

VICTORIA ABROAD



PRE-DEPARTURE INFORMATION FOR OUTGOING EXCHANGE STUDENTS

EXPERIENCE THE WORLD!



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INTRODUCTION

First of all, **CONGRATULATIONS!** You are about to embark on the experience of a lifetime! Studying abroad will introduce you to new places, ideas and more often than not, a new group of lifelong friends. This experience will leave you more open to other cultures, knowledgeable, confident and more attractive to prospective employers.

Please read this booklet as part of your preparation process. Being well prepared for your time abroad will make your exchange experience less stressful and leave you with more time to concentrate on enjoying yourself (and studying!). This booklet contains important information about managing your enrolment, dealing with any emergencies and much more, so please keep it handy for the duration of your time abroad and also for when you arrive home again.

We would like to encourage you to keep in touch with us. Please let us know if there is anything we forgot to warn you prior to your departure, let us know if you are having any problems, or just tell us about the great time you are having!

All the very best for a wonderful time abroad.

The Victoria Abroad team, on behalf of Victoria University

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SECTION 1: BEFORE YOU GO

VICTORIA UNIVERSITY ADMINISTRATION

Your Study Plan

- You must complete your study plan with your Victoria University (VU) course coordinator/international program coordinator's signature and submit it to the Victoria Abroad office before you depart. This ensures that your studies overseas will be credited to your VU degree.
- Be aware: If you need to change your subject choices while you are overseas, you must obtain written permission from your VU course coordinator/international program coordinator. An email is fine, but make sure you send a copy of the email to Victoria Abroad and print out and retain a copy for yourself. You will need verification of your course coordinator's consent to accredit your overseas subjects towards your VU degree.

Enrolment

- It is **EXTREMELY IMPORTANT** that you are correctly enrolled at VU for the semester(s) you are studying overseas. To organise this, you will need to contact the relevant International Student Advice Officer as soon as you have received your official acceptance letter from your host institution:

Faculty of Arts, Education and Human Development

Farrah Itaywi

Room 412D, Building E, Footscray Park Campus

Ph: (03) 9919 4046 / Email: farrah.itaywi@vu.edu.au

Faculty of Business and Law

Tina Jeggo

Room 3.24, Building A, Footscray Park Campus

Ph: (03) 9919 1549 / Email: tina.jeggo@vu.edu.au

Faculty of Health, Engineering and Science

Philomena Fernandes

Room 4C 439, Building 4, St Albans Campus

Ph: (03) 9919 2178 / Email: philomena.fernandes@vu.edu.au

- If you are unable to attend a scheduled enrolment session in December or June, you will need to make sure you organise a proxy to enrol in your absence. **IMPORTANT:** if you do not re-enrol, you may lose your place in your VU course. You can download a higher education proxy form at: www.vu.edu.au/current-students/student-essentials/commonly-used-forms

VU Travel Grants

The following documents need to be submitted to Victoria Abroad in order to receive a VU Travel Grant:

- Student Travel Grant Acceptance and Payment form
- Victoria Abroad Student Agreement
- Copy of the acceptance letter from your host institution

The travel grant will be deposited into your bank account within about three to four weeks of submitting ALL of the above paperwork. Please note that you are only eligible to receive a travel grant once during your studies at VU.

UMAP and Endeavour Scholarships

If you have been informed by Victoria Abroad that you will be receiving a UMAP or Endeavour Scholarship, the following documents need to be submitted to Victoria Abroad in order for your Scholarship to be processed:

- Endeavour or UMAP Acceptance and Payment Form
- Victoria Abroad Student Agreement Form
- Copy of the acceptance letter from your host institution

The scholarship will be deposited into your bank account within about three to four weeks from submitting ALL of the above paperwork. Please note that you will receive the scholarship INSTEAD of the VU Travel Grant. If you go on exchange for two semesters, then you will still be eligible to apply for the VU Travel Grant.

Note: Centrelink expects you to declare scholarship/grant moneys as income, but the Tax Office does not. This is because scholarship/grant moneys are considered to be ex-gratia payments, not 'earned'.



TRAVEL AND IMMIGRATION



Flights

- It is worth doing some research to find the cheapest airfare. Book your flight as early as possible!
- What luggage weight does your ticket allow? Keep this in mind as you think about what you need to take with you.

Passport and Visas

- Make sure your passport is valid for the duration of your time abroad, plus an additional six months.
- To find out about the visa application process for your host country, ask your travel agent or contact the consulate of the country/countries you are travelling to. Details are also available at: www.dfat.gov.au/geo
Please note that Victoria Abroad is not at liberty to provide you with information about obtaining visas for overseas countries.
- Carefully read through the terms and conditions of your student visa. These terms and conditions will inform you as to whether or not you can work while on exchange, what your attendance at university must be (usually 80 per cent), and if you can travel in and out of the country freely (without any additional visas).
- Be aware that a visa does not guarantee you entry into a country; entry is still at the discretion of the immigration official. You should also not assume you can change category of visa easily, e.g. from student to tourist. This is something you should investigate before you leave Australia.
- If you are an international student, you must submit a letter to the Australian Department of Immigration and Citizenship from the Victoria Abroad office which confirms your participation in the exchange program. This must be done at least 28 days prior to your departure.

Getting Around

- If you intend to drive overseas, contact the RACV to find out about obtaining an International Driving Permit. Information is available at: www.racv.com.au/travel
- Look into purchasing an International Student Card from STA Travel for discounts on travel world-wide as well as some hostels, tours and tourist attractions. Information is available at www.statravel.com.au/cps

Researching your Destination

- You can do a lot of research online...check out the safety advice and country specific information at www.dfat.gov.au/geo/fs/
- You might like to buy a travel guide to your destination country. *Lonely Planet* and *Rough Guides* are suitable for younger, budget travellers. The *Culture Shock* guides to living abroad are informative and especially helpful if you are going to a non-western country.
- To research your host institution, speak to returned exchange students and read through the information on your host institutions website. You could also ask Victoria Abroad staff whether they have any hard copies of information on your host institution that you might be able to keep.

INSURANCE

Health and Travel Insurance

- Health and travel insurance is compulsory for all VU exchange students. Your options are to, 1. Arrange your own insurance and provide Victoria Abroad with a copy of the policy or; 2. Take out VU travel insurance which is free and valid for 180 days including a maximum of 30 days personal travel. All exchange students must submit a VU Travel Authority Form regardless of whether you take out your own insurance or VU insurance. The Travel Authority Form is available at the Victoria Abroad website <http://www.vu.edu.au/current-students/student-exchange-program/apply-for-the-exchange-program>
- Students on exchange for more than one semester can purchase additional coverage through the VU Finance Department at a cost of A\$75 per month.
- You should be aware that many host institutions require students to purchase specific health insurance.
- If you are buying a policy of your own, do some thorough research. If you plan on doing any adventure sports, such as skiing, horse riding, mountain bike-riding, taekwondo, check to ensure you are covered for these activities.
- Your insurance should cover you for the entire period you are away, including the transit period.
- Make sure your insurance policy provides cover for travel cancellations, just in case your exchange is postponed or cancelled for some reason.
- Make sure 24-hour assistance is available under your travel insurance policy.
- Most policies will not cover you for drug or alcohol related incidents, or for travel to countries where DFAT has advised against travel – see www.smartraveller.gov.au

FINANCES

- Think about a 'Plan B' in case an emergency arises and you run out of money. Possibilities could include:
 - having an emergency-only credit card
 - seeking more money or a loan from your parents or other relative
 - arranging for someone at home to sell something of value, e.g. your car
- Plan ahead for the filing of your income tax return. Make sure your income payment summaries (group certificates) are sent to a permanent home address.



Centrelink Payments

- If you are currently receiving Austudy, Youth Allowance or Abstudy, you can apply to have these payments continue while you are overseas. You will need a letter from Victoria Abroad confirming your participation in the exchange program. Be sure to contact us well before your departure to obtain this letter.
- If you were previously not eligible to receive Centrelink payments, going on exchange can sometimes mean that you become eligible under Centrelink's 'studying far from home' criteria. For more information, visit: www.centrelink.gov.au

Working Whilst on Exchange

- Research the employment situation in your destination country. While combining work and study is common in Australia, in many countries it is not. Problems you may face with working overseas are, 1. There may be no work opportunities for you; 2. Your visa may not allow you to legally work; 3. Your academic timetable may leave little time work. Some overseas institutions prohibit you from working without permission (e.g. Ludwigsburg, Germany). Do not rely on financing your exchange through work overseas.

Taking Money Abroad

- In order to make sure you are always covered in an emergency, it is best to have access to money in a number of different ways. We have put together a list of possible ways to access money while overseas:
 - credit card
 - debit card
 - look into setting a 'travel money card', e.g. at Commonwealth Bank, from Australia before you leave.
 - setting up a bank account in the host country and having money wired (transferred) over.
 - American Express or Western Credit Union money transfer
 - cash (small amounts only, for when you first arrive)
- Make sure you have the details of who to contact if you lose your credit/bank cards and that you keep copies of your bank details in a safe place.
- You can check current exchange rates online at www.xe.com

HOUSING

- If your host university has not organised housing for when you first arrive, make a reservation in a youth hostel or backpacker accommodation before you depart. This will give you a chance to search for accommodation options after you arrive.
- The international student advisor at your host university should be able to assist you with your search for housing. Email your host institution about housing well before you arrive.



HEALTH

General

- Organise dental and general health check-ups before you leave. You should speak to your doctor about what vaccinations you need for the countries you are visiting as soon as possible. If you don't have a regular GP, visit VU's Student Services Health Service at Footscray Park Campus or go to a 'Travel Doctor' medical centre. For locations, visit: www.traveldoctor.com.au
- If you have any chronic health problems (e.g. asthma, diabetes, heart disease) speak to your doctor or specialist about how to manage your condition while abroad. Make sure you take with you any required documentation about your condition. Discuss with your doctor or specialist what you should do in the case of an acute episode.
- Put together a health 'kit' before you go, with things like cold and flu tablets, paracetamol, rehydration salts, a good vitamin supplement and something like 'Imodium' for traveller's diarrhoea. You should speak to your doctor about the specific health risks of the country you are going to, and prepare yourself accordingly. Some useful websites include:
www.who.int/ith/en/
www.cdc.gov/travel
- Stock up on contact lenses and/or take a spare pair of glasses with you overseas. Carry a copy of your lens prescription with you, so that if you lose your glasses or contact lenses you can replace them easily.
- Depending on what country you are travelling to, it might also be a good idea for female students to bring a stock of preferred sanitary items as these might be difficult to obtain locally.

Prescription Medication

- If you take prescription medication (such as the contraceptive pill), seek advice from your doctor about stocking up before you go. Cost may be a factor: medication may be cheaper here because of our Pharmaceutical Benefit Scheme, especially if you have a Health Care Card.
- If you decide to travel with prescription medication, make sure you take a copy of the prescription, as Customs may query it. Make enquiries also to ensure that you are permitted to take the medication into your destination country.

- See if your doctor can tell you what name your medication is sold as overseas as it may have a different brand name. It may also be useful to ask your doctor to write a letter citing the ingredients of the medication so you can get an equivalent medication.
- Your airline will need to be notified before you leave of any drugs you need to take intravenously on your flight (e.g. insulin for diabetics).

DOCUMENTS TO TAKE WITH YOU

- Take contact details for the following:
 - Your VU course coordinator/international program coordinator
 - Your host institution study abroad office
 - Your bank in Australia
 - Centrelink case officer
 - The Australian Embassy in the country you are going to – see www.dfat.gov.au/missions
- Make sure you keep a copy of your passport details, airline ticket, credit card and any other important documents in a separate place in your luggage. You might also want to leave a copy of these details with a trusted relative or friend in Australia.
- Make sure you have a copy of your host institution acceptance letter, proof of funds and proof of accommodation to ensure a swift passage through immigration once you arrive in your host country.
- Take details of your travel insurance policy and leave a copy with your next-of-kin.
- Take a copy of your transcript of results. You may need this to enrol in subjects that have prerequisites at your host university.
- Take a copy of your proof of enrolment, VU student card or ISIC card in case you need to prove you are a student (for travel concessions).
- Take any documentation relating to your health, such as prescription documents.

BEFORE YOU LEAVE

- Register with the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) before you leave Australia. By registering with DFAT, you are allowing yourself to be easily tracked down in the case of an emergency, such as a natural disaster or civil disturbance. Register online at: www.smarttraveller.gov.au



SECTION 2: WHILE YOU ARE AWAY

WHEN YOU FIRST ARRIVE

- Let your parents/family/friends back at home know you have arrived safely.
- Make contact with the exchange/study abroad coordinator at your host institution.

COMMUNICATION

- **Keep us informed:** Make sure you email your new contact details to the Victoria Abroad Team educationabroad@vu.edu.au as soon as you are settled. Please include your mailing address, email address and mobile number. We can then contact you if there are any important issues at VU you should know about.
- **Keep your family and friends informed:** Stay in regular touch with friends and family at home. If you are planning to go travelling, even for a weekend, make sure that you leave your itinerary (even if it is provisional) with a friend or relative, and let people around you know where you are going.
- **Work out a system for calling home:** Use phone cards from the local newsagent/store or phone reverse charges (note that this can be an expensive option). Skype is a wonderful (and cheap) way to stay in contact. Download Skype at www.skype.com/intl/en/home
- In an emergency you should phone your parents/next of kin, the nearest Australian Consulate, and the study abroad office at both your host institution and Victoria University as soon as you can.

WELLBEING AND SAFETY

Safety

There are risks involved with being in a foreign country on your own. Jetlag and not knowing your way around, understanding local customs or speaking the local language can mark you out as a potential target for crime. Being well prepared will make all the difference.

When you are new to an area, make an extra effort to keep safe. Jetlag may make a 4.00am walk seem like a sensible option – but it's not! Once you are settled and know your way around, you will probably have developed a good sense of what is safe and what's not, but until then it is worth being extra cautious.

Here are some tips to help you keep safe in a new area:

- Do not give out your phone number or personal details freely.
- When going to a bank or ATM, go with a friend and stay alert.
- Taxis are not always safe. Travel with a friend, especially at night and especially if you are a woman.
- Take cues from locals. If local women do not wear short skirts and tank tops, you probably should not either. If locals do not drink in public, then you should not.
- Ask fellow students for advice about the local area.
- Listen to local news bulletins to keep informed about what's happening around you.
- Only accept home visits from people you know well.
- Be wary also about accepting invitations into the homes of people you have just met.
- Always buy your own drinks and keep an eye on them.

Health

Jetlag, unfamiliar food and new bugs all take their toll on your health. Feeling rundown and tired is typical within your first weeks in a new country. Take care of your health at this time. Here are some tips:

- Be careful with water, including ice-cubes, milk (often diluted with water) and washed vegetables.
- Make sure you are getting enough sleep.

- Eat well – make sure you have a balanced diet, not just 2-minute noodles and chips.
- Make sure you practise safe sex. Note that incidence of STDs and AIDS is high in many countries.
- You might want to consider taking a vitamin supplement to help your body cope with new bugs, exhaustion and strange food.

Emotional Wellbeing and Homesickness

The emotional ups and downs of arriving in a new country and experiencing a different culture is called 'culture shock'. This is a normal response to moving to a different culture. Symptoms will vary from person to person. Some symptoms can include:

- Depression
- Irritability
- Exhaustion
- Withdrawal
- Headaches
- Frustration
- Disorientation
- Lack of motivation

Culture shock is caused by stress resulting from the uncertainty of being in a different environment. Many of the differences are obvious – like the climate, the food, the absence of friends and family – but many are subtler and may only become apparent after being away for some time. They include differences in:

- How people make decisions
- How people resolve conflicts
- How people make friends
- How people express themselves

You probably do not think about these things at home as you know how to behave and what to expect from others. All the signs and rules are clear to you at home.

While unpleasant, culture shock is an indication that you are redefining yourself, learning, adapting and changing. As the saying goes, 'no pain, no gain', and there is certainly a lot to be gained from your Victoria Abroad experience.

Some symptoms you should be aware of are:

- Overvaluing your own culture – Australia suddenly becomes an amazing Utopia in your mind where everything is done properly and people make sense.
- Undervaluing your host culture – nothing in your host country is good enough compared to Australia.

If you need help, seek it out. Most universities will have a counselling service you can access if you need to speak to someone.

Things you can do to make life easier

Here are some things you can do to keep yourself going when you are really missing home:

- Get plenty of physical exercise, such as walking, yoga or team sports.
- Invest in friendships. If you support your friends, they will support you.
- Establish simple goals to avoid being overwhelmed.
- Seek out help from a tutor, friend or someone at home. Find a mentor.
- Keep in touch with people at home. They will be able to support you, and you will not feel so far away from them. This also helps to make coming home easier.
- Keep active and engaged in your new environment.
- Make sure also that you have enough personal space and some quiet times just for yourself.
- Keep a diary. Describe the situation, what it means to you and your response to it. Expressing a problem usually makes it easier.
- Build and maintain a blog – and let us know the link.
- Relax and meditate.

- Plan how you will act next time you feel this way.
- Use the experience to further develop your life skills, such as patience, stress tolerance, inner security, emotional maturity, flexibility, openness and a positive attitude.

If you are not OK...

If you are experiencing personal problems such as depression, difficulties with drinking or anything else, first of all seek help from a counsellor, doctor or friend where you are. If you are having trouble accessing help, the following online resources may help:

www.health.vic.gov.au/drugs

www.druginfo.adf.org.au

www.ysas.org.au

www.aa.org.au

REPRESENTING AUSTRALIA AND VICTORIA UNIVERSITY

Remember that while you are overseas, you are an ambassador for Australia and for Victoria University. Please be mindful of the rules of your host university and the laws of your host country. Be aware of what is and is not culturally acceptable in your host culture, e.g. public displays of affection, drinking, and acceptable behaviour for men and women. Ask somebody, such as a trusted classmate, if you are not sure. Remember your Student Agreement - you have agreed to abide by the rules of your host institution and country.



Be prepared that people might ask you about Australian politics, environmental issues, foreign policy, attitude towards refugees, population, geography, sports, arts, culture, etc.

If you find yourself being asked sticky questions about Australia that you can't answer, there are a few online resources you can access including:

- <http://australia.visahq.com> - This is the website of the Australian Embassy in Washington DC. It has good general information about Australia.
- www.abc.net.au/ra/australia - The Radio Australia has a wealth of useful information aimed at developing an understanding of Australia and its people.

Before you leave you can get an Australian flag free of charge by writing to your local Member of Parliament. They will also send you a copy of the lyrics for 'Advance Australia Fair'. This may be the opportunity to learn the second verse!

ADMINISTRATION ISSUES

What if... you are sent a bill for fees?

The basis of an exchange program is reciprocal tuition waiver. You will not have to pay tuition fees at your host institution. You may have to pay for housing, health insurance or a materials fee in some instances. If you receive a bill for tuition, see the study abroad advisor at your host institution and they will be able to help sort this out for you.

What if... you want to change your subjects?

If you need to change your subject choices while you are overseas, you must obtain written permission from your course coordinator. An email is fine, but make sure you cc educationabroad@vu.edu.au in your emails and print it off and retain copies of all documentation. You will need verification of your course coordinator's consent to accredit your study abroad subjects towards your degree.

What if... you want to extend your exchange for another semester?

Extending your exchange for an additional semester can be possible for some students, however it is certainly not guaranteed. If you decide that you want to extend your exchange, inform Victoria Abroad staff educationabroad@vu.edu.au as early as possible. Victoria Abroad and your host institution will both need to approve you to stay on for an extra semester. The next step is to ask for approval from your VU Course Coordinator. Your Course Coordinator must approve you to take an additional full time semester load at your host institution and you must be receiving credit for all subjects. If your Course Coordinator does not approve you to stay on, then an extension will not be possible.

SECTION 3: ON YOUR RETURN

ADMINISTRATION

Transcripts

Depending on your exchange university, transcripts either come to the Victoria Abroad office or go directly to you. If transcripts are sent to the Victoria Abroad office, we send a scanned copy to the faculty so they can credit your studies towards your VU degree and hold on to the original for you to come by and pick it up. If the transcripts are sent directly to you, it is your responsibility to take them to the international support officer in your faculty for accreditation.

Returned Student Report

Upon completion of your exchange, you will be required to complete a "Returned Student Report". The report is a great opportunity for you to share your experiences with Victoria Abroad and provide valuable advice for future exchange students. With your permission, an excerpt and photo from your report could even be chosen for future exchange publications!

SETTLING BACK

Reverse Culture Shock

Reverse culture shock can seem like a bad joke when you first get back. Coming home was supposed to be the easy part! But you will have changed, learnt a lot and probably done a lot of growing up. All of these factors put a distance between you and your friends and family.

Below are some tips to make coming home and settling in easier:

- Allow yourself time. Don't expect to fit in immediately. You will have some catching up to do.
- Talking about your experiences to friends and family is important, but don't forget they have had many experiences of their own while you've been away. Be sure to listen as well.
- Remember, your family and friends have probably been missing you. Make sure you let them know you are glad to be home and to see them again. You will need your friends in the time ahead.
- Beware of making comparisons. All cultures are a mixture of good and bad. Try to keep a balanced view.
- Make time for yourself to reflect on your experiences.
- Keep in touch with your friends abroad. This way, your contacts will stay with you even though you have returned home.
- Recall how you adapted to being away. Remember how much you have learnt from your time away (see below). This will help you realise the huge gains you have made.

Most of all, make sure you attend the VU re-entry program. You will be informed of the date on your return. This is a great opportunity to deal with any re-entry issues – and more importantly, to capitalise on your experience by debriefing with students who've had similar experiences, identifying what you've achieved, and gaining valuable practice in articulating your experience to others.

Remember what you have gained!

If things are getting tough being back at home, remember the amazing benefits you have accrued while studying abroad:

- *Independence.* You took on the adventure of going to a new place, you learnt to take care of yourself in a foreign culture and you adapted to a new way of doing things.
- *Increased awareness of international issues.* You have stepped out of your comfort zone and can now see the world from a new perspective, and are thus aware of Australian biases.
- *Sensitivity to differences.* You have experienced very different ways of thinking, feeling, communicating and studying, all of which are no less valid than the way you do things. This should help you understand and appreciate people who are different to you.
- *Competency in another language.* If you studied in a language other than English, your proficiency will have improved enormously.
- *Networking.* You now have a new set of friends, contacts and mentors, many of whom you will keep for life, and also the skills to network more broadly in future.

Passing the Baton

Did you have a great time abroad? Then pass on the good word! We are very keen to recruit more students to study abroad. Speak to the Victoria Abroad team about how you can help. Here are some suggestions for spreading the word:

- Tell your friends and classmates
- Offer to give a talk to your class/club/society
- Write an article for SEED, a magazine which is produced by Victoria University students
- Start up a networking group for returned exchange students
- Volunteer to be a guide for incoming international students
- Help out at the VU Annual Exchange Fair Day held in March/April.

AXAN

Another great way to keep in touch with students who have been on exchange is to join AXAN, the Australian Exchange Alumni Association Incorporated. It is a network for anyone in Australia who has studied overseas in some form – an exchange program, study tour, internship, clinical placement or volunteering program. AXAN is about sharing the incredible energy and experience that is studying overseas. Victoria Abroad fully supports this association and encourages you to become a member, attend social functions and take advantage of networking opportunities. Join AXAN online now: www.axan.com.au

AND FINALLY ...

We hope you enjoy your time away. Like we said at the beginning of this booklet, going on exchange is a positive life-changing experience. With your exchange experience on your resume, we are sure you will find you have a lot to contribute to the workplace, your university, your community and your friends.

Good luck!

The Victoria Abroad Team

