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# Studying Abroad at San Francisco State University

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### **How difficult/easy was it to obtain a US visa?**

Looking back, it was pretty easy to obtain a US visa but at the time, I thought it was one of the most daunting experiences ever. I had to pay many fees (SEVIS, application fee, and other miscellaneous fees) that totaled up to about \$400-\$500 to get my final visa. There were many forms to fill in and they cautioned that if you make a mistake, fees were non-refundable, so make sure that you have all your things right before the interview.

Once you paid all the fees and filled out all the forms, you had to schedule a consulate meeting. Based on my experience, be prepared to spend a long time there (3-4 hours wait time for an interview that lasted about 5-10 minutes). Again, bring all requested documents, and make sure that your photo meets the requirements specified. I think you also had to pay for an interview fee so make sure you pay that BEFORE you attend the interview. If you forget to pay the interview fee, or not have the right photograph, sometimes, they would be lenient and allow you to go down to the post office downstairs and get your paperwork in order. However, if you forget any of your documents, especially receipts, or forget to pay the SEVIS fee, your interview will be cancelled, and you'll have to reschedule and pay another interview fee when you book online.

Once the interview was over and I got approved, I think my visa came in the mail the day after. I'd definitely recommend going to the U.S Pre-Departure meeting that UTS emails you about at the U.S Consulate. I think it cost about \$10 and they serve some delicious bagels! Besides the food, you'll gain some valuable information that the UTS International Office does not provide. They will present you with a checklist to assist you with the Visa application process and it practically became my Bible while I was applying.

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

Craigslist.org is the way to go, but I think it took me forever to find the right house. For my other peers, looking for houses was quick and painless, but for me, even though I started to look for houses months before I was scheduled to go, I didn't find the house that I wanted until I arrived. Luckily, I had family in San Jose, but even then, it was a hassle to go to and from school since it took me about \$10 and 2-3 hours each way by BART and buses.

Desperate, I gave this house in Daly City a chance and it was lovely. It was this big Victorian house that was situated opposite a park. It came furnished, and rent was about \$750 a month. I only shared with one other person, and it was great because she was neat and tidy, and her house reflected that too. The only bad thing was the area, and according to a lot of my American friends, \$750 was too high of a price for a house in Daly City. Although it was safe and near the school (free shuttle at the Daly City BART station that took me about 5 minutes to walk to), I found it such a hassle to go to the city and it was hard for me to go home late when I went out because there was no public transportation in Daly City late at night. I always ended up getting rides from friends, but it became a big inconvenience.

If I had a chance to do it over again, I would definitely move closer to the city, even if it meant I had to wake up a little earlier to travel to school. I guess it depends on your purpose. If you are here to study and not go out as much, then I definitely think you should live closer to school. If you are here to have fun and experience the American culture, I would recommend living in areas closer to the city such as Mission, Haight, and Dolores Park where the fun usually lies.

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

As stated in the previous question, I found my house on Craigslist. I saw an ad, responded to the ad, got called by phone and then scheduled an interview/viewing of the house. I paid \$750/month in Daly City and that's considered extremely expensive for a house in that area. If you are willing to pay that much, I would definitely consider other areas closer to the city.

Overall, I'm pretty happy with where I live. I only share with one other person, all my utilities are paid for, the house is neat and there's a free shuttle that takes me to my university every day. I also have a friend coming over at the end of the year and my room mate was nice enough to let my friend stay over for the entire 2-3 weeks without paying anything extra. This doesn't usually happen with other houses since there are about 3 other people sharing with you.

However, since my room mate doesn't go to school, it was hard for me to get to know the real American culture. I had to rely on making friends by myself during classes and go out with people who didn't live with me. But then again, when I went to my friend's house, which he shared with 3-4 other college students, it was EXTREMELY messy and some house mates smoked. I asked him how the cleaning schedule works and he said, "The person who cleans is the person who gets fed up with it first." Since I'm a pretty clean person, I wouldn't be able to stand it if I were in his position. I guess that's a trade-off that you'd have to be willing to take or look for ads that state that they are looking for a non-smoking, clean person. Ask things BEFORE you make any deposits and use your assigned buddy to extract information from. They're definitely a helpful source!

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

To go to school, I only had to walk to the BART station (a train system pretty much like Sidney's Cityrail but with fewer delays), and get a free shuttle that dropped me off right in front of the school and took me home.

Shuttles usually came every 10 minutes. However, when I wanted to go out, I usually used the BART or the MUNI (buses).

San Francisco has a really comprehensive transportation system and I think I got told that EVERYWHERE is accessible by public transportation. If you think you're going to be travelling and exploring a lot, I would consider getting a Clipper/Muni pass, which costs around \$70/month. This allows you to go anywhere on the bus, MUNI, or BART within San Francisco for as many times as you want. Campus is huge and located on one block, not scattered around like UTS. During my time here, I've learnt to improve my power-walking skills since I'm always late for my next class.

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

I opened a bank account at Chase, and I got my parents to transfer money from my account in Australia to the account here. I tried to only send it once or twice because foreign transfer fees were \$20 from my bank account in Australia and \$15 from my bank account here, no matter the amount I sent. I think I got the College account, which is free and you can close your account after 90 days of opening it without any cancellation fee either. I don't think I spent any additional fees or anything while I was here.

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

No, I didn't. Even if I did, it would have been extremely hard to drive since they drive on the right side of the road, not left like we do back in Australia. Even escalators, I found myself going to the left, even though it's situated on the right. It caused a lot of embarrassing moments for me.

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

Yes, definitely. You only needed to ask, and they would try your best to help you.

**Where did you obtain furniture for your room?**

My room was fully furnished so I had no reason to get furniture.

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

I usually bought groceries on a weekly basis but ate out whenever I was out. Since SFSU is right next to Trader Joe's ( a small supermarket-ish store that has all the basic groceries and is organic), I just went to it every time I ran out of food. However, you MUST eat out in San Francisco. They have a wider range of food than Australia and relatively cheap!

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

Making friends was pretty easy! Everyone was really friendly because I had an accent and was from Australia. I was assigned a buddy before coming here and she was wonderful! She took me to places and introduced me to people. In class, again, as long as you're friendly, it's really easy to make friends since everyone in college wants to know one another.

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

I was a **country ambassador** and with other country ambassadors from Australia, I had to organize an Study Abroad Fair Day, which pretty much involved setting up a table that marketed Australia and our respective universities. It was a really fun experience and I also had to do 5 hours of Office volunteer, which meant that I went to the OIP office for an hour for 4-5 weeks. There, you did little errands or whatever needed to be done on the day.

**Were you able to enroll in the classes you wanted?**

Exchange students actually got a priority registration period, which allowed us to choose the classes before the rest of the students here. However, I really recommend you looking at the classes BEFORE the registration time because in America, there are many students, but few teachers and

resources. In order to get the class that I wanted, I had to be prepared. Because there was a class that was too early for my liking, I didn't go to the first class and got dropped from it. I had a period of time where I only had 3 classes, instead of the required 4 and I had to crash another class and ask to be added. It was a stressful time. Don't do this. Get your classes sorted before anything else.

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

In UTS, I usually had a 2 hour lecture and a 1 hour tutoring every week. Here, I had a class that ran for 3 hours every week, 2 classes that ran for 50 minutes 3 times a week and a class that ran for 1.5 hours twice a week. All my classes had a smaller number of students (around 20 to 30) in comparison to UTS, and they really encouraged participation.