A semester down under

## Before departure

I have always wanted to go to Australia so being able to go there for an exchange was a great opportunity. I choose USYD because I wanted to experience life in Sydney, looking back maybe next time if I would like to experience more of Australia I could have gone to Queensland – a place where all the dangerous animals are living. Sydney was great and I love it as a city. It is very safe and comfortable for foreigners, and I hope I will come back one day. Before the departure, I had to apply for a visa (it is just an online form which is quite long, but I was granted the visa in 2 days after the submission without having to go to any embassy).

## Upon arrival

I arrived in Sydney 10 days before school started and was happy with it. I had quite a jetlag for a couple of days, so it is definitely a good idea to be there a week before at least. A week before the uni starts there is an orientation week happening. You get to do some treasure hunts and trips. Everything is happening in quite a big group which makes it sometimes harder to connect with people, but it is great that you can meet all of them, so definitely make sure to sign up. There is also a union fair with a lot of associations to choose from. There is a USU that creates many events and is free to join for every student!

## Financials

We received insurance from KTH, which saves you some money. Otherwise, Sydney is quite expensive accommodation-wise. Don’t always take accommodation that the university offers to you. Some offers are way more expensive than others. I stayed in Scape for 500 AUD per week(accommodation offered by the Australian coordinator) but I would recommend staying in University Village instead. The food is as bit cheaper than in Stockholm, especially seafood and fish! Also, the services such as restaurants are more affordable than in Stockholm.

## Accommodation

I have already mentioned earlier the accommodation. Also, accommodation directly from USYD seemed quite nice and less expensive. In general, kitchens were small and not really ready for actual cooking. Seems like Australian students are mostly getting takeout – which is cheaper than in Stockholm though. All the accommodation I mentioned was situated close to the university, so the distance wasn’t a problem. If you decide to stay with Scape make sure you will be staying in the new buildings! The price is the same but the building (eg. Scape Redfern) differs a lot. I stayed in Scape Sydney Central, which was old, but the location was incredible.

## University and studies

USYD is a very big university with a beautiful campus. Architecture faculty has its own charm, with a bunker look. The school is open 24/7 and there is a shared space for all master students to work in and a lot of strong computers to run your renders overnight on.

## Courses

Choosing courses was a bit tricky. You get an Excel sheet and you can choose a course from any field, then you must consult it with your study coordinator. The problem was that once you need to change anything it was very tricky to reach the Australian coordinators, otherwise it should have been quite easy. It affected my beginning experience because I was not able to choose a studio I would wish to have because of this delay. If there is a problem like that the coordinators will tell you to wait and don’t go to classes until it is resolved – my experience is that it will make your life way easier if you are there on the first day.  
I took the following courses:  
Studio 1  
The website shows a prerequisite for this class but if you have done any master studio at KTH you can take it, they just have to approve it with your portfolio. It is a studio for everyone who is not in their first semester of master’s. You should choose a studio, but I got assigned because I got approved for that too late. I was in a FIRE in the city, which was a great studio taught by Maren Koehler. It was partially historical research and speculation about the future reuse of financial buildings (banks, insurance companies). Maren is a great tutor and very structured work I can only recommend her. It is group work, which is always tough when you don’t know anyone, but from what I heard other studios are also group work. It is quite a lot of work, but I think it is worth it especially if you work with interesting people on an interesting project.

Ethical Practice in architecture

An open discussion seminar about ethical issues focused quite a bit on the indigenous people and their approach to them in Australia. There are two assignments completed in pairs again – retcon assessment study. I think that it is a good course if you want to understand more relationships between Australian inhabitants and you like discussing topics without right and wrong answers. The teacher is kind and the course is very enjoyable.

Scriptwriting and directing

I choose an elective from film school at usyd and I was really grateful that our study coordinator allowed me to do that. As it was a new field, I learned so much and I think storytelling, which was part of this course, is a topic shared also with architecture. I can only recommend this course. Even though I had no experience I produced a short movie and was able to complete the course with no problems.

## City and country

Sydney is a beautiful city even though it was rainier than I expected, especially in the autumn months. Sun is very strong. NSW is one of the safest places in Australia, there are not many spiders or snakes and jellyfish. There are a lot of beautiful parks and beaches. You can surf on almost all of them. There is great public transport within the central city. Reaching the suburbs is a bit more time consuming. There is a great train connection to Melbourne and Greyhound busses around the east coast.

## Leisure and social activities

In my free time I played beach volleyball in one of the (surprisingly) few clubs in Sydney. The university offers only normal volleyball and a lot of other sports. Also, there are two gyms where you can buy a membership. I spent a lot of time on the beach or running in the city. There is a China town nearby and also a darling harbour with many different places to hang out.

## Sustainability

Sustainability is a thing that many people talk about in Sydney but there is not much happening sadly. It starts with tons of useless freebies for new students and ends with a lack of any recycling bins on campus. It is not a USYD problem though, but the problem of NSW/Australia.

## Other recommendations and observations

There are a lot of markets, exhibitions, and shows happening in Sydney every week so just search for whatever you are interested in and I am certain you will find something. Definitely visit Byron Bay, for me that was the essence of true Australia.