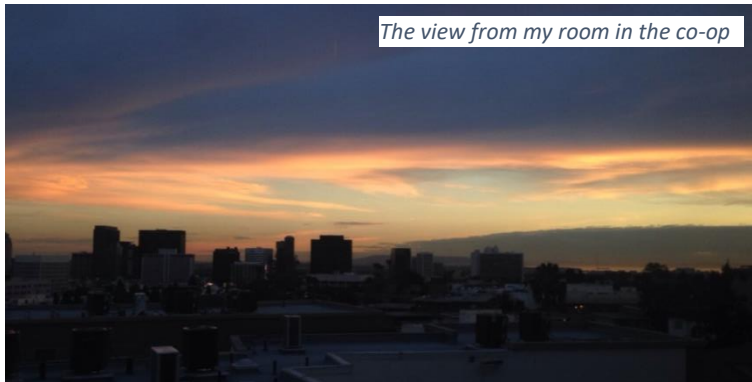


University of California Los Angeles (UCLA)
2017 Semester 1
Bachelor of Science; Genetics and Zoology

Accommodation & Eating

In LA there are three options for student accommodation: the UCHA co-op, dorms, and apartments. I stayed in the co-op which is by far the cheapest option of the three. It works on cooperative living, like a flat of 400 people! Each week you have to do four hours of chores like cleaning the bathroom, general maintenance, or helping in the kitchen. Food is included in your rent and it is only a 10min walk to campus.

The dorms are the most expensive option but the most convenient as they are located on campus. Meals are not included so you will have to purchase a meal plan that gives you access to the many eating locations on campus. I've heard from many people that UCLA has some of the best food out



The view from my room in the co-op

of the university's in America. You can also organise a space in an apartment before you arrive. UCLA provides some good information and resources for how to go about organising a space in an apartment. This option gives you the most flexibility with food. This is the way to go if you want to prepare your own food, or you can also purchase a meal plan and eat on campus.

No matter what accommodation you choose, be prepared to share a room. Some lucky people I knew only had one roommate, the most common is to have three in a room but I had a friend in an apartment with 7 in a room! It takes some adjusting to get used to roommates but it really is part of the UCLA experience.

Money matters

Personally for my money access I used an Air New Zealand One Smart card which you load up like a cash passport and get free ATM withdrawals, and I got to earn airpoints along the way. I also took my New Zealand credit card as I had to use it to pay my rent and it was very handy when traveling and using hotel rooms. It was also a nice back up as the one smart card took a day to process the money you load. Other exchange students opened American bank accounts and used an American card. This also has its benefits as a statement from an American bank account was an easy proof of your American address when applying for a state ID or social security number.

Another money matter is the fact that all the UCs ask for proof of funds before you leave NZ. You cannot include the money you will get from student loan living costs or allowance so you might need to save a bit more or ring those helpful parents to provide evidence of the required funds.



Some photos of the UCLA campus

Academics/course load

I would HIGHLY recommend taking the minimum course load of 12pts per quarter. You are going to be so busy on exchange trying to explore and the last this you need is extra work weighing you down. Plus, the quarter system is much more full-on than semesters at Otago. There are more smaller assignments throughout and less weight on the final exam compared to Otago. I had some exams that were only worth 20%, and some of my classes didn't even have a final exam! It sounds great, and it is as long as you stay on top of the assignments and midterms during the quarter. Another thing to consider is that UCLA has restricted class sizes and exchange students are some of the last to have the chance to sign up for classes, so I recommend having a lot of classes on your learning agreement (I filled two pages and that was just enough!) and don't get too attached to one certain class you really want. However, some professors (lecturers) are really nice and if you contact them personally they can sometimes squeeze you into their class.

Transportation

The main mode of transportation I used was buses. There was a student pass for (GO Bruin Flash Pass) \$60 per quarter that gives you unlimited rides on Big Blue buses, Culver City buses and all Metro lines (including trains). Or it is only 50c per bus ride with your bruin card (student ID). The other transportation mode I used was Uber. This is more expensive than the bus but a lot cheaper than a taxi. It also works out well if there is a group of you going somewhere together. You can download the Uber app and link it to your New Zealand card so you don't have to worry about having the exact change like the bus. Ubers also have a set fare so even if you get stuck in LA traffic (which you will!) then it won't cost you any extra.



My campsite at Sequoia National Park

Weather

When I arrived in LA in January, it was an unusually cold and rainy winter. For LA, this meant an average temperature of 15 degrees with a few odd showers! LA is always hotter and dryer than New Zealand so I wouldn't recommend packing more than one jersey! However, if you plan on doing some adventuring, it does get colder up North in places like San Francisco and Yosemite, I even camped surrounded by snow in Sequoia National Park.

Things to do

There is so much to do in LA, it is almost overwhelming! There are theme parks such as Universal Studios, Six Flags, Knotts Berry Farm, Disneyland and California Adventure. Plus, the LA Zoo and a bunch of museums (main ones like The Museum of Natural History and the Getty, as well as many small obscure ones like The Museum of Broken Relationships). There are also many close hiking trails such as in Griffith Park and Runyon Canyon for if you are in need of an escape from the city.



Enjoying a butterbeer at Harry Potter World at Universal Studios



The Museum of Natural History



Firework display at Disneyland!

LA also has a great variety of food! If you're a fan of sushi you have to try a poke bowl, which is a type of raw fish salad very popular in California.

And you can't forget the classic tourist spots in LA such as the Hollywood sign, Walk of Fame, Rodeo Drive, Santa Monica Pier, Griffith Observatory and Sunset Boulevard. I also thoroughly enjoyed visiting the La Brea Tar Pits where the remains of mammoths, dire wolves, and other prehistoric animals have been preserved in naturally occurring asphalt pits. The park is free to visit and there is a small museum on site that displays all the remains that have been discovered in the pits.

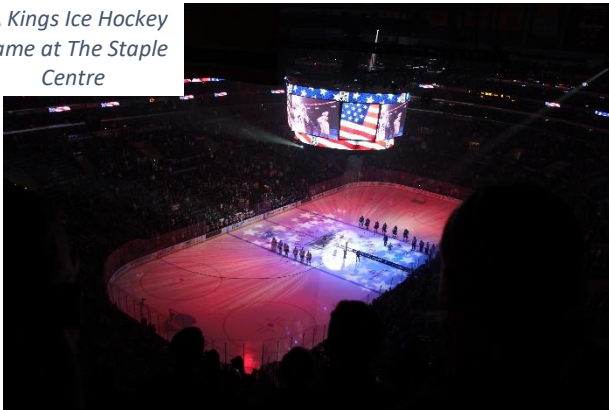


Santa Monica Pier

As an exchange student, I also highly recommend attending a range of sports games. There are so many UCLA sports games played on campus over the weekend

such as gymnastics, basketball, rugby, baseball, and American football, just to name a few. Some of these UCLA games even have free entry for students. In LA there is also the Staples Centre which holds larger sports games such as LA Lakers basketball, and LA Kings ice hockey, as well as concerts from time to time.

LA Kings Ice Hockey Game at The Staples Centre



If you are interested in seeing a larger sports game or visiting a theme park, the Dashew Centre (the exchange department at UCLA) runs trips to events such as these for discounted prices and it also gives you a great opportunity to meet other exchange students while exploring LA.

Places to visit

Apart from Hollywood that is located very close to the UCLA campus, I would also recommend visiting Malibu just up the coast on a sunny day, as well as downtown LA. I also did trips to San Francisco, San Diego and Las Vegas. These types of trips can be done on weekends but I promise you will want to stay longer! The Outdoor Adventures (located in the John Wooden gym on campus) run camping trips to the majority of National Parks in California. I did trips with them to Yosemite and Sequoia National Park which were well worth it and super easy as everything is organised for you by your student guides. However, if you do plan on doing an Outdoor Adventure then getting in and book your spot super early as they fill up very quick!



Outdoor Adventure camping trip to Sequoia

Tips for future students

In terms of a mobile phone, I used US mobile. It was by far the cheapest option because I could use it the same way as a prepaid phone in NZ. The major companies such as AT&T and T mobile are more reliable but are more expensive. They do family plans with multiple numbers so if you find a bunch of friends that are also needing US mobile numbers,

signing up to a family plan might be a better option.

Also, at UCLA the Dashew Centre runs a free bus tour of LA on one of the first weekends of each quarter. I highly recommend doing this tour as it is where I first met the majority of my exchange friends, plus it is a great way to get a feel for LA and what you most want to get out and visit.

My final tip is to create an exchange bucket list. It's a great thing to do while you are planning your exchange and getting excited about everything you want to do. While you are on exchange it also provides clarity when things get overwhelming. You don't have to cross everything off your list but it does come in handy when you have a free weekend that you want to fill.