

Fall Semester 2010/11

Stefanie Matzer
smatzer@edu.uni-klu.ac.at

Final report on my exchange semester at



I have had the honour to spend an exchange semester studying in Hobart, Australia, at the University of Tasmania (UTAS). During this time I have not only gained academic knowledge and improved my English, I also got to know many interesting people from all over the world and I got to know myself a little better. I am very grateful that I was given the chance to spend such an amazing time here at the other side of the planet and I would not trade this experience for anything.

In this final report on my semester abroad I am going to write about my pre-Tasmania time, about my preparations for going on exchange and about various aspects of my life and studies in Hobart.

Preparations

I have never been that kind of person that plans everything in detail, thus I restricted my pre-organisation for my semester abroad to the very essentials. As soon as I had received my Confirmation of Enrolment (CoE) I applied for a visa to Australia, which I received only a few hours after I had made my online application. All I did then was booking a flight and reserving a hostel for the first week in Hobart, since I decided to look for private accommodation instead of living in one of the student halls (for both financial matters and location).

Of course I also tried to familiarise myself with the academic procedures and the organisation at UTAS, so that I would not be completely lost at my arrival. I have to say that the exchange student from Tasmania that was in Austria by then was of great help to me when it comes to that, even though, UTAS is very well organised (also online) and I think no one needs to worry when it comes to this at all.

Arrival and the first weeks

As mentioned, UTAS is very well organised, especially their service for international students is, in my opinion, exceptional. When I finally arrived in Hobart (a bit early since I had to spontaneously rearrange my flight from Melbourne due to airline problems) there was already someone waiting at the airport to pick me and some other students up and to take us to our accommodation – a free pick-up service provided by the international office of UTAS. On the bus to our temporary homes we were already given information about the orientation week that was held for all international students and we even got a little snack-pack to survive the first day(s) in Hobart. This orientation week was basically meant to help all students coming from foreign countries to find their way around the campus and the e-campus, to give us a chance to manage and rearrange our enrolments into our units and to get to know each other and make some initial social contacts.

I immediately got to know other exchange students and that also made it easier to find my way

around. It was also through them that I found a place to live, after checking out various rooms that were advertised on the notice boards at the University. I ended up living with four other students (both local and international) in a shared house in Battery Point, the lovely historical part of Hobart.

My Units: Enrolment and more

As every exchange student I had to choose the units that I wanted to do at UTAS prior to my arrival, but it was not before the orientation week that we really found out whether we were accepted into all our units of our choice. This means that we were all given time to mix and match and choose new units during the first week(s) of university.

I was lucky, I got finally accepted into all the units I wanted to do, even though I was on the waiting list for one of them (Photography).

Since I heard that the School of (Fine) Arts in Hobart is supposed to be very good (and in an incredible old building at the harbour that used to be a jam factory) I decided to balance my timetable, doing two academic units dealing with (Australian) Indigenous people at the Riawunna centre and two fine arts units at the School of Arts. I attended following units during my exchange semester

FSH 111 Photography I

This Unit was meant to introduce students of fine arts to the technical basics of (digital) photography and also to give a general overview over different artists and genres of photography throughout history. Since English is my second language, the unit also helped me to improve my vocabulary when it comes to discussing aspects of photographic art.

At first I was on the waiting list for Photography I, but being persistent, and thanks to the lovely people doing the organisation at the School of Arts, I was finally admitted to the unit. In this class we were supposed to submit three different assignments, with subject matter and techniques,



Working in the photo studio

present our work, listen to the online-lectures and document our development throughout the semester. I had never done fine arts units before, thus everything was quite new to me, but I quickly got into it. I was really fascinated by all the equipment the students were allowed to use for free and whenever they liked, such as the lighting studio or dark-rooms. Generally, the unit great fun, well taught, and I think I learned a lot.

FSD 156 Introduction to Drawing

Introduction to Drawing was designed to give students of various backgrounds the chance to learn how to express themselves through drawing, to enhance student's vocabulary when it comes to this sort of visual arts, and to learn about and experiment with technique and material. I really enjoyed this unit since I finally got to do some hands-on art again, which I had not done for a long time. The teacher tried to motivate and also push us a little, which I really needed to be productive. I was really impressed by the improvement in my drawing throughout the semester and also learned to express myself verbally much better, in general and when it comes to art jargon.

HAB 211 Van Diemen's Land: Contested History- Contested Place

This unit surveyed about 40.000 years of Indigenous Tasmanian history. Dealing with this topic we

were to read, compare, discuss and critique various texts (academic papers by different historians and primary sources from archives) and could experience ourselves how contested Indigenous Tasmanian history is. Even though I was quite overwhelmed by how comprehensive this unit was at the beginning, and even though I had to read myself into general Tasmanian history (and geography) in order to understand many things before actually dealing with the topic, I have to admit, I learned a lot. This unit was definitely something worth coming to Tasmania for, since I doubt that something equivalent is offered at any other University.

HAB210 Indigenous Tourism

On a broad scale, this unit dealt with the involvement of Indigenous people in (cultural) tourism. We read on and discussed various aspects of Indigenous tourism, including marketing, the roles of the Indigenous people in tourist ventures, the discussion about authenticity, et cetera; all on examples from various Indigenous cultures from all over the world – to give it a global perspective. Finally we also had to be active ourselves and create a mock-homepage for a place where Indigenous people are part of the tourist experience, and present and explain it to our class. I really appreciated the creative teaching methods in this unit, and since our class was very small we could really all engage in intensive discussions.

What I did also very much appreciate was the fact that the Riawunna centre also offered activities outside the classroom, like talks by and with Aboriginal people.

Since I am also doing a training to become a teacher of German as a foreign/second language at the University of Klagenfurt I also attended German classes at UTAS to see how German is being taught in the context of a foreign institution of higher Education. Here I could not only observe various teaching methods, but also learn a lot about my own language and culture.

Generally, I have to say, I did not expect that doing four units at university could be that time consumptive, but due to the way they are organised at UTAS (tutorials and practicals with compulsory attendance, combined with lectures) this is just the right work load for a full time student.

Financial matters

Thanks to the global financial crisis the exchange rate made my exchange semester in Australia quite an expensive adventure. However, I think every cent was worth it. I have to confess that I did lose the overview over my expenses half way through the semester, since I decided that living on the lowest possible budget would not affect my exchange experience in a positive way at all. Here a raw estimate of the costs of my exchange semester (for 4,5 months) and an overview over my incomes, excluding personal needs (like medical expenses etc.) * :

Expanses	
Flights	€1365
Visa	€410
Health Insurance (compulsory)	€200
Accommodation (privately rented shared house, 20 m ²)	€1970
Cost of living (food, phone, sports, etc.)	€2500
Books/readers, arts equipment, university expenses	€200

* All prices are calculated with an average exchange rate of 1\$ = 0,77€

Travelling (during semester)	€350
Incomes	
Joint-Study scholarship	1.710,00 €
Kinderbeihilfe (parental support; 4.5 months)	900,00 €
Auslandsstudienbeihilfe des Landes Stmk. (scholarship from Styrian Government; approved after semester)	435,00 €
Personal savings and support by parents	

Living in Hobart and Tasmania

In my time in Hobart I really got to love this little town, with its about 300.000 inhabitants. Even though one might not expect this place to be very exciting, there was hardly any day (or night) that I did not have anything to do. There are numerous Art Galleries and Museums spread in and around the town (with the especially amazing MONA!), I joined various sports clubs at the university (most amazing: the white water rafting club – only fifty dollars and free rafting for ever!), the beach is the place to be in summer, and there are bands playing in various bars many nights a week. I also got me a job to fill my weekends. I worked at an organic food stand at the famous Salamanca Market on Saturdays, which – since I got paid in food instead of cash – also filled my fridge and belly.

Since living in a town for ever is, of course, not satisfying for outdoor people like me, I did also do many trips to various parts of the Tasmanian island. I usually rented cars and campervans with fellow students and we went on longer trips or I went to do some surfing and kayaking with some locals on Bruny Island, a lovely place only an hour south of Hobart.



Amazing: Wineglass Bay, Eastcoast

Post-exchange time

I decided to stay a bit longer in Australia to travel and experience as much as I could. So after finishing my exams I went off with some international friends from uni, and partly on my own, to explore mainland Australia – because, who knows whether I will ever have the chance to do this ever again.

Conclusion

I could go on forever writing about my semester in Tasmania, but *I reckon* I have to come to a point, eventually. So to sum up, I did really enjoy my exchange semester in Australia, I have had the time of my life, and I have met so many people from all over the world, made friends for life and gained knowledge in an academic and non-academic sense.