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Experience Report: My Exchange Semester at QUT in Brisbane, Australia

Preparation: The Journey to Down Under

When I received my acceptance letter from Queensland University of Technology (QUT) in Brisbane in March 2024, it felt like a dream come true. I had long envisioned spending a semester abroad outside of Europe—and if anywhere, it had to be Australia. The chance to live and study there was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity I knew I had to seize.

The preparation process was smooth and well-supported, thanks to the excellent guidance provided by both my home and host universities. Through emails, virtual meetings, and information sessions, we were carefully walked through every step. Reading other students' experience reports also gave me a clear idea of what needed to be done. As soon as I received my Confirmation of Enrolment (CoE) from QUT, I was able to apply for my visa online without any issues. Other important matters like international health insurance, travel vaccinations, securing a credit card, and booking flights followed gradually—my advice: start early to save yourself time, money, and unnecessary stress!

For my accommodation, I initially chose a room at Student One, a centrally located student residence in Brisbane. Its location was undeniably a major advantage—right in the heart of the city, with short distances to campus, shops, and the Brisbane River. The international environment was another big plus: I met students from all over the world, and especially during the first weeks, this made it easy to form new friendships.

However, I also want to be candid about some challenges that prospective students should be aware of. While Student One advertises competitive pricing and a great location—both of which are true—there are hidden costs to consider. For example, when getting my deposit refunded, I was charged additional fees for international transfers (about \$50 for payments outside Australia), and cleaning fees were often applied even when rooms weren't particularly clean upon move-in. It's essential to document everything carefully—both when moving in and out. Also, an early termination of the lease typically requires payment equivalent to at least one additional month's rent.

Looking back, I would recommend future students compare accommodation options thoroughly and book early—deals in the weeks before the semester often offer substantial savings. Alternatively, searching for a shared flat locally (via platforms like Flatmates or Facebook groups) can offer a more authentic and often more affordable experience.

Academic Life at QUT

Studying at QUT was both demanding and deeply engaging—well-structured, practical, and intellectually stimulating. I enrolled in three courses:

- Microeconomics
- Macroeconomics
- Managing Strategy

Unlike the traditional examination systems I was used to in Germany, QUT emphasized continuous assessment. Instead of final exams, we were graded through a combination of assignments, group projects, presentations, quizzes, and essays. While this meant a steady workload throughout the semester, it was very manageable and left ample time for travel, social activities, and even part-time work.

What impressed me most was the strong emphasis on applied learning. We regularly worked with real-world case studies, discussed current economic issues, and linked theoretical concepts to the Australian economy. The lecturers were approachable, supportive, and genuinely interested in student engagement—questions and discussions were always welcome.

QUT operates two major campuses: Gardens Point, located right in the city next to the Botanical Gardens (where all my classes took place), and Kelvin Grove, slightly north, focusing more on creative disciplines. The campus itself was modern, green, and open, with plenty of inviting spaces to study or connect—be it in the open-air cafés, study lounges, or on the lawn overlooking the river.

The university's international orientation was another standout feature. I met fellow students from all over the globe, especially during the orientation week ("O-Week"), barbecues, group projects, and student-organized events. It was the perfect place to think globally—and build international friendships.

Life in Brisbane: My Everyday Between River, Rooftops, and Relaxation

Brisbane quickly felt like a second home. It's a city big enough to offer urban flair, yet it retains a relaxed, almost village-like charm (in the best way possible—short distances and everything within reach). The people are friendly, laid-back, and know how to enjoy life—a spirit that's wonderfully contagious.

My shared flat in the Central Business District (CBD) was ideal: I could reach the campus within minutes by bus or CityCat (a ferry that runs along the river). I often went for morning runs along the Brisbane River, studied outdoors in the afternoons, or met up for coffee or dinner—daily life took place outside, in the sun.

Some of my most cherished memories are from the evenings spent on the rooftop of our student residence—watching the sunset over the city skyline, cooking together, and sharing stories. Instead of only visiting the classic tourist spots like the famous Lagoon, we often enjoyed smaller gatherings, such as weekly pub quizzes that brought international students from the residence together. On weekends, we took full advantage of Brisbane's prime location: in just about an hour by car (or 1.5 hours by train), we could reach the Gold Coast or Sunshine Coast. Even further afield but still easily accessible were highlights like Noosa, K'gari (Fraser Island), and Byron Bay—each destination felt like a mini-vacation.

Traveling in Australia – and Beyond

One of the greatest aspects of my exchange semester was the opportunity to truly explore Australia—far beyond Brisbane itself. Some of my travel highlights included:

- **Sunshine Coast:** Laid-back beaches, ideal surf conditions

- **Gold Coast:** Just an hour away—perfect for day trips or lively nights in Surfers Paradise
- **Byron Bay:** Magical sunrises at the lighthouse, dolphin spotting while surfing
- **National Parks:** Countless stunning waterfalls and hiking trails nearby

Fiji

For a complete contrast to the busy semester, I spent the semester break on the Fiji Islands—crystal-clear waters, palm trees, snorkeling, island hopping, and total relaxation. A dream come true.

End-of-Semester Trips

- **Cairns & Great Barrier Reef:** Snorkeling with friends, exploring the tropical north—an unforgettable experience
- **Sydney:** Bondi Beach, Harbour Bridge, Opera House, and amazing food—an ideal city getaway
- **Melbourne:** After the semester, a few days immersed in art, culture, and coffee. Trendy, diverse, and very international

New Zealand

Following the end of the semester, I traveled through New Zealand for three weeks in a campervan.

- **Queenstown:** The adrenaline capital, set against a breathtaking mountain backdrop
- **Milford Sound:** A boat tour through the fjord—truly awe-inspiring
- **Mount Cook & Lake Tekapo:** Hikes by day and stargazing by night—unforgettable
- And so much more...

Conclusion: What Remains – and What I Take With Me

My exchange semester in Brisbane was far more than just a few months of university abroad—it was an intense, inspiring, and truly transformative time. I not only discovered new places, languages, and cultures, but also learned a great deal about myself.

- I learned how to navigate a new environment—linguistically, culturally, and logistically
- I developed new routines, found favorite spots, and genuinely lived in a new city—not just stayed there
- I gained academic insights from a fresh perspective and experienced a different approach to studying
- I significantly improved my English—both in academic and everyday settings
- And I built friendships that will last across continents

When I think back on Australia, I think of an ideal lifestyle and the incredible vastness of the country. And I know for certain: I'll be back—someday.

Tips for Future Exchange Students at QUT

- Plan early: visa, vaccinations, flights—the sooner, the better for peace of mind and lower costs

- Make the most of O-Week and university events to meet people quickly (e.g., QUT Surfers)
- Travel as much as you can—but keep an eye on assignment deadlines!
- Consider working part-time (e.g., in a café) to meet locals and gain deeper cultural insights
- Be open and flexible—Australia has more to offer than you might expect

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