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

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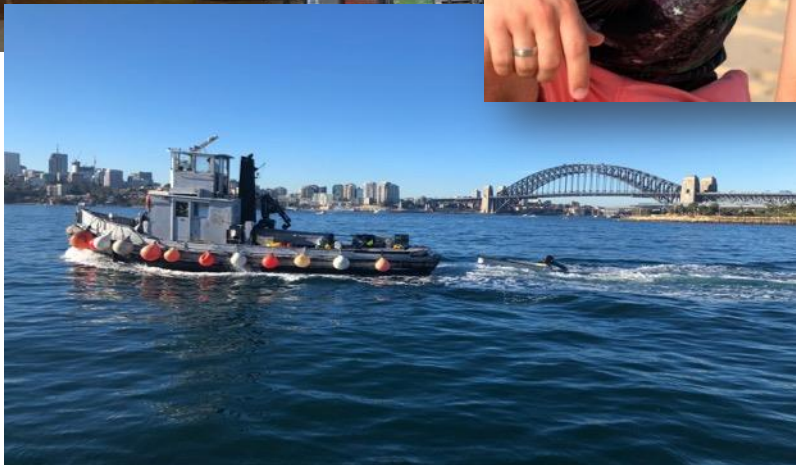
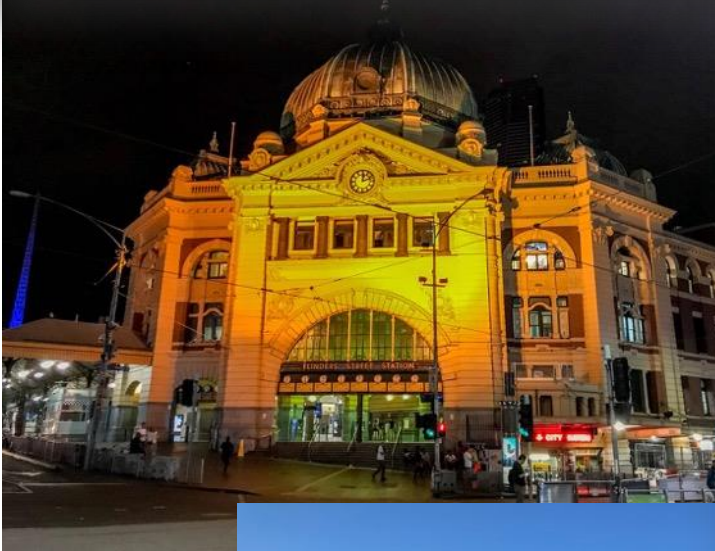
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# **Student experience report**

## **– My study abroad semester at the University of Melbourne –**

### **By Maik Wiedmann**

## **Outline**

1. Preparation
2. Arrival in Melbourne
3. Welcome at International House Melbourne
4. Orientation Week at IH
5. College life at IH in a nutshell
6. Studying at the University of Melbourne
7. The city of Melbourne and travelling in Australia
8. Time to say goodbye and returning home

## **1. Preparation**

G'Day reader,

In the following I will share my study abroad experience at the University of Melbourne.

I spent my semester abroad in Melbourne from February until June 2018.

It all started with a study abroad information session from KLU's International Office where I became aware of the opportunity to study in Australia.

The following week I was on the tram on my way to KLU when I read on one of the TV's that Melbourne has been declared the world's most liveable city for the seventh year running by the Economist annual global liveability survey. I already had my phone out, conducted some research on Melbourne and the University of Melbourne was one of the first search results that popped up on the screen. This basically started the ball rolling and kick-started my interest in Australia and in particular the University of Melbourne (abbreviated UniMelb).

UniMelb was not one of KLU's partner universities so I applied there as a so-called freemover. I informed the International Office of my study abroad plan and Ms. Ulrike Schulz told me that the organisation "GOstralia!" offers support to students throughout the entire application process at Australian universities free of charge (they receive funding from Australian universities).

The same day I gave them a call in their main headquarter in Stuttgart and was impressed by their responsiveness to all my questions. I cannot stress enough how helpful they have been in placing me at UniMelb: They did their utmost and exactly told me what I had to do in every stage of the application process. In my view, their main advantage is that they have designated employees at every Australian university with whom they are in permanent contact. This allows you to accelerate your application dramatically by escaping the anonymous application process that you have to go through should you decide to apply on your own.

After providing GOstralia! with all necessary documents they forwarded them to UniMelb and a long period of waiting for their final decision started.

I will not forget the morning when I opened my email account and there was this one special message from GOstralia! with the title "A message from the University of Melbourne that will change your life".

After receiving the Offer letter from UniMelb I had to apply for health insurance in Australia which is a necessity in order to apply for the Student Visa subclass 500. I expected the Visa to take up to a month to be processed but after a couple of days I already received it.

I was then almost good to go but one question remained: Where should I stay in Australia? GOstralia! recommended me to postpone this decision until I arrived in Melbourne where I should then stay in a hostel for a week to find a suitable accommodation. However, I found this too advantageous and instead decided to apply for accommodation at one of UniMelb's residential colleges – International House (abbreviated IH). International House is UniMelb's second largest residential college and the only college that accepts exchange students for a semester.

Living in college is probably the most expensive housing option out there but looking back at it, I would say it was definitely worth it.

The application process at IH was rather rigorous: It had to fill out several forms where I outlined why I want to become a resident at IH, how I will contribute to the community and I also needed a letter of recommendation from an old High School teacher. The last stage in the process was a Skype interview with the Deputy Head of college Dr. Nick Hill which mainly focused on my previous exposure to other cultures and how I will handle cross-cultural differences. The interview was at 6 am Berlin time and I did not have high hopes after completing the interview, because at first, I struggled with the Aussie slang and had to ask him multiple times "Part in me - could you repeat that please?".

That's why I was really surprised when they offered me a place in their college and I felt gifted, because I made it through their selection procedure.

Lastly, I shared all the good news with KLU's International Office and booked my flight with Emirates to Australia. Let the adventure begin!

## **2. Arrival in Melbourne**

I left Germany with two big suitcases and flew from Hamburg to Melbourne with one two hours stop in Dubai. Be prepared for most likely one of your longest if not "the longest" flight in your life: It took roughly 22 hours until I arrived at Melbourne Tullamarine International Airport. From Tullamarine, I took the Skybus to Melbourne city (takes around 30 minutes and one-way costs 12 Dollar) and ended up in Melbourne's Central Shopping Centre where I ate Indian food and immediately fell asleep afterwards. I won't forget how the Australians looked at a German with two big suitcases who found himself sleeping there for two hours. After this slightly intimidating first experience I made my way to International House.



Figure 1: Skyline of Melbourne

### 3. Welcome at International House Melbourne

The first thing I noticed when I arrived at IH was how big it actually is and that it is surrounded by the beautiful Princess Park and lots of green areas.

It was really nice to also meet the people behind the scenes in person after a month of intense email correspondence.

IH residents were already waiting for me at the entrance and introduced me to all IH staff. They immediately made me feel welcome and said “the moment you stepped into this door you’ve become part of our community – welcome to International House Melbourne”. You will also notice the seven clocks from around the world on the wall which highlight the international character of this unique institution.

They then gave me a welcome bag which contained an envelope with my keys, further information regarding the long history of IH and also my academic gown that we were supposed to wear during formal dinners. My orientation week leaders took my heavy suitcases and insisted on carrying them for me up to the third floor. This was really Australian friendliness in its finest 😊 My room was in a house called Clunies Ross which is the oldest building at IH.

I would say that my room was small but nice: They renovated the entire building before we moved in so I enjoyed new furniture. I shared one bathroom with 8 other floor mates from around the world. My start at IH could not have been better 😊



Figure 2: Arrival in front of International House



Figure 3: Me in front of my room in Clunies Ross

## 4. Orientation Week at IH

At IH, we were not given much time to unwind after the exhausting flight: After an hour in my room, I went down to the dining hall at IH where the head of college Dr. Deborah Seifert (her husband is German) kick-started the orientation week with a speech and introduced the 12 orientation week leaders.

I decided to devote a separate section to the orientation week, because it was a completely new experience for me and absolutely nothing I knew from the German higher education system.

All new students (around 150!) were assigned a group leader and we were required to wear our name tag at all times. My leader was Marvel from Asia and carried the nickname "Aquamarvel" for whatever reason ;) I have to admit that I found it really exciting at the beginning to engage in small talk with my fellow students but after some time it got exhausting to be asked – the more or less – same questions all the time. Anyway, this was good practice for later business life 😊

The team of dedicated orientation week leaders put in a lot of effort in the entire organisation of the welcome week and prepared a week with a myriad of activities: We started the week with some get-to-know-each-other games and had competitions with the other teams with the goal to get accustomed with IH's huge campus. Within a short period of time we developed a strong sense of belonging within our groups, came up with a slogan for our team and supported each other throughout the various competitions against the other teams.

In my opinion, the best group building activity among us freshers was the IH fresher dance which we all had to learn at the second day. Nobody told us in advance that IH won the previous year against the other colleges with their dance choreography and this year they wanted to take home the award again! Unsurprisingly, 150 students in the dining hall were exposed to a very ambitious and complicated dance to Avici's "The Nights" song. Most of us were completely overwhelmed and lost but all laughed at it and had a good time.

The remaining days, we had a toga party and a paint party where our white orientation week T-shirts finally received some colour 😊 With our new designed T-shirts we made our way to Melbourne's city centre where our leaders showed us around the most important places. The person at the front shouted some typical IH songs that have developed over the course of IH's existence and we all had to join him. We also had to dance in front of the crowd at Federation Square which is Melbourne's artistic place. The people in the city centre looked slightly strange at us but it was another experience that will stick in my mind.

I would love to share one last hint: On the last day of the orientation week, we were told that we have to pass an IH resident test and if we fail it we can't stay at IH. What happened was that we all – including me – spent the night before studying the IH information booklet all over. They really put us under an examination mode and handed out a question booklet with 5 pages. I saw us all struggling because nobody could remember when IH was exactly founded but of course it was a silly joke. Should they tell you this too, go to bed the night before and do not waste your time studying the booklet ;)

I could talk about this orientation week forever but it is still best experienced by yourself. It was such an exciting time with lots of fun! If you can attend it, please do! 😊



Figure 4: The orientation week leaders performing the IH Fresher Dance



Figure 5: My team "Aquamarvel"



Figure 6: Me after the paint party at IH



## 5. College life at IH in a nutshell

I will start this section with a quote from IH: “Once an IHer – always a responsible global citizen”. I met people at IH from literally every place in the world and had the chance to gain valuable insight into their culture. You were always surrounded by people during breakfast, lunch and dinner when you had the perfect chance to catch up on their life’s. The previous orientation week and the fact that you saw the others almost 24/7 created strong ties within a short amount of time and made my transition to a new country as smooth as possible. We were a very diverse student body and I am pretty sure that everyone will find like-minded people there.

Let me exemplify some of the key aspects of the college life at IH:

First of all, there were formal dinners twice a week – on Tuesday and Thursday. During those dinners, we were required to wear our academic gowns and a selected group of students was invited to sit at the High Table together with the employees at IH and honorary guests. I was also invited once during my time at IH for High Table and sat next an ambassador of India with whom I had a very interesting conversation. In general, you will be honoured with a place at High Table if you contributed to the IH community or received exceptional grades.

Secondly, IH ran its own tutorials for the most difficult and in high demand courses at UniMelb. At the beginning, I did not really value those tutorials enough and perceived them as an additional commitment rather than valuable support. I can already tell you that courses at UniMelb will be tough and challenging and those additional tutorials are there for a good reason 😊

Thirdly, IH provides the cultural and intellectual framework for your studies at UniMelb. I found it relaxing that I could just focus on my studies without having to worry that I will miss out some of the fun stuff that college life brings with it:

Almost every weekend the IH student club organised a party or another event such as a Lan-party that you can join. The biggest event at IH will probably be Café Internationale where many locals and IH alumni come to IH to celebrate cultural differences. I was part of the reception team and welcomed the guests and accompanied them to their tables. Should you decide to come to IH be prepared to also actively engage in some of their events (they will not directly tell you this but it is somehow expected that you contribute).

Fourthly, you will make a bunch of new friends and spend a lot of time with them laughing, wondering about some habits and also studying. We supported one another during busy times at UniMelb and I found it really motivating to study along with them either in the IH library or one of their tutorial rooms.



Figure 7: Wearing our academic gowns for a formal dinner



Figure 8: The dining hall during a formal dinner



Figure 9: Receptionists during Café Internationale

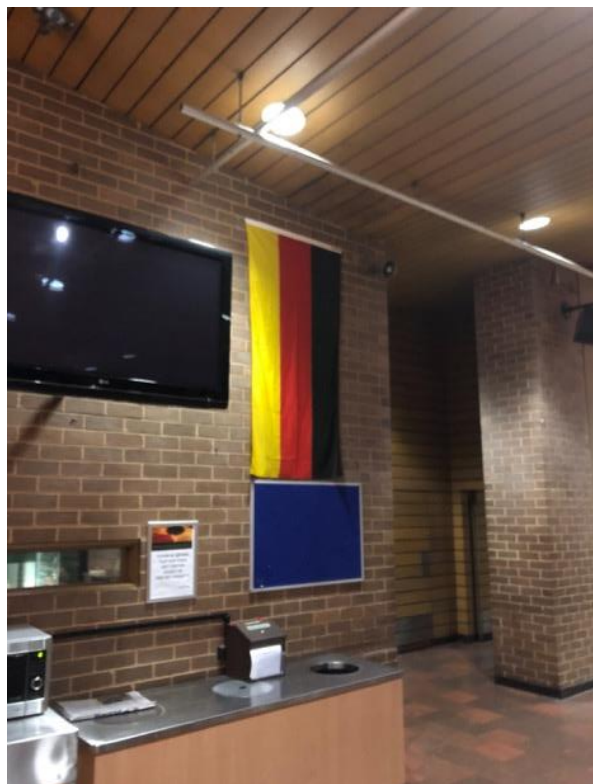


Figure 10: The German flag in IH's dining hall

## 6. Studying at the University of Melbourne

I found the orientation day at UniMelb well organised: They showed me around the campus and in particular the Business and Economics faculty. After that day, I felt well-equipped to commence my studies at UniMelb. Studying in Australia is different from studying in Germany in certain regards: A lecture in Australia usually lasts for only 45 minutes and every minute is fully used – the pace is high. This in turn means that you will need to put in a significant amount of self-study after each lecture to go through the concepts once more. I liked that there was constant course assessment throughout the semester. This meant that I was somehow forced to always keep up with my studies which saved me a lot of last minute learning before the final examinations. On the contrary, it also means that there will always be something to work on – either an assignment, essay or a preparation for a quiz. So, be prepared to continuously engage with your courses. Do not be afraid when you walk over signs on the floor saying “Welcome to Australia’s No. 1 university” – yes it will not be easy and it gives you a nice feeling but we all managed to cope with the work load.

Another benefit of UniMelb is that it is a campus university – you can reach all buildings within a short walk. From IH I walked to UniMelb every morning which approximately took me around 15 minutes. One hint: Download the “Lost on campus” App which contains a detailed map of UniMelb and it will guide your way to the right lecture hall during your first days at UniMelb.

I would like to point out that there are many students from Asian countries at the University of Melbourne. Do not be surprised should you at some point also sit in the lecture hall, look around and ask yourself if you are still located in Australia. I also made friends with Asian students but I would say it is not easy for Europeans should you not speak some Mandarin.

All in all, I enjoyed studying at this university. The lecturers are easily approachable and I learned a lot there.



Figure 11: Relaxing in one of UniMelb’s green areas



Figure 12: Historic buildings at UniMelb



Figure 13: UniMelb's famous Professors Walk



Figure 14: The Copland Theatre - lecture hall in the Spot building (Business & Economics faculty)

## 7. The city of Melbourne und travelling in Australia

Melbourne is a beautiful city and offers an interesting mix of cultural activities: I really liked the shopping centre Melbourne Central and the shops around Swanston Street. Melbourne also has some very nice Cafes that are a bit hidden in side streets but you will explore them in the city centre ☺ Melbournians are obsessed with coffee and take their coffee very serious. Taking a good coffee again will most likely be one of the first things I will do once I return to Melbourne. In general, the standard of living in Melbourne is high and Melbourne is constantly considered as one of Australia's most important cultural hubs. There is always something going on in the city: During Summer Melbourne hosts, lots of festivals in the city centre and I can definitely recommend you to check out the Queen Victoria Market where you can find a huge variety of food and craft work. I perceived the price level in Australia as slightly higher than in Germany and especially groceries tend to be more expensive. My hint for groceries would be to check out one of the Aldi stores which offer groceries at reasonable prices and the store will immediately make you feel at home (offer almost the same products as in Germany).

During the end of my semester I also knew pretty much every Officeworks store in the city centre of Melbourne – I needed quite some pens over the semester... IH hosts many exchange students and most of them want to explore Australia as well. During the mid-semester break, I found time to travel to Brisbane together with other exchange students from IH. Brisbane is a lovely city located around the Brisbane River which can be explored within a couple of days. It is worth a trip ☺

After the final examination period at UniMelb, I found some additional time to travel around while I was waiting for my final results.

I decided to travel to Sydney together with a friend where we spent a couple of days and then we went to the Blue Mountains where we stayed at my friend's aunt house. I made the mistake to travel by train from Melbourne to Sydney while my friend made the wiser decision to flight to Sydney. You should be aware of the fact that distances in Australia can be very large and it took 12 hours by train to finally arrive in Sydney while flighting only takes 1.5 hours. Should you ever find yourself on a train in Australia please do not forget a portable battery to charge your devices: I forgot mine and spend the last 8 hours on the train without the entertainment from my electronic devices, because there are no sockets on the trains.

From Sydney, I travelled around the East coast line with the Greyhound bus all the way up to Cairns, Great Barrier Reef. I can highly recommend you to check out the Greyhound bus offers if you want to explore Australia, because they allow unlimited travel around their bus network in Australia for a specified amount of time. In total, it took me roughly three days by bus until I finally arrived in Cairns where I made day trips to the tropical rainforest in Kuranda and the Great Barrier Reef. Should you find the time - do not miss out Cairns before you have to leave!

☺



*Figure 15: Main concert hall of Sydney's Opera House*



*Figure 16: Cute kangaroos on Phillip Island*



*Figure 17: Beautiful beaches at Gold Coast - Surfers Paradise*

## 8. Time to say goodbye and returning home

Saying goodbye to all those lovely people in my college was heartbreaking and I do not regret a single minute I spent in Australia, Melbourne, the University of Melbourne and IH. I can still remember Dr. Deborah Seifert saying at the beginning of my time at IH that we will not need an Airbnb anymore after our stay at IH. I did not fully understand what she meant with that at first but after my stay at IH all I can do is fully agree with this statement: IH will be my new Airbnb 😊 After some weeks now back in Germany I started to value certain things in our system more than I did before: In particular our German quality products at affordable prices. Maybe you will also start smiling once you go grocery shopping at Aldi in Germany again where you can get an entire basket full with groceries for less than 30 Euros. Who knows?!



Figure 18: Back at Hamburg Airport wearing three layers of clothes ;)

Should you need further information about Australia and Melbourne please do not hesitate to contact me. I am always up for a chat and would love to share my semester abroad experience with you.

Best regards,

Maik Wiedmann



# Gerne verwirklichen wir auch deinen Traum von einem Studium in Australien, Neuseeland oder Asien!

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