

Melbourne Study Abroad Comments Most Recent Participants

Stephani Laga, '14, Chemistry

Do you hate working on an interesting research project for course credit? Do you hate having an great time on spring break? Do you hate free events where you get loads of food and listen to cool music? Do you hate Australia? If you answered no to any of these questions, then you should consider studying abroad at the University of Melbourne! Although the following list by no means encompasses why Australia is an amazing place to study abroad, hopefully it will provide a snapshot of why my Melbourne experience has been unforgettable and how you can embark on your own adventure too.

1. MYTH? I'll never make friends at a big school. FALSE. Everyone I met was looking to meet as many people as possible and make friends. The students I have met here are from everywhere around the world, but our cultural differences only made outings more fun and interesting. My roommate is a New Yorker who lives in Russia, but hails from Singapore. One of my other close friends, Susan, is from Germany and, luckily, for me, is helping me with my German. I've even met one girl from the Caltech-Oxy band named Zoe. The point is that I've met a lot of people, "clicked" with a fair number, and have since then enjoyed fun times with them!
2. MYTH? Vegemite which is beloved in Australia is gross. TRUE. Vegemite is one of the most awful things I've ever eaten, but thankfully the rest of Australia's food scene is delicious. I can walk to Lygon Street for Italian food or into the city to grab Bibimbap at Big Mama's. Brunch and coffee are two of the best things about Melbourne, but rich, decadent hot chocolate at Koko Black has to be one of my favorite things.
3. MYTH? There are too many cool things close to where I live. TRUE. I am pretty much one tram ride or 15 minute walk away from awesomeness. I live in North Melbourne about five minutes from the university and roughly super close minutes to everything else. I can easily take the city trams to any other suburbs or into the city. I am close to the Docklands waterfront, where there free winter fireworks were held, and St. Kilda, aka. beach central. I am also close to amazing the cool hipster nightlife districts like Fitzroy and Brunswick. My favorite place to go in Fitzroy is Naked for Satan, a bar with a gorgeous rooftop patio overlooking the city and \$1 tapas. Awesome!
4. FACT: I have a mid-semester spring break (Yes it was spring time in the Southern Hemisphere!). I travelled to Tasmania with a friend of mine on a tour we found online. We met a whole bunch of other students and got to do a lot of hiking in the national parks. The best hike I did was at Cradle Mountain, where it started snowing on us as we walked up to Marion's Lookout - meanwhile I had friends Instagramming pictures of themselves on the beaches in Cairns! This trip is actually where I met my favorite German, Susan; we've had regular girl outings since then and are planning more rendezvous even after I return home to the US.
5. Other obvious FACT: Science is cool! One of my big qualms about study abroad was missing out on time to do research (both over the quarter and during summer). I picked the University of Melbourne specifically because it was easy to get into research. I enrolled in a class, CHEM30013 Chemical Research Project, that allowed me to do research for credit. This experience was amazing because I got to do what I love most - go into lab and get my hands

dirty! By the end of my project, I had gotten to love the group in which I worked and found some cool crystal structures.

6. MYTH? I love spending money to have fun. FALSE. Melbourne literally has a FREE festival every weekend. Since I've been here, I've gone to the Gertrude Street Art Projections, Nite Art, Melbourne Open House, Mexican Festival, Spring Fling, International Welcome Day, and countless others. At Melbourne Open House, where roughly one hundred city buildings were open for tours, I went to the Town Hall and heard a giant organ play the score to Les Miserables. A few weekends ago at Spring Fling I played a giant Jenga game, listened to free local artists, and took awesome photo booth pictures. If there aren't free events going on, most museums are free to students or there are places to go like the Royal Botanic Gardens that don't require you to spend money!

7. MYTH? I hate art. FALSE. In fact, my sentiments are more like, SUCH ART! WOW! Melbourne has an extensive art scene, ranging from street artists and graffiti to exhibits in galleries. The street art in Melbourne is phenomenal and can be found on almost any corner. Sometimes you even see artists in action, spray painting the sides of buildings. I've also gone to see the Australian Ballet's rendition of La Sylphide and a modern dance performance called Botanica! at the Melbourne Arts Center. I've also been to the best art museum of my life in Australia, MONA.

There are so many things I haven't even begun to describe and what I have shared with you pales in comparison to the real thing. I definitely encourage you to look into the Melbourne program yourself! Hopefully by now you are somewhat excited by Melbourne and are not thinking - MYTH: BUT I CAN'T LEAVE CALTECH!!! This sentiment is absolutely FALSE!

It is easy to come up with a million excuses as to why you can't study abroad - I have too many classes to take at Caltech, I can't do a SURF because the Melbourne program starts early, my schedule is too busy, how will I make friends at such a big school. With careful planning, you should be able to fulfill the requirements for your Caltech degree. The classes I am taking now are fulfilling general and social science requirements.

I'd like to also point out that you will ALWAYS be busy doing something; this is not an excuse! I'm currently applying for grad schools and fellowships in addition to all of the usual things I have to do. True, I missed out on SURF this year, but I did work in lab until I left for Australia and I have been working in lab while in Australia and getting course credit!

I am glad that I figured out all of these excuses were just EXCUSES because I've been able to grow academically and personally in an exciting city. Don't be one of those people who regrets not studying abroad as an undergraduate and definitely don't be afraid to explore something different like the Melbourne study abroad program. I have no regrets being in sunny Melbourne (it's summer time here!) and, with the semester coming to a close, I'm looking forward to about a month and half left for more adventure time!

Nadia Lara, '11, Chemistry (First participant in program)

Being the first person to do study abroad in Australia from Caltech, I truly had no idea what to expect, but I jumped at the chance anyways. Today I know I definitely made the right decision. If you want an atmosphere different from Caltech, Melbourne is the way to go.

After being used to greeting every other person I walked by on campus, I was seriously overwhelmed when I was suddenly surrounded by over 36,000 students. Although you'll never

get to know all of them, clubs and societies really help to meet not just a few but dozens of people who share your interests. You can even try out something entirely new because there's so much variety. The best part about these clubs is that when they meet they're not limited just to that particular interest. The Touch Football Club (it's actually more like rugby...) not only introduced me to a new sport but to a whole host of new friends that like to get together for fun non-touch-related events, like barbecues, pub outings, and the annual Touch Ball.

I am living in RMIT Village, which has been fantastic about welcoming new students through Orientation Week and a series of events throughout the semester. Orientation Week was a really fun way to meet people from the Village (there's about 400 living here), and I highly recommend it. A large majority of those who live here are also international study abroad students, so you are surrounded by people from all over the world. Monday nights at Turf, the pub next door to the Village, are easy ways to keep meeting new people throughout the semester. Another fun way to meet people is through MUSEX, the Melbourne University Student Exchange Society. They have hosted a lot of big events, including a surf weekend, a winery tour, and a farewell gala, for relatively low prices. A warning, though: if you're not the kind of person who likes to drink, you can easily be overwhelmed by the drinking culture, especially MUSEX.

On to academics. As a chemistry student, I have found that the third-year (last year) chemistry students at Melbourne are a great group of people who are really tight, but also incredibly welcoming. We have one class that is collaboration-heavy, and it has been a pleasure working with them. My other chemistry classes rely almost entirely (80%) on the final exam, so there is a true incentive to be reviewing the material during the term instead of trying to cram it all at the end. It seems that the material you are tested on, however, is more fact-oriented. That is, unlike Caltech exams, you could actually find the answer in the book or the notes, but you cannot fudge your way through it.

I joke with my mom that I flew halfway across the world to take a philosophy class I couldn't get at Caltech. This is actually partially true. I'm taking a class called God and the Natural Sciences, which is taught by three different faculty members: an Anglican priest, an atheist, and an agnostic, who all do research in the history and philosophy of science. It is a relatively large class that breaks down into smaller sections that truly facilitates discussion, which I understand is a model for a lot of humanities classes. UniMelb is such a large university you are bound to find something new and interesting in the variety of classes available. These are largely paper-based, so you can expect to be writing a total of 4,000 words for each class during the semester if there is no final exam. The handbook entry for a class will actually tell you exactly what assignments to expect, so if you are into writing papers, you can choose a class that is based on that.

On traveling. Because you will be spending a lot of time with other international students, you will find people who are excited to travel in their time abroad. Popular spots are the Gold Coast, Uluru, Darwin, and New Zealand. I went to Tasmania for six days during spring break and found it to be indescribably amazing. Weekend trips to Sydney or Brisbane are also

popular. Definitely take some time to travel after the semester ends. There is a month-long exam period that gives you a chance to really prepare for your exams. If it turns out that your exams are early, you could actually get even more time to travel. Australia, and New Zealand from what I've heard, are beyond beautiful and there's no reason not to take advantage of your time here to explore it.