

The University of Texas at Austin

Semester 1, 2017

Finance

I cannot lie. I had no real reason for choosing Austin as an exchange destination except for the fact that it was warm, the live music capital of the world, and I would be able to wear cowboy boots whenever I wanted. As it turns out, it was the best decision of my life and lived up to every expectation. Yeah, the college and city was awesome, but it was mainly the people I met that really made the experience. When I was planning my trip, I found these reviews extremely helpful, so hopefully some of these tips will come in handy for you too.

Courses

At Otago I am completing a double degree in finance and law, but as the legal system is different I was only taking business courses. Having only done BSNS102, 104 and 108, I was mainly taking second year equivalents. I took three finance courses (Investment, Stats and Modelling for Finance and Valuation), Introductory Accounting and a Global Entrepreneurship class. One thing I found about McCombs Business School is that the professors genuinely cared about each individual student and made an effort to get to know you. They also want you to succeed, so it is almost like going back to first year classes where they guide you through a lot of the work. The first few weeks were slightly stressful, just because we were given weekly homework for most classes, but soon enough I got the hang of it and it was fairly straight forward. During finals I only ended up having two 30% exams which was a nice change from home. You must be willing to participate in class though because you get participation grades and will be called on quite regularly. Although I was against this at first, the combination of homework and active participation made me learn so much and retain information a lot better than usual.

Accommodation

I lived at Pearl St Co-op, which was the absolute best decision. I knew a few people living in apartments, but they cost over USD\$1000 and it is much harder to make friends. A dorm is also an option, but probably more appropriate for younger students. The co-op is similar to a dorm, but completely run by students. You have four hours of labour each week which might be cooking, cleaning or even hairdressing if you have skills. The food is amazing and there is an industrial kitchen with unlimited food that you can cook with 24/7 (perfect for returning from town nights). There are a bunch of co-ops, and about half of the students in each are international so you get to meet a huge variety of people. Pearl St is very relaxed but loves to party. 21st St is another fun one, but even more crazy. Laurel, Neuces and Halstead would also be good options and they are just down the road.



Austin

“Keep Austin Weird” sums it up really. There’s something different happening every day and you will never get bored. 6th Street has about 50 bars in a row, but there is also a stunning greenbelt/nature area and a number of swimming holes. I was there for SXSW which is a week-long music festival with live music in every location you can think of (mostly for free too). It might not be for everyone, but I loved the heat. Most days were about 28°C and I would leave the house at 8am in t-shirts and shorts every day. Don’t be fooled though, they keep the classrooms very chilled so make sure to bring a jersey. Also, the first few days when I arrived were very cold so bring a few winter outfits just in case.

University Life

West Campus is the university area that all the students live in and is a maximum ten-minute walk from campus. The campus itself is unreal. The facilities are amazing and they even have a leisure swimming pool with lounge chairs floating in the water. As I was there in the Spring I missed football season, but went to plenty of baseball and basketball games. Just buy all the unnecessary merchandise your heart desires, be a proud Longhorn and you’ll be right.



Travel

I often found myself comparing my exchange to others who had gone to Europe and travelled every weekend to a different country. I loved Austin so much, and had opportunities before and after to travel, so I did stay in the city for a majority of weekends. In saying that we went to Big Bend National Park and New Orleans which were both epic. If you have unlimited funds and are only there for the semester, then I would definitely recommend travelling a bit more but also know that it is just as fun getting involved in events in Austin and having it really feel like home.

Funds

Again, live at a co-op. They are cheap, they are fun and you will save so much money. I made a budget and thought I had it figured out but put aside a fair bit more than you anticipate. Although everything is relatively cheap in the States, you do so many activities on exchange that you end up spending a lot. It’s not worth turning down a social event (say going out for dinner or something) because you are worried about the money. At home I am very cautious, but I splashed out for a few months overseas so try to save as much as possible.

Hook em’.

