Ireland.... :) and beyond...
In the 2nd semester of 2008 I completed an Exchange program with the University of Limerick (UL) in Ireland, through the program offered at CSU. The following presentation is an account of my experience, what I enjoyed and recommend, what I learned and what I would do differently if given the opportunity again.
Departure

- No Visa Required for Ireland for Australian citizens for study completed in Ireland in under 6 months or less.
- Students are issued with a Garda Immigration card within a few weeks of arrival. This makes entering and exiting the country easier if they want to travel.
- The Immigration card and fee however costs €150 ($300) and is compulsory. They don’t tell you this until you arrive, and I didn’t hear anything about it. So factor that in. And don’t miss your appointment!
- Irish police (Garda), are very cruisy cops and love aussies. The same with immigration officers at the airport, just travel with appropriate documentation.
Travel

Pretty self explanatory. Always watch your bags, and read signs. Never travel with no cash at all, or with no phone if you can help it. Its safer to travel with a return flight and don’t pack too much stuff, its just a hindrance and you will only use a little of what you pack. Luggage requirements are very strict, especially with low cost airlines. You will have to pay up to $40 per kilo over their allowed limit. EasyJet, Ryanair, TUIfly and BMI fly cheap from European destinations to and from Ireland, and so do British Airways and Aer Lingus if you book in advance.
Insurance

I used the CSU Corporate cover to travel with. It seemed like a good policy, even though I found some cheaper ones out there, the security of travelling with the insurance offered by my own institution I felt better about, and it is a really good policy and covered me for just about everything. It also covered me for any destination in the world.

If someone has a pre-existing condition then it is best for them to apply for all the insurance company’s they can on the one day. Insurance company’s cross check, and they will know if you have been denied by another company for a pre-existing condition, lessening the chance of your application been successful. If you don’t get cover for your pre-existing condition, there are countries in Europe with reciprocal agreements, and Ireland was one of these. So medical treatment relating to the condition is treated free of charge, or paid for by Medicare.
Campus

- Campus at UL is very different to that at home. There is only 1 small bar fridge to service 8 people where I lived (however was the cheapest).
- very little storage space for food and very few cooking utensils.
- There is no microwave.
- Washing clothes is very expensive, about €6-10 or $12-20, depending on how long it takes your clothes to dry.
- There are no cleaners, not toilet paper and waste responsibility is left up to the tenants to dispose of in the bins outside. This method doesn’t really work very well at all. The place can get filthy, and rubbish piles up from house party's, it become a two man job very early!
- There is much more emphasis on house party’s at UL than at CSU. This is because it is very expensive to drink at pubs and bars in Ireland and as a student, it's much cheaper to drink at home. This is fine, it just means the place can become very messy, and nobody will ever want to clean it up. Plus there is often excessive noise until all hours. This can make it extremely difficult to sleep, and also study. Also guests are allowed to smoke inside, so this can be a very uncomfortable environment.
Course Information

Again very different at UL the courses are structured differently. They take longer, with most courses taking 4 years to complete and there is much less help available than of that at a smaller university such as CSU. There are very few electives available. So choose carefully. This however was just for environmental science. You can however enrol in any subject you want at UL, its just a matter of getting a credit for it back home. Subject lists for your course are available from the university's website.
Transport around Limerick is really quiet good. There are regular 15 minute bus services from various stops throughout the campus around the town. Tickets can be purchased upon entrance the bus. Transport throughout the country is also very good with regular services to Dublin, and many other popular cities in the Irish Republic, services to Belfast must go via Dublin. This is the same with trains. But buses are much cheaper. Always carry your student card with you at all times as you can get discounts almost anywhere on public transport in Europe. Taxi’s are extremely expensive in Ireland. A return trip into town on the bus will cost you about €3.00, and in a taxi up to €30.
Expenses

It's no secret, Europe is not at all cheap. And unfortunately Ireland is no exception to this. Food is the killer, followed by entertainment. Try to shop Aldi or Lidl. These are cheap supermarkets. You have to pay for plastic bags anywhere else, but here you have to take your own. You also have to pack the groceries yourself. Exchange rates at the moment, but they never really change enough to make a difference are usually about $1 = €0.50.

To combat this I:
- As I made more and more friends I just hit them up for lifts to places, and often car pooled.

- Was really frugal with money, you should stretch it. Give yourself a budget.

- Didn’t drink to hard, and only drank beer in bars. Pre-drinking is also a very cheap way to have a typical uni night, and house party's are very common, other than just going out.
Travel Destinations

- The fun part! Ireland is a fantastic place to travel, with awesome destinations such as Galway, Cork, Dublin, Kerry and Waterford only a stones throw away from Limerick. If you compare it to Australia! They are all relatively cheap to get to by bus. There are also many small and quaint Irish towns on the way to all of these destinations, so they are worth checking out to!

Next door- the UK is very well connected, by both Air and Ferry Services. Europe is also, with an airport in Shannon servicing many countries such as Spain, France, Poland, Scotland, Germany, Portugal and Greece. The following are some photos I took!
Travel Destinations!!!!

Charles Bridge Prague, Czech republic
Travel Destinations!!!!

Aran Islands, Ireland

Bunratty, Ireland
Travel Destinations!!!!

Plymouth, Southern England

Trafalgar Square, London
Travel Tips!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

- Couch Surfing. Great way to meet people and have somewhere to stay for free! You can register online at www.couchsurfing.com.

- Always Travel with Emergency Cash

- Take time to relax, and look after yourself! Eat well!

- Try not to spend all your time on Facebook, Skype and emailing back and forth! Get out there and enjoy it! The more time you spend on your computer, the less of the country you are visiting you will get to see! But still always remember you have loved ones at home all the same, and postcards and letters home are always easy to write on long train/bus/plane trips! Along with quick calls and emails will always keep worried mothers at bay.
UL like CSU, introduces you to many clubs and society’s that you can join when you start uni. There is a much larger range though, and many which suit exchange students. One I recommend is the Outdoor Pursuits Club (OPC). Its brilliant, and known to take people to international destinations to climb mountains! There are sporting clubs, and everything else. So put yourself out there! You’ll meet loads of people! Also, Irish people are extremely outgoing so the ones you meet, will generally be your friends for the whole time!
Culture!!

There is no real culture shock in Ireland. Nor much of Western Europe. There is noticeable differences, but nothing massive. Only Language barriers, but there is almost always someone that can speak English. And if you know another European language, that always gives you an upper hand! For example many Dutch people speak German.

Eastern Europe is another story. City's are often more drab, less people know English or Western languages and it is much less advanced! But the positive side is that everything is generally much cheaper! Even the bars!
Europe is famous for its freezing weather, and if you are visiting in the winter, then it is going to be very cold! It can get very depressing the weather, and Ireland is not immune! So take plenty of warm clothes and remember to always take a raincoat! This photo was taken in January, it was -15°C! A few days after I left, it hit -18°C!
What you should take, get over there and leave at home!

- Think really carefully about what you should take with you, particularly if you are travelling after University, or doing weekend trips away. Maybe bring some printed photos, travel diaries and letters if you think you’ll need them.

- Pack for all seasons. Don’t pack to many toiletries, clothes and stuff. Just the bare minimum. They are so annoying to carry around, and pack and repack.

- Whilst overseas you won’t need to buy much in the way of appliances or anything. Just what you need when you need it.
Relationships and Homesickness!

- Combating homesickness can be really hard for some people, but the best way to do it is to make sure that not too much time is spent going through photos and comments on Facebook, and that you aren’t up every night sending countless text messages, because it can make time drag!

- Try not to dwell on letters and stuff that you bought from home, because they might make you a little sad.

- Having your door open as much as you can is a big help! If your door is closed people probably won’t make a huge effort to say hello. But they will if they can see you. Also you can hear when something’s happening, and get out there and get involved! Just try to tough it out and remember you not going to be there for long, and to grab every opportunity with both hands to meet someone, explore, go somewhere and do something. This keeps your mind occupied!