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Studying Abroad at San Francisco State University

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Student Perspective From:
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How difficult/easy was it to obtain a US visa?

I did not need to obtain a US visa due to having a US citizenship.

Where and how did you find temporary housing when you first arrived? How much did it cost? Describe your experience.

I first stayed at the Green Tortoise Hostel in the City, which I pre-booked before I arrived to San Francisco. I researched several hostels close by to the city, and the Green Tortoise had a good rating. It was approximately \$60 per night for a private room, and I arrived with a friend, so we split the cost, and it was \$30 each. It was a great, inexpensive place to stay for a couple of nights whilst I searched for permanent housing. They provide a free breakfast and free dinner on certain nights.

Where and how did you find permanent housing? How much rent do you pay? Are you happy with where you live? Describe your experience.

Before arriving in San Francisco, I researched several apartment complexes which were listed on the University website. However, I was told not to organize any living arrangements until I had arrived in San Francisco, to avoid fraud.

I arrived in San Francisco 3 days prior to the J-1 orientation program, so I didn't leave myself much time to find accommodations. Park Merced, a housing estate across from the University, seemed like a convenient option. I came to San Francisco with a friend that is also from Deakin University in Australia, so we had the intention of renting an apartment together for our 5 month stay.

The rent was slightly above our budget; however, due to the limited time we had before we started the semester, it seemed like the best option. The rent is \$2100 per month for a 5 month contract, so I pay \$1050 per month. I am very happy living at Park Merced. They offer many facilities such as a fitness centre, business center (where printing is free), laundry facilities etc.. If there was anything I could change, I would arrive at least 2 weeks

prior to starting the semester, so I could explore more accommodation options.

How difficult/easy is it to get around? What mode of transport do you use primarily (public transport, bicycle, car, walk)?

When I first arrived in San Francisco, I spent a lot of money catching taxis to and from the city whilst organizing permanent accommodations because of my luggage. Living across the road from the University is very convenient; it takes approximately 5 minutes to walk to the University. The MUNI is also located near Park Merced, and is my primary mode of transport if I need to go into the city or to my local shopping center. I have only taken BART once over to Oakland for a basketball game.

How do you access your money? Did you open an American bank account? If so, was it worthwhile?

Before I arrived, I organized a travel money card with an Australian bank. A travel money card is a prepaid credit/debit card that is loaded with US dollars. It has been fantastic and is very secure! I also needed to open an American bank account, which was an easy process because of my US citizenship. The only reason I opened an American bank account was because I have to have a checking account to pay my rent and also pay bills such as electricity and gas from that account.

Did you obtain a California driver's license? If so, was it worthwhile?

No, I have not obtained a Californian driver's license as I do not own a car here, and have no intention to drive a car.

Did you find San Franciscans to be helpful if you were in need?

Yes, everyone has been helpful and friendly! People are always intrigued when they hear a different accent.

Where did you obtain furniture for your room?

I rent my furniture monthly with a furniture rental company, Cort. It is approximately \$224 a month for a 2 double beds, 2 study desks and 2 chairs, 2 lamp and 2-piece dining set. My friend and I each pay \$112 per month.

This was the most convenient option for us. As we are only staying in San Francisco for 5 months it works out cheaper than buying furniture. It also saves the hassle of selling furniture before we leave. There are also plenty of great deals on Craigslist.org; however, it was difficult for us to arrange transportation of the furniture.

Primarily, do you buy groceries or do you eat out? Where and why?

Each week, my housemate and I shop at Trader Joes. The produce is fresh and at a reasonable price. We rarely eat out, as we like to cook and eat healthy. Trader Joes does not cater for other supermarket needs such as cleaning products, bathroom needs etc., so we shop at Walgreens for those items.

How difficult/easy was it to make friends? Describe your experience.

I came to San Francisco with a friend from my home University, which has not only been a great support, but also convenient for splitting the costs for accommodation, groceries etc. The J-1 orientation program was a great way to meet people when first arriving, as everyone is experiencing a similar transition. I have also meet friends in my classes at University. The IEEC weekly activities are also a great way to meet people. I recently attended a yoga class which was really fun and for free!

What IEEC commitment did you choose (flyering, tabling, language exchange, country ambassador, IEEC officer, special contribution)?

Describe your experience.

My IEEC commitment is participating as a **country ambassador** at the study abroad fair. I am currently in the process of organizing the table with other

Australians. The study abroad fair isn't until April, so I have not yet completed my task. I will also be volunteering for 5 hours in the OIP office.

Were you able to enroll in the classes you wanted?

Yes! It was fantastic that J-1 students had first preference to choose classes. As a 4th year student, I was limited to only four classes I could choose that would match up to my subjects back home, as it is my final year of study. Knowing that I was able to take all my classes here at SF State before I arrived was comforting.

How do your classes at SFSU compare to your classes at home?

The University system is quite different in terms of the exams and workload that I have back home in Australia. It is a new experience for me to complete mid-term exams and complete weekly homework. At Deakin University, a large proportion of marks are allocated to one final exam at the end of the semester, and a take-home assignment during the semester.

I would allow at least two weeks to settle into San Francisco before starting the semester, as it was quite difficult for me to organize living arrangements and start University at the same time. My first lot of mid-term exams came around very quickly, and it was quite overwhelming as I was just settling in and had a large workload.