

Melbourne Study Abroad Comments 2010-17

Michelle Dan '19 – Geobiology Caltech/Biosciences Melbourne

I'm sitting in my 7th floor apartment now, as I just got back from a meeting with the Melbourne University Underwater Club to plan a scuba diving trip for the weekend. This morning I prepared samples for a scanning electron microscope, and still had time to go for a wonderful run through the Royal Botanic Gardens just a couple minutes down the road.

Living in a city and attending a large uni opens opportunities that I couldn't have at Caltech. Of course, I am grateful for the incredible professors and close community at Caltech. But, I found that spending each weekend in the library, and having a lifestyle that revolves around problem sets is not conducive to being a happy 20-year-old.

Studying at University of Melbourne for a semester doesn't mean sacrificing the "academic prestige" of Caltech. I'm able to do research during my semester, and take classes in fields not offered back home. My project in the zoology department applies optical physics to the structure of iridescent beetle wings. For my field biology course, I was out in the countryside for a week to observe foraging behavior in free-ranging kangaroos, and meet a whole new suite of amphibians and marsupials. In my philosophy course, I've been exposed to an entirely new understanding of indigenous cultures. Not to mention, the class schedule leaves time for me to actually concentrate and absorb my assignments, without feeling pressed for time.

Outside of the classwork, studying abroad has allowed me to prioritize my social life, hobbies, and interests. I live in the Melbourne University Student Village, which houses over 1,000 students from around the world. It's located in the center of the city, walking distance from countless restaurants, cafes, bars, clubs, museums (and the university). I've made friends from all over - small islands, major European cities, Asia, and many parts of Australia. Being able to experience such diversity of opinions and lifestyles firsthand is a crucial way of learning, which can't be obtained from textbooks or the internet.

I've been able to explore several landscapes unique to Australia, including the "Twelve Apostles, a set of limestone stacks emerging from the sea, and hikes around Cape Raoul in Tasmania, home to one of wildest surfing locations in the world. Last weekend I completed a scuba diving certification course, a dream I've been trying to pursue since I was a lil kid obsessed with sea creatures. And, importantly, I've enjoyed leisure time – catching sun rays in the many green parks around the city, going to bizarre festivals (Balkan dancing?), or grabbing produce from Queen Victoria Market just around the corner to cook with friends.

Arriving in Melbourne, as soon as you'll meet a new person, they will first ask where you plan on travelling. It seems like the norm here to try and visit all the Australian

classics you can fit. And there's enough time to make good progress – a 10-day mid-semester break and a solid month before/after exams. Australian destinations are often catered to the unparalleled outdoors, from coral reefs to rainforests to the outback and surfer's paradise.

If living in a cultural city, taking unique classes, and experience some of Earth's most distinctive environments sounds good to you, consider applying to study in Melbourne, Australia! And feel free to contact me if you want to have a chat.

Shaurya Gilani '19 - BioEngineering Caltech/Biology Melbourne

Coming to Melbourne was by far one of the best decisions I've ever made, and definitely the best one I've made at Caltech. I will do my best to explain what it's like to live in the "most livable city in the world" 5 years running (you will hear this from everyone here) but it's impossible to describe it as there are so many different aspects, large and small, that make life here so unique, especially coming from a small, rigorous, STEM school.

The biggest thing is the social life by far. You are constantly meeting all sorts of new people from all over the world (all my good mates are French, Canadian, English, Italian, Aussie, etc.) and exploring different things. Everyone who comes here has the mindset of maximizing their time here so if you want to do anything, someone else will be happy to go with you or may already be going which is a little difficult at Caltech given the small amount of people and work schedule. People are extremely friendly and inviting so you will always have something to do, especially given the overwhelming activities the city boasts.

The best part about it is definitely the party scene/nightlife. From house parties to daily happy hours around the cities to celebrating the Richmond Tigers winning the AFL after 35 years to countless nights coming home past 7 am, Melbourne is truly the city that never sleeps (and I can guarantee you everyone will tell you it's the best city to go out in, especially given Sydney's lockdown laws). Going out for a beer is practically given most days, although it may break your wallet a bit given how central Student Village (the brand-new housing complex you will stay in) is. Student Village is located right outside Queen Victoria Market, just south of campus but still right in the heart of CBD, with free trams operating 24/7 to take you within a few blocks of wherever you need to go (as a Chicago native living in LA, this is the best public transport system I have seen by far).

The Student Village is about 1,000 students, most of whom are international so you do have to make an effort to meet real Aussies, but the nice thing is now I have free housing all across Europe in 2 years and other parts of the world for when I travel and I had an easy time meeting Aussies through sports, clubs, class, and bars. The university itself is like nothing I've ever seen before with 38,000 students and daily activities going on all over campus. It's a common practice to just wander campus for free food/beer if you're low on money as there is always some live band or club activity going on. While I

never really signed up for many clubs (since I also play water polo which is 2x a week), I highly encourage you to check out the ridiculous expanse of clubs offered here; to name a few good ones, surf club has the best parties, beer club has free beer, and UMSU and MUSEX are great for organized events where you get to know people (and Student Village also hosts tons of minor events and a few large ones like a boat cruise and toga party).

The academics were definitely way more relaxed than Caltech, although it is far too easy to just underestimate your classes and slack off. All the classes are recorded and put up online and usually you will just have 2 major assignments and 2-3 major exams throughout the semester, where the final is generally 70% of your grade. Melbourne offers some really interesting classes which I never fully took advantage of as I stuck to classes in my major but if you have some free credits, I can guarantee you will find a vast assortment of classes spanning anything you could possibly want to learn about. Classes are generally 2-4 hours per day and are divided into lectures and tutorials (similar to recitations except new material may be introduced).

The last major factor I love is the travel. I really cannot stress enough how much there is to do in Australia and the amount of fun I've had doing it. From going to Phillip's Island to see all of Australia's fauna and feeding kangaroos, to surfing in Torquay, chilling on Bondi in Sydney, to the best week of my life at Uni Games on the Gold Coast, I've had an absolute blast seeing all Australia has to offer, and I still have plans to do a road trip to Uluru in the Outback, drive along the Gold Coast to Cairns (Great Barrier Reef), and go skydiving, cave rafting, and so much more in NZ. Melbourne alone has enough to offer every weekend but getting out of the city is quite easy and I've yet to have an ounce of regret for any trip I've taken so far. The best one has been Uni Games, which is a week-long test of your ability to play a sport hungover. Tons of Australian unis converge during break to compete in all sorts of sports during the day and go out at night. I was part of the water polo team (and if you are an athlete interested in this, it's extremely easy to get the Elite Athlete scholarship as well) and they gave me a true Aussie experience as the team is broken down into Sergeants, Nothings, and Freshers. Sergeants give freshers (if it is your first Uni Games, you are a fresher so that was me) daily tasks to do random, fun challenges and bond with the other freshers along the way. There's all sorts of other things that happen as well including a suit of shame every night and some great team meetings but I won't give too much away.

There are countless reasons to come to Australia but to really sum my experience up, it was enlightening and changed my opinion from wanting to simply go home and work in Chicago after college to wanting to travel/work in Europe and maybe even settle back down in Australia in a few years. Coming here was a really tough decision as my coach/teammates and friends urged me to stay, my dad wanted me to go to Copenhagen, and in general, it is the longest, most expensive, and farthest trip, not to mention it takes up a summer. I missed out on the Caltech water polo team winning

our first SCIAC game in 16 years, which was something I dreamed of being there for and celebrating with all my teammates but despite all of that, I can honestly say I'm so happy I chose to come here and wouldn't change anything about my experience.

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.