Editing for Digital Media*) pushed me out of my comfort zone in very productive ways!

Another bonus is that most classes and lectures are recorded! I was able to take part in a subject that had a lecture at the same time as another subject's class this way. I attended the mandatory-participation class and watched the lecture later! Some teachers also use automatic subtitles for the benefit of ESL students in the class, which can be really helpful when a prof has a strong accent or you have auditory processing issues.

Every exam came with extremely detailed grading rubrics, which can be a blessing and a curse. If you're also an anxious perfectionist like me: my advice is not to sweat it. In my experience, as long as you include all the elements mentioned in the "pass" and/or H3 columns of the rubric, you're already set for a decent grade. It's not worth trying to fulfil everything from the H1 column for every (or even any) assignment! Unless you plan to stay for the full extent of your Visa after classes end, you'll get more out of your semester abroad if you also dedicate time to uni clubs, the city, and the country, instead of just classes.

UniMelb's campus is beautiful, and there are many places to sit, eat and hang out! Unfortunately, there's no Mensa, and food on campus is no less expensive than food outside of it, so make sure to factor that into your food budget (or timeplan, if you like meal-prepping).

My favorite part of campus were the libraries. (Emotional support Baillieu Library, my beloved). They have lots of different comfortable seating options, and you can even eat and talk on the lower floors! This meant that upper floors were genuinely quiet almost all of the time. When I returned to the FU, the Baillieu was the thing I missed most.

Outside of Uni

Melbourne is a beautiful city, and one that honestly feels a lot like the Berlin of Australia, so I felt immediately at home there. There's a million things to do, and lots of great and sometimes even cheap food (I practically survived off of sushi hand rolls).

Melbourne is similar to the UK in that it has tons of secondhand stores, where you can find practically anything you could want/need for super cheap!

If you love public libraries, I highly recommend checking out the various libraries in Melbourne! There are lots of smaller groupings of 5-ish libraries per area, compared to

Berlin's VOEBB system. Many don't require you live in their specific area when you apply for a library card as long as you have proof of address in Melbourne—just as a tip if you need more Libby libraries for English books ;) This also allowed me to borrow and read lots of books specifically on Australian and especially Indigenous culture that I couldn't get from the VOEBB! One of my local libraries had a regular crafting circle that I found perfect for when I needed some time off to focus on artistic hobbies. (I was the youngest in the group by about 30 years, so if you're looking for crafting groups of people closer to your age, I'm pretty sure UniMelb has several! I just happened to like the commute to the library more).

After

After my studies were over, I used the chance to travel the region before returning home for the holidays. (Luckily my landlady let me leave the bulk of my luggage with her while I travelled). The student Visa extended beyond the semester until the end of January, so I could have stayed much longer than I did (and looking back, I almost wish I had). Melbourne and the surrounding area already has lots to offer, but together with a friend from home, I travelled to Queensland, Sydney, New Zealand, and Singapore as well! Queensland is beautiful and I highly recommend it—it's hotter than anything and very humid in the summer, so try to go as early as possible before it gets too hot. The Blue Mountains are an easy day trip from Sydney and I recommend them even if you're not a hiker!

If you get overwhelmed / need a place to just Focus Up and Work while in other Australian cities, I found that other uni libraries are just as lovely as those at UniMelb and are a great way to focus when the rest of your life is dedicated to everything *but* working! The UNSW Library especially was lovely and reminded me a lot of the Baillieu.

New Zealand is beautiful and well worth a visit if you're already on that side of the world. My friend and I roadtripped from the bottom of the South Island all the way to Auckland and it was fantastic. As a Lord of the Rings nerd, I had the time of my life there (if you can afford a Hobbiton tour with a meal, *do it*, it's so so so cool). My friend, who is not a LotR fan, did lots of horse riding tours instead! An unexpected but wholeheartedly enjoyed bonus: *Christmas celebrations in summer*. We happened to be in Auckland at the same time as their free open-air Christmas Event, and it was a delight, especially because it felt so incongruous when you're used to the holiday in the winter.

Singapore is expensive but also has incredible food that's super affordable. Lots of flight options between Berlin and Melbourne involve transferring to a new airline in

Singapore, so I was able to use my “layover” (of a full week) to explore—something I wholeheartedly recommend if your flights also take you through Singapore!

Conclusion

If it sounds like setting all of this up is too much to cope with: *don't be afraid*. There's a lot to keep track of, sure, but *even* when I messed up so badly I thought I'd never make it to Melbourne / be able to focus until the end of the semester / [insert any other panic-moments here], *it all turned out fine!!!* Some rules are concrete, some are more like guidelines, so be as prepared as you can be without driving yourself crazy. Also: most things can be solved by talking to someone in charge. Don't be afraid to reach out! And *make use of your support network*. I could never have done this exchange without help from my family and friends. This exchange changed my life and expanded my own conception of what I'm capable of, so even with all the stress, I wouldn't have had it any other way!



(The Rowden Library's massive teddy bear encouraging you to take it easy!)