

Kate Sheehan – Exchange to Oregon State University, 2008

Pre departure:

Although it's a little hard piecing together exactly what you need to do before you leave the way you decide to use this time will essentially dictate how comfortable you will feel when you arrive. A lot of your exchange needs to be organised on your own and once you have an outline it's really not that daunting.

These are the steps in which I took that help me have an enjoyable stress free exchange:

Visa:

This process is not the best but unfortunately the most important make sure that you don't leave this too late and defiantly don't buy your ticket till you have confirmation that you have the visa approved. It's easy for them to say no. This would be incredibly rare as the exchange is done through the uni but you never know what the outcome.

Visa interview:

The actual interview is like 2 minutes with a total of 5 or so questions (it may differ depending on the officer). The questions are straight forward just answer them seriously. There is no room for sarcasm when it comes to any American official business. They may include: Have you been to the US before? Why are you going? Do you have a place of residence for when you arrive? Etc. Questions you will already have the answers to just make sure you have the American universities address so that you can prove you have a place to stay. The interview has to be booked on the internet.

Visa cost:

When I applied I was unaware of the cost of the visa, there are three charges and the application starts on the net with passwords and identification numbers. The first cost is the I-901 SEVIS transmittal fee of \$100 which you pay over the net when you register. You will receive a "notice of action" in the mail to double check your info is correct and to reinforce that your payment went through. The second fee is paid to the Australian post which is \$157.20. This was a real shock to me. Ask the post office for the non-immigrant visa option and they should know what you're talking about especially if you're right near the embassy. **MAKE SURE YOU KEEP THE RECEIPT** as this is all you have to prove you paid it, so keep the little flimsy receipt. Lastly once you have gone past all the security checks you will have your interview and if you're successful they will ask for another payment for the actual VISA of around \$150, I forget sorry. I would just have around \$200 in cash to be safe.

Buying the ticket:

I bought my ticket pretty late and ended up getting a deal, which was lucky but it was still \$2200 return with Qantas. Make sure you ask for a ticket where the return flight can be changed once without an additional fee. Odds are you may want to change it to stay longer or shorter but if not its nice to no you have the option to move your flight home at least once with no charge.

Insurance:

Insurance was really hazy when I applied so here goes. Oregon State has insurance for student which is cheap and a good deal however this only covers you when your at uni so if your on an trip on a weekend your not covered. So what you can do is get your own insurance which starts the day you leave this will cover you and your luggage from the minute you leave the country so if you're bags are lost your not up the creek. This cover is simple its one company and will cover 24/7. The university will not allow you to come without using insurance so you can apply for an insurance waiver form from the university. This can be filled in when you arrive at the uni just make sure you let them know that's what your doing.

Picking subjects:

There is a really good internet site for the subjects available. This is the address: make sure you look at the key down the bottom of the page which tells you which session the classes are run. Classes are seasonal like Aus so hopefully there in season for you.

Emailing the university:

This is what really made the difference between my exchange and others.

Make sure you are emailing people in Oregon. Your exchange will not happen very smoothly if you are only organising it on the CSU side. You need to make regular connections with Oregon State Uni. I emailed the exchange office and requested the name of an adviser in the forestry department. I emailed him the subjects I was missing and he tried to find subjects with similar objectives in the US. Subjects need to be confirmed on the American side of things. Just because you fill in the original forms with CSU with the subjects you want doesn't mean that you are enrolled in the in the US. A number of students thought this and when they arrived in the US the subjects they needed were full. It was very stressful for them. This is what made my exchange smooth.

Staying on campus was interesting. It was a good experience and a simple way to find safe reliable accommodation. What I wasn't really aware of was that in 1st year in America it is compulsory to stay on campus so if you're a mature aged student this might not be the scene for you. Also don't just go with the international dorm check them all out on the net.

Food:

The food plans are very convenient but if you don't spend all the money on the plan you won't be refunded so if you would like to try the plan go for the basic option and then you have the opportunity to upgrade. If you don't want to use the plan there is a great farmers market twice a week and FredMyre (Coles/target put together) is also close by.

Culture shock:

The culture shock in America is very minimal compared to other exchanges however this doesn't mean that there will be some little things to get used to:

Tipping:

A 15 to 20% tip is expected almost everywhere. 15 or even 10 is sufficient. For the hut shuttle bus (the bus which runs from Portland airport to Corvallis) I would only give like \$2 or \$3 tip for baggage handling.

Controversial issues: tip toe around some of these issues politics, health system, gun laws and schooling

Food:

Be prepared for some large servings and increased fat food. It is very easy to put on weight while overseas and especially while in America at college.

Travel (Weekends and Holidays)

Amtrak:

The Amtrak is a train which runs up and down the west coast of the US. It's a great way to travel. A ticket to Seattle is around \$50 for a student.

Greyhound:

The greyhound system is ok. Make sure you sit up the front and keep an eye on your luggage at all times. In America everyone has a car maybe even 2 so the people that can't afford a car use greyhound so it's a little dodge

Taxi:

The taxi's are the same but expect a large tip usually.

Extending your visa if desired

I really wanted to stay in the states a little longer. If your exchange is only for a term make sure you allow some time to travel because you finally get comfortable and make some good friends and before you know it its time to go home. I was able to extend my visa on academic training. This wasn't very hard at all. I had to find a job and was able to get work at a summer camp.

If you would like anymore information on the exchange process feel free to contact me at kate_587@hotmail.com.