Exchange report – Australia, autumn 2015/spring 2016, Alba Arteaga Claramunt

**Basic information**
The University of Western Australia (UWA). Perth, Australia. Autumn 15/spring 16. One academic year.
I took two units at the School of Animal Biology. One considered undergraduate level and one postgraduate level.

**Perth**
Perth is the capital of Western Australia. It is known by the most isolated city in the world, and indeed distances are very large in this country/continent. The nearest city of over 1 million (or 500,000) to Perth is Adelaide, which is 2,104 km away.
Perth is the most sunniest capital city in the world, which is reflected in the lifestyle of Perth’s people. They love hanging out with friends in parks, do BBQ (barbies as they called them), and outdoor sports. Australians are very friendly, kind and helpful. They are happy people as they are most of the time smiling and joking.
The city is beautiful. It’s surrounded by an estuary and there are many parks as well as natural parks where one can see the incredible wildlife.
Public transport is quite good, however, the city has a good infrastructure for bikes. I used my bike to get to all places without a problem, it’s easy and safe, and the views are spectacular.
Western Australia has some of the most beautiful beaches in the world, so totally worth it to visit them, enjoy the sunshine (although you need protection as UV radiation is very high) and try some surfing lessons. The UWA runs some courses for students who want to start surfing as well as other sports for an affordable price.

**University of Western Australia**
The University of Western Australia is in the top universities of Australia. It has a good reputation within the country and worldwide, although in my opinion it’s not as good as Lund University in terms of education.
I decided to go to this university as they have very good courses in Wildlife Conservation, in fact south western Australia is a hot spot in biodiversity and thus, a lot of research going on in this area. The student life is quite good, but Lund has many more things for international students that are in most cases free.
Teachers at UWA were very friendly and interested in knowing more about international students, I felt welcome there.

**Arrival**
I arrived during the introduction week. However, I missed out some of the activities as I did not have a place to live so I was looking for a room most of the time. But I had a very good time in the trips I participated, specially the aquarium and the visit to the Swam Valley, a beautiful place famous by its good wine and chocolate. I totally recommend to arrive during this week due to you meet many international students that will become your friends throughout your whole exchange.
Courses

General

In Australia there is a lot of flexibility in terms of choosing the minors. For example, some students study different bachelors as long as they take the mandatory majors, but then they can mix different backgrounds as history and natural science for example.

A full time student has to be enrolled in 48 credit points per year (24 each semester). Each unit is normally worth six points. The type of assessment varies among units and faculties but in general all of them involve practical assignments and exams.

Course/s

I took two units, one was undergrad level “Wildlife Conservation and Management”. This unit was run by different teachers, but the coordinator of this unit was Harriet Mills who was very good. The unit was based on assignments, reports, debates, trips and a final exam. The level was not very difficult.

The other one was for postgrads and it was very practical, “The Conduct, Ethics and Communication Science” taught by Roberta Bencini, one of my project supervisor and an incredible engaging teacher. It was focused on research like how to give presentations, create good power points, how to write papers, how to do good research, etc. I didn’t have an exam in this one but a lot of practical assignments. I enjoy very much this unit. Each of them had 6 credit point.

In addition to that I carried out my final master project. This project was a collaboration between UWA and Perth Zoo. It was the most amazing experience in terms of research that I have done so far. I learnt a lot and I made very good contacts for the future. This research worth a total of 36 credit points.

Accommodation

UWA has five residential colleges: St Catherine's College, St George's College, St Thomas More College, Trinity and University Hall. They are very expensive so I decided to find something else by myself. There is a very useful website called gumtree to find accommodation. I found a small flat in South Perth, a very nice area, to share with a New Zealand girl for about 160 Australian dollars per week. I was very lucky as this price was quite cheap for being Perth. Normal rent ranges from 150 to 200 dollars per week.

It took me around two weeks to find an affordable place to live in. I will recommend to book a hostel for the first week and start visiting flats or houses, please do not pay anything in advance without seeing it before!

There is a facebook group called Perth share accommodation where people post houses/rooms available.

Leisure/spare time

Since Perth is a very expensive city I had to work part time to afford my rent plus food and other expenses. I worked as a waitress. It is relatively easy to find a job and they pay very well, around 20 dollars per hour or even more.

During my spare time I used to go out with my friends to parks or cafeterias.
Costs
I would say similar to Sweden or a bit more expensive in terms of food. There is a very good place to do your shopping called Spudshed and Subiaco Gold Market with low prices.

Other
Application for the student visa is very simple and easy. As I said before, if you do not have a place to live it's better to book a hostel and start searching once you are in Perth. Never pay something in advance without seeing the room, it's good to visit the place and see if you like it as well as your future housemates. Consider the area as well, and think if it's well connected with public transport to get to uni.

There are a couple of breaks during the semester so go traveling! There are so many amazing places in WA. I would highly recommend Karijini National Park, Margaret River, Coral Bay, Exmouth and Pemberton. Camping is cheap and good fun. Do not forget to visit National Parks to see the most strange and incredible animals in the world!

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