



My Exchange Evaluation

Basic Information

<i>Host University</i>	University of Hawaii at Manoa
<i>Semester & Year of Exchange</i>	Semester 2, 2018
<i>Otago degree(s)</i>	Master of Planning
<i>Major(s)</i>	

Academics/ course load

Which papers did you take whilst on exchange?

Course title	Language of instruction	Otago equivalent	Otago credit value
PLAN620 – Environmental Planning and Policy	English		
PLAN625 – Climate, Energy and Food Security	English		
PLAN632 – Planning in Hawaii and the Pacific	English		
PLAN670 – Disaster Management and Humanitarian Assistance	English		

The urban planning department at UH had a diverse and interesting range of courses on offer. Two were particularly unique as lectures were run as conference calls between several universities throughout Asia and the Pacific. Each week, a different lecturer from around the world would link in and present research in their particular field of interest. This was a great experience and cool to learn from a range of different perspectives. I'm not sure how common this teaching style is in other departments.

Lectures tended to be a lot more personal at UH. There were smaller class sizes and lecturers often know you by name. In general, I found the workload to be easier than Otago.

Accommodation

I was lucky enough to have connections in Hawaii, who ended up offering their guesthouse for me to stay in for a significantly lower cost than anywhere else. I was initially concerned as they lived quite

far away from campus and I thought this would limit my chances of meeting new people and making friends. Living with a Hawaiian family, however, opened doors to a range of opportunities I would never have otherwise experienced. I had no trouble meeting new people and my host family made me feel right at home.

There is a range of accommodation possibilities close to campus. There are organisations that place you with host families, but most of my friends either chose to go with the student dorms or find their own housing. The dorms were very expensive for what you got and I would recommend looking for off-campus housing. Craigslist and Facebook are good places to start when finding accommodation and you will likely meet other exchange students looking for flatmates in orientation week.

Money matters

The cost of living in Hawaii is very high, so prepare for the savings to take a hit. You can find cheap flights if you buy tickets at the right time. I got a return flight for around NZ\$800 with Air New Zealand. I was lucky enough to find very cheap accommodation, but while I was looking it seemed like accommodation would be around US\$800–1000+ a month. This is, however, highly variable and dependent on quality and location of housing. Take time at the start of the semester to find something affordable. Sharing a room is another option. Getting a visa is also surprisingly expensive and cost me around NZ\$500 for all the application fees. The cost of food largely depends on where you shop. Look to buy at local markets and Costco if you can.

To manage my money I used an Air New Zealand Onesmart card. This is similar to a cash passport and allowed me to transfer US dollars onto a card with no transaction fee. This was really effective as most places in Hawaii take card payments.

Visas & Insurance

You will need a visa to study at UH. For me, the visa application process was a nightmare. Allow a lot of time to sort this out, as you will need to travel to Auckland for an interview.

It is mandatory to have health insurance before you will be allowed to study at UH. You will have to get a form signed saying you meet specific coverage requirements before you will be allowed to register for classes. I went with InsurancesafeNZ and had no problems. The university does offer its own insurance policy, however this was incredibly expensive compared to other options.

Extra-curricular/Social Activities

UH organised an orientation week for international students, which was a great way to meet people new to Hawaii. You will have the opportunity to join clubs depending on your interests. There is also a range of activities available through the campus recreation centre, including surfing, stand-up paddleboard, sailing and scuba lessons.

The UH campus is awesome. It has a real laidback feel, with plenty of breezy open spaces and tropical vegetation. Honolulu itself may not be what you expect when you picture Hawaii. It is a big busy city with a lot of traffic. The rest of Oahu, however, is amazing, with so much cool stuff to do.

Things to do:

Surfing – Naturally, Hawaii has some of the best surfing in the world and there are breaks for all abilities. If you are new to surfing, Waikiki is a good place to learn. With a bit more experience, start checking out places around Diamond Head. I regularly made trips to the east side of the island, which had some fun breaks with very few people.

Hiking – Oahu has too many hikes to count. My personal favourite was the Olomana Three Peaks hike, but there are fun trails all over the island.

Chilling on the beach – If you're anything like me, you will spend most of your semester at the beach. My favourites were Sandy's and Makapu'u round to the east side, which are great for bodysurfing, but you don't have to travel far in any direction to find amazing beaches. The west side of the island is definitely worth checking out.

Eating – Food in Hawaii was another highlight. Check out Da Spot, close to campus, for good cheap curries and smoothies, and any of the food trucks on the north shore for local food like shave ice, shrimp, poke and acai bowls.

Exploring – Hawaii has endless awesome spots to check out. You will quickly find your own favourites. Make sure you take time to travel to the other islands. I visited Kauai and the Big Island and both were amazing.

Final tips – Try and make friends with locals if you can. They will show you a heap of cool places you would never have thought to visit otherwise.

Overall Experience

My semester in Hawaii was truly unforgettable. The islands have something for everyone. You can spend your days surfing, exploring, hiking and chilling at the beach. There are also some fun nights to be had in Waikiki and Chinatown. The wildlife is amazing and I had the chance to swim with sharks, sea turtles, dolphins and manta rays. Hawaii is a real melting pot of cultures and ethnicities and everyone is incredibly friendly and welcoming. You will find yourself quickly getting sucked into the island lifestyle and you won't want to leave. I'll definitely be back in the near future.

