

## Experience Report

Psychology (B.Sc.) & Law (Staatsexamen) – University of Sydney (USYD), Australia – Feb-Jul 2024

Experiences in Sydney and Australia during my studies at the University of Sydney (USYD) in Semester 1 (19.02.2024 – 15.06.2024).



*Sydney Opera House*



*Sydney Harbour Bridge*



*Central Business District*

Two parts! Firstly, I will swoon why Australia is great to visit and why you should definitely do it. Second, I will go into boring details and preparation, after I convinced you to apply.

### Why Australia?

**Motivation.** Australia has been on my bucket list since forever. Also, I eventually want to travel to each continent, so there was hardly a way around going. My motivation was mainly to see the exotic nature, experience the so much talked about “laid-back” Australian culture and finally study at one of the best universities in the world.

To be fair, I did apply for Australia more as a backup to my Erasmus plans the previous fall term; and then ended up getting into both Erasmus and the Global Exchange program having the privilege of doing two back-to-back semesters abroad. BUT (!) I do have no regrets and have travelled to most of the Australian cities, we have exchange programs with and can confidently say, that I enjoyed the Sydney experience most. (but that is very much biased, as I think exchange anywhere in Australia must be awesome!)

### How was it?

**Experience.** It is awesome and I miss it already. I want to go back! To simplify what I liked I put it in four categories: People. University. Sydney. Travel.

**People.** Well, it´s always the people that make the most of your experience. I feel like you need a bit of time to adjust to Sydney and the Aussie vibe; but as soon as you have, you cannot go without it. People greet you on the street with “How are ´ya mate?”, “Cheers” and “G´day” a lot. Expect a lot of small talk, it is common to talk to the cashier, the barista, your tutor, which makes you feel welcome and connected pretty quickly. But don´t be scared, everyone is relaxed, easy-going and accommodating and you even get the hang of these interactions eventually and will learn to love them (It is more that you will miss them dearly after returning to Germany). Besides the random conversation, you will encounter so many different People. Sydney is a huge, diverse city, so is USYD and as soon as you start traveling you will encounter people from everywhere in the world and all walks of life. I am glad to have also made a few new friends; ending up with a mixed group of Americans, Norwegians, Italians and Australians (lots of new couches to stay on while traveling). Most of them were also on exchange, still with a bit of effort you will also get to know real Australians. Looking back now it is hard to put all my encounters, experiences and conversations into words; but for having been there only 6 months, I feel like I made friends for life. It is curious who you bond with in a new city, in a different culture on a different continent. But it is also the best opportunity to practice openness, curiosity and spontaneity. I loved Australia mainly for the people and the friends I made along the way.

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**University.** Depending on what you study, university in Australia will look familiar or very new. I found it very refreshing studying law and psychology in Germany. I studied a variety of subjects, which all only sparsely related to my studies at home; but I loved it. People go abroad to find themselves or find new things. I reckon I did a bit of both. I took classes in “International Relations”, “Contemporary Political Philosophy” and “Gender Studies”. All of them were taught as readings, lectures and tutorials. I really enjoyed the system, though mainly because of the lecturers and engaging student discussions. Lecturers were all very knowledgeable and intelligent, but in a distinct way to Germany, impressively approachable, open and reflected. I think this is partly due to the nature of English, where you address everyone as “you” (instead of a hierarchising “Sie”) and also because university culture is more discussion based (at least in my subjects) and feels less like a “being taught by the knowledgeable professor” and more like “learning, discussion and discovering the topics together”. Usually, you are also on first name-basis with most (all) of your lecturers and tutors and therefore feel more inclined to ask questions and interact with them. All in all the university culture felt more interactive, connected and rewarding than what I was used to in Germany. Also, critical and reflective thinking were far more encouraged and rewarded (especially compared to law in Germany). I took only three, instead of the possible four units and would recommend that as well (or 3 serious ones and one fun class like “Outdoor Education”). They are not as challenging as classes in my studies in Germany (because less unnecessary learning by heart), but still demanding, if you engage with the content. And you also still want free time to explore Sydney and travel. and experience Australia.



*The Quad (USYD)*



*Education Building (USYD)*



*Inside the Quad (USYD)*

**Sydney.** Sydney is a huge city. I cannot begin to list all the things you can and should do. In summer I mainly loved the beaches, taking the ferry to Manly or the bus to Coogee, swimming, tanning, surfing, playing volleyball and watching the sunset in the evening. It feels like you are on holiday, but you are also living there. In Winter, you can still go to the beach (it never really gets colder than 15 degrees), but I tended to spend more time in coffee shops, book stores or pubs, especially in Newtown, Glebe or Redfern. Australia has the best coffee! If you don't have a coffee addiction already, there is a good chance you might have one after. Even the weird corner shop, makes divine Lattes and don't even get me started on dedicated roasteries and coffee shops with awesome baristas. Besides these more life focussed points there is so much to do in Sydney. Just a few recommendations: Do the Bondi-Coogee Walk (cliff walk along the coast), dress up and watch a show at the Opera House, go swimming in rock pools, go walk across the Harbour Bridge, get good food in Chinatown (or Spice Alley), go running in one of Sydney's many parks. Go hiking in the Blue Mountains (3h from Sydney) or one of the close national parks. Eat a caramel slice. Go to Miss Sina, study at Berkelouw Café or Sappho's. Watch a movie in an outdoor cinema or an indie film in Golden Age Cinema. See a musical. Go out for a night of music Bingo and Karaoke in Newtown Hotel. Trivia at the Royal Hotel Darlington. Get pasta from



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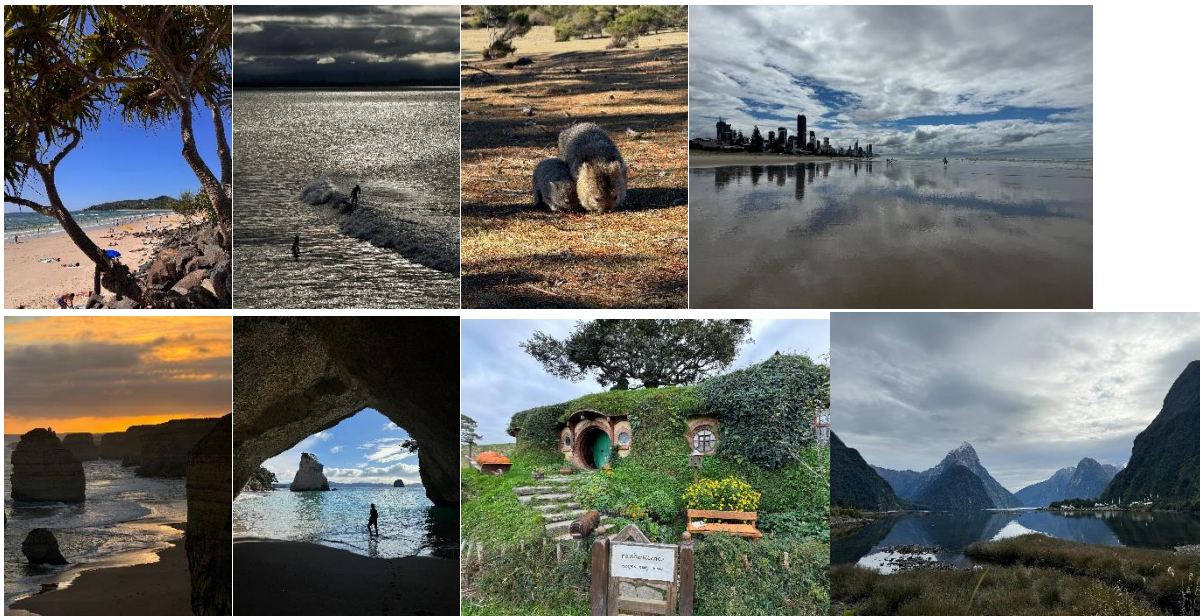
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the Italian Bowl and Yo-Chi after. Just try it all or just some of it. You ´ll find whatever your heart desires.



Left to right: *Prince Alfred Park Pool*; *Latte Art in Dirty Red Glebe*; *Coogee-Bondi Walk*; *Spice Alley*; *Sunset near Coogee*; *Sappho Books, Café & Bar*; *Elizabeth´s Bookshop Newtown*; *Show at the Opera House*; *Yo-Chi Newtown*

**Travel.** Also leave Sydney. For semester break or a weekend. I can recommend Byron Bay (cute coastal town; for beaches, hikes and tons of work & travel people). Melbourne and the Great Ocean Road (ideally road trip there). Cairns just for the Great Barrier Reef (take an outer reef tour; Passions of Paradise or Silverswift is recommendable). Fly to Tasmania (beautiful landscape, cute towns, beaches, highlands, Wombats...). Fly to New Zealand; it´s literally the most beautiful country in the world, worth at least a 3 week roadtrip in a campervan.



Left to Right: *Byron Bay Beach*; *Surfers at Cape Byron*; *Wombats on Maria Island (Tasmania)*; *Surfers´ Paradise*; *12 Apostles (Great Ocean Road)*; *Cathedral Cove (NZ)*; *Hobbiton (NZ)*; *Milford Sound (NZ)*

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### Practicalities and stuff to know

#### BEFORE SYDNEY

**Global Exchange application.** I applied, following the required procedures of the international office. The only deviation from the required procedure was that I did not take the IELTS, TOEFL or Harvard test. That was very fine for my visa and USYD; but as we Germans tend to be very particularist with our requirements was to my disadvantage in the application process for the Global Exchange (international office). I received less points in the ranking process (so was less likely to get into the program and my preferred university). So be aware of that and although I genuinely find it an unnecessary hurdle and a reason for class/monetary discrimination; for a hassle-free application just get a certificate (and read up on which one is best). A few weeks after my application there was (unexpectedly) a personal interview with the coordinator of the Global Exchange. It was just a talk to clarify some points from the application and an insistence that we should advertise the University of Freiburg and doing an exchange during our time abroad. It freaked me out at the time; but turned out to be just fine. Just a heads up that, that might come up. Then I finally received my confirmation a few weeks later. Got recommended to USYD.

**USYD application.** After a week of being recommended I received an email by my USYD academic advisor. They are the best and detail everything you need to do and when in their Emails. Just follow the process and you ´ll be fine. I found it to be pretty hassle free; though you have to wait up to a few weeks in between some steps: You will apply, receive a conditional offer, and unconditional offer and then finally your confirmation of Enrolment (COE).

**VISA.** With the COE or electronic COE (eCOE) you can apply for the Visa. The Visa application is A LOT. I spend literally 10 hours preparing and writing up stuff; I don ´t think that is necessary as I handed in my visa application and it got granted within a minute (I received the email confirmation that the visa-application was received and the email, that it was granted in the same minute). Consequently, don ´t stress too much about the Visa application, as long as you put in the COE-number in the application process you should be fine, and it should get granted very quickly.

**Accommodation.** As soon as you got accepted you will also (at least for USYD) eventually receive an email about the guaranteed student accommodation during your stay. You might get into the “Queen Mary Building”. It is pretty competitive insofar as it will be full by the end of the day, when you receive the Email that you can apply. So be quick! It is – as far as I saw – the cheapest way to live centrally and hustle free. I, for my part, missed the email and needed to find accommodation privately. Flatmatefinder.com.au is your friends; while the prices usually aren ´t. I flew 2 weeks earlier to Sydney, stayed in a Hostel and had a room after a week of being there. It is a bit more stress, but very doable. Pricewise you ´re looking at between 300-500 AUD per week (!) for flats and if you want a studio or a room in one of the privatized student accommodations (“Scape” is a big company with lots of locations) you are looking at 500-900 AUD per week.

**Flights.** Book them early; or very late. I booked my flight 5 days before I flew there and a week before I flew back. I paid roughly 1000€ in total (600€ there; 400€ back). Cheapest Airlines are China Eastern or Air China (book through Booking.com); they have two 23kg suitcases included and meals and stuff. They fly through China, Beijing or Shanghai for me. Which is lovely, as you usually have a layover of 6-12 hours and can go into the respective cities visa-free (with a German Passport). I looked at Shanghai on my way



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there and the Great Wall of China on my layover back. Both very doable, as long as you plan a bit ahead. If you book your flights very early, consider doing a few days of layover. Bangkok is recommended or maybe a city in India. Multi-city stopover flights are usually cheaper than direct ones and you can travel a bit on your way to Australia.



*Shanghai Skyline   Yu Garden (Shanghai)*

*Mutianyu Great Wall*

**Course selection.** You must usually do the course selection beforehand. There are sometimes quotas for internationals, but usually it is “just first come first serve”. So, look at the course catalogue early and apply for your favourites. You might not get any, but at least try. Especially for law, psychology and economics you got to apply early to get your priorities. But do not fret. I ended up switching all my courses two weeks in (just before the deadline) and was very satisfied with my courses. Then again, it might be different for you, if you need specific courses for your studies.

**That´s it for preparations.** I don´t remember preparing anything else. You should be set for Australia. Bring clothes for all weather, it is sunny (sunscreen is best bought there), but also rainy sometimes (rain jacket!), hiking boots because it is lovely to hike there. Usually not very cold though (coldest in Sydney was in Winter; some 9 degrees overnight).

## AFTER ARRIVING

**First weeks.** Find your flat, find the closest supermarket, get to know people living with you – the classical drill of arriving somewhere new. University-wise read ALL your emails; everything is planned for you, just gotta follow along and sometimes pre-register for some events. There will be an orientation week, information meetings, meetings with your academic advisor, social meetups, club and society fairs. Just do it all, meet all the people!

**USYD.** A lovely university. Best you just experience it yourself. I felt like, while demanding, the courses were all very doable and comparably easy. I took “Gender Studies”, “International Relations” and “Contemporary Political Philosophy”. I can recommend especially philosophy courses. The lectures are very engaging, and tutorials offer interesting debates. But just select whatever floats your boat; try them for a week and see if that works for you. Interesting thing to know is that lectures are usually mandatory, so you have to go. And there is a semester break in the middle of the semester; you´ll usually have essays or papers due, but most people still use it to travel a bit.

**Societies.** There is a myriad of societies and clubs. I personally enjoyed the **Runclub** (600+ members running through Sydney), they accommodate all levels and I found a lot of friends there. **Philosophy society** is the same, you meet for events, the pub and free pizza. Cool people, conversations and new friends. **Book Society** is also a lovely crew, reading together and having weekly study-meetups. **German Society** also worth a shot for some nostalgic Bretzels or some Germany interested people. But just talk to everyone on the welcome Faire (every society has its

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stand for a few days and gives out goodies). You will find whatever you want among the 300+ Societies and sport clubs.

**Meet people, read, explore, travel, LIVE.** While Sydney might feel daunting at first, you will soon meet your friend group. If not at USYD, there are so many other universities, sport clubs, societies, events etc. to attend and visit. If you take away one thing from this experience report for your time abroad, let it be this: Say “Yes”, be open, engage in some banter and good-willed small talk, meet people you wouldn't at home, learn new perspectives, try new hobbies and I promise it will be one of the best semesters of your life.

## **Acknowledgement & Fine-print**

I am very aware, that this experience report is majoritively positive. I must admit that there were times, when I was stressed to find a flat, stressed about finishing essays on time and annoyed at the people and friends I met there. I was lonely at times and missing friends from home. Traveling also is not always fun, it is a lot of planning and deciding, it is costly, very exhausting and demanding at times. BUT. Firstly, I think you cannot have the good times, without the bad ones and I personally would rather be stressed, annoyed and lonely in Australia, than anywhere else. Secondly, these times were rare and are definitely not what characterized my experience or what I associate with Australia now. I honestly think that it has been one of my best semesters! What I think of are beach days with my friends, Flat Whites in coffee shops, intriguing discussions in class and sparkling eyes at the end of the day.