

Melbourne

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If there was one way, I would describe moving to Melbourne for the year it would have to be "easy". I chose Melbourne University as I had always wanted to go on exchange in Australia and Melbourne was ranked best in Australia for my course (psychology). As well as this, Melbourne is famed for its coffee scene, brunch scene, and foodie culture which definitely did not disappoint. From the moment I got there it was a surreal experience of feeling very much at home, but also a very different home where trams went by every few minutes and skyscrapers lined the horizon. From day one Melbourne was the perfect place to be spending a year away from home, it has all the bright lights of a big city but is also filled with tiny laneways and suburbs full of different cultures, music and people. I also found Aussie people to be really warm and friendly and always helpful and willing to show you more of their city and tell you about all the different places to travel. Luckily, I stayed in student accommodation with lots of other exchange students, mostly from the UK and the US and quickly settled into Melbourne Uni life.

There was always lots to do around Melbourne, there was obviously the beaches such as St Kilda also further out there was places such as Brighton Beach with coloured huts which were perfect for your classic Aussie photo shoots. The nightlife scene was a little different as it was a lot more spread out than Dublin's Harcourt Street. Fitzroy was my favourite and was also where I worked in a busy bar for my first semester. It was filled with artsy cafes, people, and street-art, as well as small homey bars and late nightclubs. The city centre was filled with every type of night out you could want with student cards getting you free entry into a lot of the night clubs. If you were looking to meet Irish people, then St Kilda was easily the best place to go looking, with people walking the streets in their GAA jerseys and multiple Irish pubs. I was also lucky enough to play GAA and went to events such as the 7s GAA competition where teams travelled from all over Australia to play.

I found the university work-load lighter than UCD as we only took 4 modules, but the tutorials and classes were much more interactive. There were definitely some areas where I had more experience from modules, I had taken at home but other areas I found I had to catch up a little bit, but nothing out of the ordinary. To scale the size of the university, in UCD we have one corridor for my course, whereas there was an 11-floor psychology building at Melbourne Uni. However, it wasn't as intimidating as I had anticipated, the university had a society specifically for exchange students who were on exchange there and also for Australians who had come back from exchange which made life very easy for meeting like-minded people looking for the same experience.



The different semester dates in the southern hemisphere meant that I left Ireland in July and completed my first semester by November, from there I had 4 months of Uni holidays to travel and see as much of Australia as I could. Starting at Cairns where we snorkelled at The Great Barrier Reef, we made our way down the East Coast all the way to Sydney. The highlight of the year was easily spending Christmas in Bondi, where a few of us exchanges rented an AirBnB and lay on sunny Bondi Beach all Christmas morning, followed by a Christmas dinner BBQ. The only slight drawback I found was the time difference, feeling slightly out of the loop as life went on at home while I slept and in the morning being a bit too late to join in the conversations, however nothing a scheduled Facetime couldn't fix!

The biggest moment for me was returning to Melbourne after a month of travelling and feeling the sense of relief that I was "home" again, that really stuck with me as it was the first time I realised just how much I had come to love the city. Melbourne is a city where life is just easy, the people are easy-going and friendly, the city never feels rushed or stressed, and life just happens, I would go back again in a heartbeat!

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