

University of California, Santa Cruz  
Semester 1 (Winter and Spring) 2017  
BA (Politics, Philosophy and Economics)

I had the absolute privilege of attending UC Santa Cruz for a semester and it was one of the best decisions I have ever made! While UCSC was not my first choice, Santa Cruz absolutely stole my heart. Santa Cruz is a beautiful and sunny beach town, and the university campus is up on the hills in a literal redwood forest overlooking the bay. Everyone is carefree, open-minded and super chill; an authentic, blissful and breezy Californian lifestyle!

#### Accommodation

I lived in the International Living Centre (ILC) at College Nine/Ten in UCSC. It is similar to a hall of residence, but 6-people apartment-style living rather than dormitory. It is 50:50 international and American students, and was a really neat way to meet people. All of my 5 flatmates ended up being American, as they had all known each other beforehand. Most students in the US share rooms which was a bit of an adjustment! My roommate was super cool and lovely so it worked out fine. If you would prefer to steer clear of the ILC, all the other halls of residence are 'themed' so have a look at their values and see what speaks to you. About half of students at UCSC live on-campus.



1 MEXICAN CULTURAL NIGHT AT THE ILC

One thing to note is that Santa Cruz is one of the most expensive places to live in the US (think Auckland-style housing bubble). I went with on-campus living because it was easier given I was only there for 6 months, but all my friends who lived off-campus had a blast. If you are going for a year, you always have the opportunity to move off-campus after a quarter! There are quite a few Facebook pages for finding off-campus accommodation so you can plan in advance.

#### Money

Budget budget budget. I did not and I spent way more money than I planned for! I got a Cash Passport travel card with ANZ and loaded it up with about UD6000 before I left NZ, then opened a bank account with Wells Fargo when I first arrived in the US. Paypal is also a useful way to wire transfer money from NZ to the US if the exchange rate they give is good as you can escape the bank fees. Insurance is expensive but there is no way to escape UCShip. In saying this, utilise the health services!

#### Academics and Course Load

I was at UCSC for two quarters and took three 5-unit classes each quarter. I took two politics papers; post-communist comparative politics and politics of China, two philosophy papers; philosophy of science and philosophy of punishment and responsibility, an economics paper on developmental economics, and – as an interest paper – and art history / visual culture paper on gender and minority representation in horror films! I thoroughly enjoyed all my classes and really struck gold with my lecturers. The quarter system means that everything happens quicker, but I did not find the course loads any weightier than Otago.

The thing that caught me off-guard the most was that participation was a percentage of my grade in majority of my papers. Students in American classrooms are expected to talk and give their opinion in class discussions. However, this is a cool way for your lecturer to get to know you. I found the lecturers to be much more invested

in their students than at Otago, and they love exchange students so use this! I also found the standard of thinking more challenging than what I was used to at Otago, but found this really rewarding.

Additionally, the PE faculty offer classes like yoga, cardio, kickboxing, swimming, etc. for \$20 a quarter. You sign up for them as if you were signing up for a normal paper, and they are pass/fail based on attendance. Would definitely recommend taking advantage of this! The gym also offer a good range of fitness classes and it is fairly cheap to get monthly/quarterly passes. Additionally, the recreation centre offers a whole range of activities – surfing, kayaking, cooking, scuba diving, you name it!

### Transportation

Buses around Santa Cruz are free with your UCSC ID card which is a godsend. Everything downtown is within walking distance which is convenient. The Greyhound also runs through Santa Cruz as a transport option to get to other cities. Some of my friends (both American and international) had cars which was wicked for roadtrips and late night food runs. You can hire cars through ZipCar, borrow bikes from the bike library, or carpool with zimride or UCSC carpool pages.

### Weather

It rained the entirety of winter quarter (please get an umbrella, raincoat and/or gumboots) but spring was warm and absolutely beautiful with temperatures of mid- to late-20s.

### Eating

The dining hall food is a much wider range than in Otago. If you are living off-campus or in an apartment on campus, you will have access to a kitchen which is an absolutely life-saver! Santa Cruz has supermarkets and weekly markets downtown that are well-priced and easily accessible by bus. If you are downtown, visit Verve – easily the best coffee in Santa Cruz! Also, California has fantastic Mexican food. Enjoy.

### Things to Do

In Santa Cruz, the mountains truly meet the sea. Campus and the surrounding areas are unparalleled for camping, surfing, and hiking. I cannot recommend visiting Big Basin more highly; it is about a 45min drive from UCSC and has some of the tallest coastal redwoods in California as well as some beautiful hikes to waterfalls! Additionally, Yosemite is super close; it, Death Valley and Joshua Tree are all must-dos in California. I made the mistake of visiting them all during summer in June/July when it was about 35-50 degrees Celsius – doable, but I would recommend going in spring before the heat waves hit. Santa Cruz is also a short drive north to San Jose, San Francisco, Sacramento / UC Davis, Lake Tahoe and Napa Valley. It is a slightly longer journey south to Big Sur, Santa Barbara and LA, but I absolutely loved these areas.

Within Santa Cruz itself, there are a few cool bars. Some wicked bands come to the Catalyst and tickets are typically quite cheap! Every Tuesday is Funk Night at the Crepe Place, where a live band plays. The board walk and its little amusement park is very photogenic and quaint, and Santa Cruz has some beautiful beaches.

UCSC campus has some cool hiking trails and forest parties. There is a place called the Buddha Hut in the forest just up from College Nine which is super cool to check out if you can find it! Also, the trailer park, Porter Caves and wall murals are fun to explore.

Outside of California, Oregon was my favourite state to visit. It felt like NZ crossed with California. Portland is such a cool town and the craft beer and specialty coffee is unreal! Happened to be there the same weekend as the annual naked bike ride which was a laugh. I also had the opportunity to road-trip through Nevada, Utah and Arizona, visiting their national parks and going hiking, which were all completely different climates and landscapes to the lush forests of northern California. My biggest regrets are not heading to Colorado and to the East Coast. If you book flights early enough in advance, you can get cheap rates! I was able to go to Mexico over spring break which was incredible. Use that NZ passport advantage and pop to Cuba if you can!



**2 DYING IN DEATH VALLEY BECAUSE IT WAS 50 DEGREES**



**3 ARCHES NATIONAL PARK, UTAH**