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**University of New England 2010 – Armidale/Australia**

### **Final Report of Exchange Semester**

In June 2010 I started my exchange semester in Australia which was one of the greatest and most exciting experiences of my whole life. Now when I look back, after seven months in Australia I have to say most of it turned out totally different than expected. But I would not like to miss any moment of it with all its ups and downs. Perhaps one reason why my experience turned out to be so different from my expectations was because of the great difference between the Australian- and our European-lifestyle. With this report I want to give students an idea about how it is to study in Australia and especially at the University of New England.

#### **Preparation**

Preparation should be one of the major key words in the idea of doing an exchange program. Because everything which has been taken care of in advance is one thing less to worry about after arriving.

My preparation started with the application for an exchange program at my home-university, which took a CV and a letter of motivation. This turned out to be quite simple. After my nomination the real work started, from this point on I was in daily contact with the UNE (University of New England) about the application in Australia. It took a while to get everything done because it takes approx. 24 hours to get a single answer from university in Australia. All together it took me about two weeks to get everything done including the college.

The application for a college was quite simple. There is only one general apply system which is reachable online through the university webpage. Although it is only possible to give preferences for different colleges (because there are a lot), it is no problem at all to switch if you wanted to. In fact I switched only a couple of days before I went to Australia because of some bad reputation about the college I should have stayed in.

A next step was to apply for a student visa, which I did in person at the Australian embassy in Vienna (the homepage provides also a possibility to apply online). First the application looked a little bit difficult to do because of all the required documents. But it turned out that they were only interested in the confirmation of enrolment, the application-fee, passport and a photo, which made in the end quite simple. My recommendation: It is simpler to do a call and ask a real person than do a research through the webpage which provide information for every possible case.

Now if I think about it, I think I should have spend more time in preparation about details for Australia. Because after I arrived in Armidale I realized I had no cell phone, no bank account, etc. It would have saved much time and especially much money to do a little bit more preparation in advance.

### **The journey and the first days**

The flight, which I booked about half a year in advance, was quite comfortable. Additional to the normal economy ticket I book an emergency rough seat which was real worthwhile. My whole journey to my exactly 30 hours which sounds quite a lot and I can tell it is. Then I arrived in Armidale one of the employees of the international office from university was already waiting for me and another girl from Germany. We got a little tour through town and campus and then have been dropped off at our college. At college there was already somebody waiting to show us our rooms so that we could have a little rest.

After a short nape we made trip into town to get our first supply. During this trip we also meet our first new friends at college which I invited to have a drink at college later on. This turned out to be great because surprisingly a whole group of people showed up to welcome us and to help us with all sort of stuff. One of them also gave me a more detailed tour through town and helped me a lot of useful information and the final application-procedure at uni.

Although it took like two to three weeks until I was finally settled with everything I consider myself lucky because as I heard later on, the girl which I arrived with had to change the college because she could not get in a good contact with their flat-mates.

After two weeks the university started as well and that was something which made me a little bit nervous because as you can imagine I had no idea how it would be like or my teacher would be. But I found out quite fast that all teacher are very friendly especially if you are an exchange and for special assistance we were always able to go to our first year adviser which become a real good friend of mine during my time at university.

### **College and University**

As I mentioned before there a lot of colleges and in the beginning it was a little bit hard for me to decide which one to go to. But I took the advice from a couple of people form Armidale which I contacted via Facebook, which was a great idea because I think could not have chosen a better one. The college is called Wright Village and is, besides it is the cheapest one, also one of the most liberal one with a lot of international students. It was easy to get into contact with people because instead of one great building with dining hall, different floors and so on it has several small apartments which you share with four to eight people.

In these flats you have your own room with a desk, bed, cupboard, etc. In the flat itself you share a kitchen and a bathroom, which is quite different from what I knew from my college

in Klagenfurt but after a while I was totally fine with this. In room as well as in the common room you have internet access which is quite fast and provides you with enough data-volume to make enough phone calls back home. Normally you also find a TV and some kind of entertainment in the common room but this varies from flat to flat and your pre users and what they left in there.

The university itself was located about 15 minutes away from the Wright Village up on a hill. This can be quite a hard walk at the beginning but after a while it is a good workout and you get used to it. One good with about the hike which you have to do every time when you want to go to class is that you have to pass the kangaroo enclosure which I think is quite amazing for international students at the first place. But one interesting fact about campus is that you can also meet wild kangaroos which are jumping around the hill.

The whole campus is located around the hill and is huge in comparison to Klagenfurt and it is a little bit confusion if you want to make a look around through campus because this is quite a walk and you can get lost quite easy. Fortunately, the business building is close located to the main area of the university with the library, supermarket, post office and cafe. This main area provides also the social meeting point for all students and is a really nice spot to hang around, meet people or have lunch.

The whole campus is covered with a WIFI system which is accessible for free and printers are located in both of the two libraries. Unfortunately, it is only able to send print jobs from the university computers. Normally you have to pay for these printouts via your student-card. But there are also some hidden places in the university there you can print out for free, which can save a lot of money.

### **To live in Armidale**

Armidale is a really sweet little place between Sydney and Brisbane and approx. three hours away from the coast. It is quite quiet place which was at the beginning very different for me and it took a while until I understood this different kind of lifestyle which students have there. Armidale itself is at least famous for a couple of really good boarding-schools and the UNE which leads to the fact that there is not much besides this.

But this should not mean that you cannot have fun in Armidale, it is just different if I think about Klagenfurt with all its cafes, bar, restaurants and things to do. In Armidale the social life of students is provided by its college which is their home and kind of their family. Therefore it is very important to get into contact with as many people from your college as soon as possible. In fact I also experienced a very bad case with a few other students who unfortunately missed their chance to meet people at the beginning of the semester and then have never got some real friends around university and college, which was very sad.

The town itself is located approx. 30 minutes away from campus by foot and approx. 5-10 minutes by bus. If you would like to go by bus you should be aware that the timetable of the buses are quite bad. During some times of the day there is only one bus per hour, which can be a hassle. Although it is a quite small town it still provides some kind of free time entertainment. It is just a little bit more hidden than e.g. in Klagenfurt. There are a couple main pubs which are each supporting a different college and so have special conditions for the supported college. But it is no problem to go to any other pub beside your related one and this gives you the opportunity to go to various pubs during the whole week. During the daytime it is mostly about sports. This is a general fact which I experienced during my time in Down Under that in Australia for most people is everything about sports. It does not matter if it is about soccer, rugby, touchfootball, basketball, netball, cricket or anything else. Besides sport there is a small cinema if you are interested in movies and once or twice per semester there is the great horse race in Armidale. Which was really surprising for me that even such a small town in Australia has its own horse-race-place and for that was the first time ever that I went to a horse-race.

### **General impression of Australia**

Australia is in a way different that I would have never imagined. Perhaps it is just the fact that I knew so little about it and its culture. Although in the beginning it was a kind of a cultural shock for me it still was the greatest fun to discover such an amazing country. I guess it was especially the exchange program which gave me the chance to discover it. Because as a normal tourist you hardly could learn so much about this culture than in an exchange program. It gives you the opportunity to see behind what is reachable as a tourist. As a tourist you probably see more sights than most of the Australian see in their whole life but it is hard to get an impression about real Australia. Besides doing all the great things to like for example: scuba diving at the Great Barrier Reef, sailing at the Whitsunday Island, explore the unlimited distance of the bush, walk around the Uluru or watch the New Year's Eve fireworks from the Royal Botanic Gardens in Sydney it is hard to explore typical daily Australian-life. An Australia where the family is one of the most valuable goods of all, where people would meet in their private home for a barbie or a cup of tea rather they would meet in a bar and I guess this ability is also what makes Australian so friendly to visitors. Wherever you go they are delighted to show you about Australia if they see you are interested in.

At this point I also would like to take chance and say one more time thank you to my Australian family which I met at college and which adopted me and always tried to give me an idea what it means to be Australian so that I am now really able to say: "I came from a land Down Under!"

Thank you for everything!