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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?

Personally it was quite easy to actually obtain a U.S visa, however the actual process was quite tedious. The reason why I say it is tedious is because of all the different paperwork that was required and all the different fees that you had to pay. I recommend making sure that you do everything that has been asked properly the first time. One of the reasons why it was easy for me was because I followed every single thing that the U.S consulate in Melbourne, Australia asked. Some of these things were making sure that I had the exact requirements for the visa photo, paying all of my fees and the exact forms. Just remember: when obtaining a visa, you have to be patient and prepare to be waiting a long time. If you have gone through and done everything correctly the first time there will be no hassles.

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

I arrived in San Francisco a week before I actually found permanent housing. In the first week, I stayed in a hostel downtown called Green Tortoise Hostel. Because I came with another friend from Australia, the price was \$30 each per night. It was very cheap, but you got what you paid for. It's not the prettiest of places, but if you enjoy a friendly and laidback environment, then the Green Tortoise would be the way to go. I actually researched over the internet for cheap hostels back at home because I wanted to make sure that I had somewhere to stay as soon as I arrived. I enjoyed staying at the Green Tortoise, because it was located on Broadway, which made it a lot easier to get to places downtown. The staff was very helpful, and gave great directions on how to get to different places. They provided free breakfast—bagels, fresh fruit, tea and coffee every day, and free dinners on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays. However, by the 4th night there I was ready to find my permanent house.

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

Since I came to America with an Australian friend, we had both been looking at places on the internet before we arrived, and we both decided that we weren't going to choose a place until we actually arrived in San Francisco. The reason for that was to make sure that we weren't going to be ripped off, or taken advantage of because we hadn't actually been there to see the place, or speak directly to the landlord, so my friend and I started looking at some places on Craig's List and also at Park Merced (a housing estate located right next to campus).

The first place we decided to enquire about was in Park Merced and we went there with the intentions of just looking. Once we arrived there, we had a look at a place and really liked the idea of living there and the fact that it was so close to campus was a bonus. The only downfall was the price; it was quite expensive compared to some of the places we looked at on Craig's List, but it was within our budget and under the cost of living on campus. Also, because we were only going to be living there for 4 months, the rent was more expensive because the contract is normally for one year. We weighed up what was of more value to us, and also our patience was slowly fading, so we went for the house in Park Merced straight away. Just for rent alone it was \$1050/month.

I am really happy with where we live because I just walk to and from SFSU, and it's only a 20min MUNI trip on the light rail to downtown. It's also walking distance to do our groceries and my buddy also lives in Park Merced, so it's good for my social life. I'm glad that we chose to live near school because if I lived near downtown or the party places I would have spent a lot of money, and not focus on my studies.

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

Because I drive back at home in Melbourne, it has been really frustrating and quite difficult here. I have to walk and commute everywhere so when it came to buying things for the house it was very difficult transporting it from the shops to home. It's great going to school and the fact that I don't have to get up early and can always come home for lunch is amazing. When I want to go downtown, it's really easy because there's a light rail right in front of SFSU and takes only 20mins. However, it's annoying at times because, if I go out and come home late, I have to pay for taxis.

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

I personally didn't open up a bank account, but my roommate did because, to pay for rent, we had to use checks from an American bank account. In Australia we have a travel money card that is loaded up with USD and used just like a credit card. It has worked for me everywhere except for when we had to pay for our rent.

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

No, I did not obtain a California driver's license.

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

Yes, San Franciscans are helpful when you ask. A lot of people just do their own thing but when you do ask for help they are more than willing to help.

Where did you obtain furniture for your room?

We rented our furniture from a place called CORT. We got 2 beds, 2 desks and 2 desk chairs, 2 lamps, dining table and 2 chairs for \$224 per month. We decided to rent because we're only going to be living in our house for 4 months.

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

We have been trying to save our money for travelling at the end of our semester, so we have been buying groceries and cooking our own food. Our lunches are never bought; we always walk home and make our lunch to save our money. We buy our groceries from Trader Joe's, and find the produce to be very cheap and good quality.

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

Personally, I found it quite difficult to make friends at the start because everyone here at SFSU comes and goes and SFSU doesn't really have a big college atmosphere. In my classes there isn't a lot of interaction between people, but after the first month I did make study friends, and we work together on our homework. I also was assigned a buddy when I first got accepted to SFSU, and she has been amazing. She also lives in Park Merced and invites me to a lot of social events and introduced me to a lot of her friends.

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

I chose to be a **country ambassador**, and represented Australia at the Study Abroad Fair. The fair isn't until April, so as I am writing this, I haven't actually done it yet but it involves setting up a table and presenting Australia to potential American students who want to study abroad. I also have to volunteer 5 hours of work in the Office of International Programs. I chose to do my 5 hours all in one day and I helped work on ideas for the new website and also write up this experience report.

Were you able to enroll in the classes you wanted?

Yes, I was very lucky because my classes that I choose back at home in Australia were running for this spring semester and, being a J-1 student, I got priority registration. I had no hassles with my classes.

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

My classes here at SFSU are a lot different than my classes back at home. I study at Deakin University in Melbourne, and we have a different system of learning. For one, classes there are normally 2 lectures that go for an hour each, or one lecture that goes for 2 hours, followed by an hour tutorial. Our lecture rooms are big and some hold up to 500 people, and this is where the content is taught to you. Our tutorials are in smaller classrooms where there is a lot more one-on-one interaction and discussion. However, here at SFSU all my classes have two 80 minute classes a week, and are a lot smaller and take the form of a classroom-based environment. Back home, we don't have weekly tests or graded homework each week, and the final exam is worth a lot—some are worth 70% of your final grade. Whereas, over here there is a lot of emphasis on weekly tests and midterm exams; therefore, the final exam isn't worth a lot.