Exchange report – Tasmania, Australia, autumn 2017, Michaela Kupkova

Basic information

University of Tasmania, Hobart, autumn semester 2017 (semester 2); Master program in Physical Geography and Ecosystem Analysis at Lund University

Hobart

University of Tasmania is situated in Hobart, the capital of Tasmania. This beautiful harbor city is bigger than Lund but still you can feel a student atmosphere. Although I was surrounded mostly by other exchange students from all over the world, Australians are very friendly people. The whole area of the city is very hilly so it is not that easy to bike here as it is in Lund. However, the city center is in the walking distance from the university and student accommodation or one can use a public transport or Uber, which is quite popular nowadays.

University of Tasmania (UTAS)

UTAS is situated mainly in Hobart, although some units (courses) are based in Launceston. The university offers a range of very interesting and unique courses and similarly to Lund, a lot of international students come here for studies. The educational system is a bit different though. To be enrolled as a full-time student, I had to take 4 simultaneous courses to be equal to two courses per semester at Lund University.

Arrival

After landing at the Hobart airport, I was picked up by some UTAS students and driven to the accommodation which was really helpful. However, it is necessary to book the shuttle in advance. There is an orientation week during which many important lectures are held to provide new students with important information about the life in Tassie and the university. But luckily it is not only about lectures but some fun as well. A number of local trips are organized by UTASlife Hobart for free, e.g. Mt. Wellington tour or a visit to Bonorong Wildlife Sanctuary. That is a great opportunity to meet other exchange students.

Courses

One of the reasons I have chosen UTAS for my exchange studies was the choice of courses that are quite unique. Thanks to its proximity to Antarctica, there is a wide range of courses in Antarctic science. At Lund University we are more focused on the Arctic so I found it very interesting to see the things from the other hemisphere. I took courses at the bachelor level since some were not really in my field of expertise.
Antarctic Ecology course gave me an overview of different mammals and birds of the Southern Ocean and insight what kind of research is done in that region. Although a very interesting course, I expected more hands-on experience.

Marine Geosciences course offered me an insight into geological processes within the Earth. A lot of practical tasks also in geophysics were included in the course, as well as an excursion and a field trip.

Biodiversity Conservation and Environmental Management units were more related to my major in Lund. They provided me with very interesting view on the local problems related to Australian flora and fauna. A large group project was carried out within Environmental Management which gave us an opportunity to work on a project of our choice and experience some real-life issues. Within the project we had a great field trip.

**Accommodation**

I got a place at University apartments. There you share a flat with other five people. It provides a bit calmer atmosphere than in the colleges. Nevertheless, student accommodation in Hobart is very expensive and moreover, I had to buy some basic stuff like a pillow and a duvet. Internet connection is also paid separately. But of course, there are other accommodation options which can be found e.g. through Gumtree. A lot of people stay in a hostel before they find a suitable accommodation.

If you decide to stay at the uni accommodation and you are lucky to get a spot, be prepared for a bit of hiking every day. Although the colleges and apartments are very close the university, they are situated on a big hill. I found this very nice since it is a really good exercise.

**Spare time**

Tasmania is such an amazing place. The local fauna and flora is completely different from what we are used to and I absolutely love it. Since I love nature and hiking, I joined a bushwalking club which organize one or more bushwalks almost every weekend and gives you the opportunity to get to know the place. There are also other clubs you can join, e.g. scuba diving, white water rafting and others.

Tassie is never boring and while driving through the state, the surrounding is changing all the time. There are some must-to-see places like Wineglass Bay or Bay of Fires on the east coast, Bruny island, Maria island which is home to so many wombats, or the Cradle Mountain. These can be just weekend trips or you can travel even more during mid-semester break. South-west of Tasmania is a pure wilderness and great place to visit for experienced hikers.

Tassie offers some great free camping. It is also an opportunity to meet local wildlife, like wombats, echidnas, parrots and especially wallabies. These little guys are also just hopping around the uni accommodation when it is dark.

There is also quite rich cultural life, from museums to many pubs and restaurants. Every Saturday, Salamanca market offers a big choice of local food and souvenirs as well.
Costs

Regarding food, prices are comparable to prices in Sweden. Accommodation, however, is more expensive. Also, if you need to see a doctor, be ready to pay around 50 AUD for a regular appointment.

Other

If you are not sure what courses to take, it is alright. As an exchange student you have a big choice of courses but it can be tricky to put the right schedule together. But the uni staff is very helpful and will help you to organize all the courses and if you are not happy with your choice, you have some time to change it at the beginning of the semester. But do not miss the deadline!

Be sure that you choose courses at one campus, Hobart or Launceston. Also, some courses in Antarctic science in Hobart are held at IMAS, which is about 25 min walk form the campus. So pick your courses carefully. In the harbor right next to the IMAS building you can see Aurora Australis, the icebreaker that goes to Antarctica, which is also pretty cool.

Winters in Hobart are not freezing cold, but be ready for some snow in the mountains and the wild south-west. It can be pretty hot during summers.

Long story short, Tasmania is a unique place that is worth visiting. If you decide to do your exchange semester down under, you will not regret.