

PROMOS Experience Report

The University of Sydney, Australia

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Fall Term (31st July – 25th November)

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Main Building of the University of Sydney

The University

General

The first thing that I thought when I saw the main building of the university was that I've finally been accepted to Hogwarts. I wouldn't have been surprised if Harry, Ron and Hermione came out of the main door, or if Professor Dumbledore was walking down the hallway. There is even a great hall, where the only difference from the one in Hogwarts are the missing candles floating in the air. During Orientation week, the official welcome event was held in the great hall, and I also wrote an exam in there, which made the normally not-so-desirable experience of writing an exam much more fun (at least for me as a Harry Potter fan).

However, my lectures were not held in almost-Hogwarts but in the Abercrombie Building, home of the Business school. Which was not that bad, considering that the building was very new, with lots of space to study, enough power sockets for everyone and all the technology you need in lecture rooms. Depending on what kind of unit of study you have, the lectures or seminars are held in traditional lecture theatres, seminar rooms, or learning studios, where the tables form groups and each group has their own big screen to work with. Almost every lecture is recorded, so you can listen to it (again) whenever you want. The only exception for me was my Agile Project Management class, which was very interactive and the lecturers decided not to record it. But even if there are recordings, I would always recommend going to the lectures, because there are a lot of exercises and activities which do not always get uploaded on Blackboard, the e-learning space of the university. Overall, I felt really comfortable at the university and I didn't mind spending time there to go to lectures, study on my own or meet with my groups for group projects. Group projects are another reason why you should attend the lectures (at least in the beginning): For each of my units, I had to complete a group project, and it is much easier getting to know people to form a group if you actually attend the lecture. Furthermore, over the course of the semester some lecturers offered one date where there was not a formal lecture but the groups could meet to work on their project and ask the lecturer if there are any questions. I also had very positive experiences with the reachability of the lecturers. Whenever I wrote an e-mail, I got a reply within the next day.



Abercrombie Building (Business School)

Activities

The University of Sydney offers a lot of activities. Of course, there was Orientation week. Next to more official events, where (very useful) general information about the university and life in Sydney were given, there was O-Day, where most of the University's societies had their booths where you could get information about and join the societies. There were also several barbecues over the course of the semester, a buddy program, and a farewell event, which included a farewell gift (Tim Tams and a little University-of-Sydney wombat – not a real one of course). I also joined the language exchange program, which is organised by the student union. I could put down several languages that I would like to learn or improve my knowledge of, and then I got assigned a "language buddy" who had one of my preferred languages as his mother language, and who wanted to learn German. It's a really nice way to meet new people and also to learn a (new) language.

Additionally, I joined the Bushwalking society. They are very organized, and offer bushwalking trips almost every week. You can sign up for the newsletter, receive information about all upcoming trips and sign up for them. It's also possible to borrow equipment.

Units of Study

I completed four units of study during my semester abroad, which is the usual study load for one semester. Each unit of study gives 6 credit points, which adds up to 24 credit points in total. As an exchange student, you are not allowed to take more units of study, and you can only do less if you get approval from your home university. The credit points "exchange rate" to Cologne credits is 1.25, and I am planning to use my Australian credit points for the supplementary section of my studies in Cologne, which count for 24 Cologne credit points.

1. INFS5001 Project Management

This was a study unit offering basic project management knowledge. 45% of the overall grade was determined by the final exam, 25% by the group assignment and 30% by the individual assignment. Both assignments consisted of two parts, one involving solving a case study, and one involving a practical exercise. For the lectures, we used the PMBOK (Process Management Body of Knowledge) book and had roughly one lecture for each knowledge area. We also gained practical knowledge with Microsoft Project (which we also had to use for the individual assignment) and a project simulation software, to familiarize ourselves with the interdependencies of several project parameters (this was required for the group assignment). During the lectures, the lecturer not only presented his slides, but in each lecture we had at least one, but most of the time several activities that we had to work on in groups and then present to the whole class, which helped with understanding the content of the class.

2. INFS6002 Strategic Information Systems Sourcing

This unit was concerned with every possible aspect of the (Out)Sourcing of Information Systems. Similar to the project management unit, the final grade consisted of a final exam (40%), a group assignment (25%) and an individual assignment (35%). For the group assignment, we also had to prepare a presentation which counted towards the grade. Both assignments required us to solve a case study using the knowledge we had gained in the lectures. Again, the lectures consisted of both slide presentations and group activities.

3. INFS6015 Business Process Management

This study unit was one of my favourite classes. We gained an overview of the Business Process Management Lifecycle and then acquired knowledge on each of the Lifecycle phases. In the end, we also got an introduction to Six Sigma, a different approach to Business Process Management. This unit consisted of a final exam (50%), a group assignment (25%) and two individual assignments (10% + 15%).

We spend a lot of time learning how to use Signavio to model and analyse processes, which lead to very hands-on knowledge about process discovery, analysis and re-design. We were also required to use Signavio for both the group assignment and one of the individual assignments. Just like both of the other units, we regularly performed group activities during the lectures.

4. INFS6032 Agile Project Management

This unit was organized very differently than the other units of studies. We did not have a final exam, but the final grade combined a group project (25%), learning journals (30%), in-class group activities (15%) and a final essay (30%). During the lectures, the lecturers (there were 3) did not always hold a presentation (and if they did, it was very short), but we mostly performed group activities. Before each lecture, they uploaded readings and links to videos that we should watch to prepare for the lecture, so that we could spend most of the time during the lectures practicing agile skills. Some of the activities in class were graded, and over the course of the semester we had to write 6 learning journals, describing what we learned and what insights we gained on the agile way of working in the last lecture. At the end of the semester, we had to write an essay about our overall learning experience and how our view on project management had changed. The group project had to be performed during most of the semester, we had to organise our work in several sprints, got assigned a product owner (one of the lecturers) and had meetings with her after each sprint. This project was very useful to actually experience agile project management over a longer period of time. Although at first the style of this unit was very different from what I was used to, this unit quickly became my favourite unit in Sydney.

Special Requirements

In order to study at the University of Sydney, it is necessary to prove sufficient skills in the English language. This can either be done by proving that a certain amount of tertiary studies have been performed in English, or by taking a test. I took the TOEFL iBT test and had to achieve an overall score of 85, while achieving a minimum of 17 points in the Reading, Listening and Speaking, and minimum of 19 points in the Writing section. The detailed requirements can be found here: <https://sydney.edu.au/study/admissions/apply/entry-requirements/english-language-requirements.html>.

Preparation

Application

I applied for the exchange program of the WiSo faculty via the WEX database of the ZiB Office. Before my application, I researched the course offerings of each of the universities that I had interest in studying at, and I found that the University of Sydney has a broad offer on Information Systems modules that I could use to deepen my knowledge in knowledge areas that I have a specific interest in, and which were not offered in Cologne. Thus, I applied for the University of Sydney as my first choice and was accepted. The application deadline is in the end of November, and I got accepted in mid-February.

For the application, I needed to hand in a motivation letter stating why I wanted to go to Sydney, a CV as well as proof of language skills as personal information, professional information including previous work information, awards and activities and Study Details, consisting of my bachelor degree and the confirmation of enrolment for my current master studies.

After I received the notification of acceptance from the University of Cologne, I had to wait for the University of Sydney to receive my application. In March, I got information from Sydney on the further application process. I had to hand in (online) a translation of my bachelor degree (approved by the ZiB Office), an overview on my current grades of my master studies, a copy of my passport and proof of

my English skills (my TOEFL results). After this, the University formally accepted me, and I received a certificate of enrolment (April). I then got access to my online student account and was able to view the current offer of units of studies. I was able to confirm the eligibility of the units that I wanted to take with the ZiB Office, in order to make sure that I could use them after the semester to get credits for my Cologne studies. The choice of units of studies happened before the semester started, and after the deadline I already got my personalised timetable. However, during the first weeks of the semester, it is still possible to change units.

PROMOS

Because living costs in Australia are quite expensive, I started to look for financing options and quickly found the PROMOS scholarship. I decided to apply, and luckily was accepted. The scholarship covered the costs of my flight completely and gave a little bit towards my rent.

Visa

I applied for my student visa in May, after my application process was completed, on the website of the Australian Embassy, and had to include a CV, my Certificate of Enrolment for the University of Sydney, my Bachelor degree and my certificate for the health insurance in Australia next to filling out a form. I received the acceptance and the visa not even one day after my application. The student visa is valid for one month longer than the end-of-semester date stated on the Certificate of Enrolment.

Student Health Insurance

The University of Sydney offers the possibility to buy Student Health Insurance from the Allianz Group during the registration process. It is also possible to look for Health insurance on your own, but because the University organized the recommended insurance, and other health insurances need to fulfil certain requirements, I decided to go with the university option. I got a temporary insurance certificate per mail, and after I arrived in Sydney I could fill in my Australian address and my insurance card was sent to me by post. I never needed to go to a physician, but there is an app for the insurance where it is possible to look up physicians.

Getting there

I booked my flight to Sydney in the end of May, but I would recommend to do this earlier in order to get more and cheaper options. I decided to book both my flight to Australia and my flight back together, since this was the cheapest option. I went to the STA travel agency to book my flight, which was comfortable. I also decided to book my flight back not from Sydney but from Melbourne, since I wanted to travel after my exams and did not want to have to go back to Sydney for my flight back home, which I did not regret.

Accommodation

The University of Sydney has several on-campus accommodation possibilities, as well as partnerships with external accommodation providers. As an exchange student, I got offered the possibility to sign up for guaranteed accommodation before I arrived in Sydney, which I did and which I would recommend. Student accommodation might be a little bit more expensive than some apartments you can find on your own, but the location of my accommodation was very good, and I did not have to worry about finding accommodation after I arrived in Sydney.

Life in Australia

Living in Sydney

Australia in general and Sydney specifically is very expensive. For rent, I paid weekly almost as much as I pay in Cologne monthly. Food is also more expensive (Aldi is the cheapest grocery store, but the

offer is not as good as in Germany), especially if you want to eat out. Clothes are roughly the same as in Germany, but drugstore items like shampoo are ridiculously expensive, but it's also possible to make a bargain. Kmart usually has cheaper options than the pharmacies, but they change their offer very often, so you always need a little bit of luck to find what you need. Kmart is also the cheapest options to buy everything else you might need (except food).

For transportation, there is the OPAL card. It's a pre-paid card that you need to top up before you travel. Topping up is possible at a lot of stores, but also with an app, which is the most convenient way. As an exchange student, I was eligible for a concession card, which meant a 50% reduction on all transportation fares. Additionally, for everyone, on Sundays you can use buses, trains and ferries as much as you want to for only \$2,60.

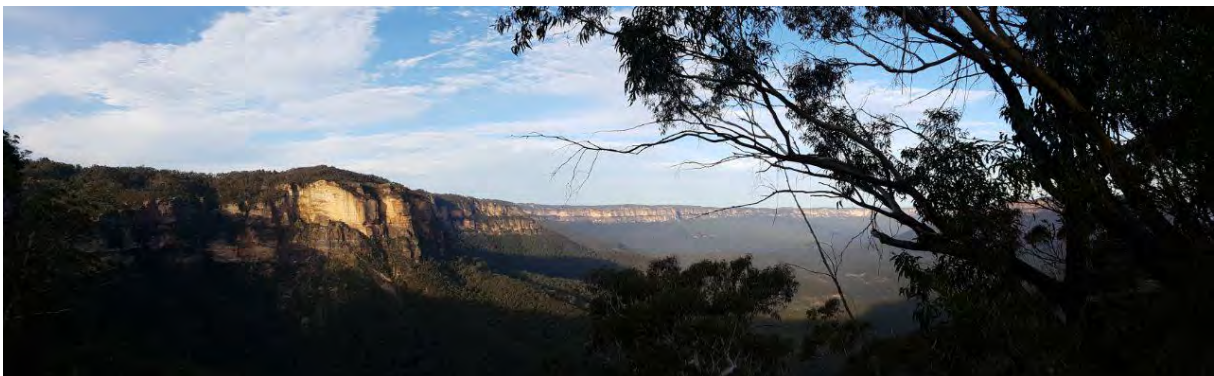
Concerning SIM cards, there are a lot of options, and I ended up buying an Aldi mobile SIM card. You can buy credit for the "pay as you go" option and then buy monthly plans from that, I hardly ever called anyone, which is why I only chose a data plan for \$15 a month.

As a tourist, you won't be able to ignore Vegemite and Tim Tams. I'm not a big fan of both. When I arrived in Sydney, I was really determined to love Vegemite, bought it, tried it a few times and threw it away because it really does not taste good. Tim Tams are better, but you need to eat it the Australian way: Bite off two edges, drink milk through the cookie and then eat the cookie – much better than eating it "dry".

Around Sydney there are several beaches, with Bondi Beach being by far the most popular one. However, although the coastal walk from Bondi to Coogee is really nice, I prefer Manly Beach. You need to take the ferry to get to Manly (which is also fun, although expensive, which is why the most popular day to go is on Sundays), but then the beach is a little nicer and a little less crowded than Bondi. You can also walk to Shelly Beach and from there around the headland, where there are some amazing lookouts. I also really liked the Northern Beaches, especially Palm Beach.

The Sydney Opera offers tours through the opera, but I actually went to two concerts and preferred this experience over the tour. The Harbour Bridge, Sydney's second most popular attraction, can be climbed, but the BridgeWalk is very expensive, and I chose to just walk over the bridge – for free.

Other destinations for day trips from Sydney are the Blue Mountains (this involves a lot of climbing and paths without railings, so take appropriate shoes) which are really beautiful and offer amazing views, and the Royal National Park, which has a beautiful coastal walk.



Blue Mountains National Park



Manly



Bondi Beach



Harbour Bridge by Night

Traveling in Australia

During my semester abroad, I tried to use all the spare time I had to see as much as possible from Australia. I was lucky with my timetable at university and had Mondays and Fridays off, which meant that I could leave Sydney for long weekends. One weekend trip was to Port Stephens: This is still inside the OPAL range, which means getting there is quite cheap, and the peninsula is really beautiful. Canberra, the capital, was my chosen destination for another weekend trip since it is also only a few hours away (Murrays is cheaper and faster than Greyhound), but it wasn't my favourite destination in Australia.

When traveling around Australia, it's easy to underestimate the distances. Most journeys require a plane if you don't want to spend a day in a bus. However, there are cheap airlines (I was quite content with Tigerair and Jetstar) which connect all the most important cities. To look for flights I always used Google Flights. Traveling up the east coast step by step is best done by bus. Premier is cheaper than Greyhound, but I preferred Greyhound because they have more services a day. Traveling in the Greyhound busses was comfortable, I had always access to USB chargers and on-board Wi-Fi.

Spring break (or study vacation week, as it is officially called) is an opportunity for all the international students to travel. During spring break, I rented a car with a friend to travel part of the east coast, which was okay, but only pays off if there are several people sharing the costs – don't forget to calculate the insurance costs. Of course, you gain the flexibility that you don't have with the bus. However, buses stop at almost every little town, and when I used it to travel the rest of the east coast after my exams, I was very happy with that.

Exams finish at the end of November, which gave me almost four weeks of traveling before I went home for Christmas. It is definitely not possible to see everything there is to see in Australia in one semester, but I would recommend taking your time to really enjoy the places you see, instead of rushing to see as much as possible. Taking your time also means the possibility to see more animals: I saw wild kangaroos, koalas, echidnas, emus, penguins, lizards and goannas and of course lots of colourful birds.

Not everything is possible to do on your one: I booked several day tours to do Whalewatching, visit the Whitsunday Islands, The Great Barrier Reef, The Daintree Rainforest north of Cairns, Kangaroo Island close to Adelaide and Phillip Island near Melbourne. I can really recommend asking other backpackers or reading online in forums which tour operators are recommended, and in general I would look for smaller tours because they tend to be more personalized and informative. And I definitely recommend diving at the Great Barrier Reef! There are also tours that go on for two or more days, which I did and really enjoyed on Fraser Island and to see the Great Ocean Road. They are good, because you don't have to worry about transportation and food, and the tour guides are usually really nice, but of course you can't decide on your itinerary yourself. I tried to find a balance during my travels between tours and exploring Australia by myself.



Sunset in Gold Coast



Canberra



Riverfire in Brisbane



Wild Koala on Magnetic Island

What I think about Australia – Conclusion

I definitely enjoyed my semester abroad in Sydney. I liked the university, was really happy with my units of studies and cannot complain about the support I received from my study abroad adviser and the student centre in Sydney. Aussies (Australians) are extremely nice, so whenever I needed help in Sydney or anywhere in Australia, there is always someone willing to help. Australia itself is a beautiful country, with lots of great sceneries, beaches, national parks and exotic animals just waiting to be discovered. If I had to choose again, I would definitely always choose the University of Sydney for my semester abroad.

Sandra Klein

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Köln, 10.01.2018