

Victoria Abroad Evaluation Form

PLEASE TYPE THIS EVALUATION FORM & EMAIL IT TO VICTORIA ABROAD AS A WORD DOCUMENT

A: Student Information

VUW degree(s)	MSc
Major(s)	Cross-Cultural Psychology
Exchange Institution	University of Hawai'i at Mānoa
VUW Tri & Year of Exchange	Trimester Two 2015

B: Finances

Please detail your basic costs in New Zealand dollars. This will help future students plan their own budgets. (Enter your number rounded to the nearest dollar.)

Books	\$690 for new and used (Graduate textbooks were expensive but can sell them back at the end of the semester for a bit of money NB: Not much money)
Accommodation	\$8550 for off-campus accommodation (fully furnished – bills included but <u>not</u> food)
Return Airfare	\$2320
Local Transportation	Bus is free for students! Uber is also a good option and very popular.
Meals	\$4000
Visa	\$470
Health & Insurance	Travel Insurance - \$480 / Health Insurance - \$300
Personal Spending	\$6000
Communications (phone, etc.)	\$70 per month phone plan on AT&T (\$350 for the whole semester)
Other fees (specify)	\$50 – rec activities through UH
What unexpected costs did you encounter? What items were more or less than expected?	Food is very expensive on the island, partially because everything is imported from the mainland and partially because the exchange rate was so bad when I went. It made eating out comparatively cheap and meant I spent a lot if I wanted to cook myself – In this respect a mealplan may be more beneficial.

How did your financial expenses compare to what you originally expected to spend?

Food and personal spending took up a lot of money, I came prepared to buy a lot of make-up though so my spending is slightly warped toward that which should be taken into account. Accommodation was a little more expensive than I anticipated due to the exchange rate, and I don't really think where I chose was the best value for money. Phone plan was out of this world expensive, yet it was hard to find anything much cheaper which was shocking.

Thanksgiving sales also took a toll on my spending, I'm a sucker for a good deal.

By what means did you maintain your finances? What would you recommend? (Credit card, foreign bank account, travelers checks, etc)?

I used a credit card and my debit card from home. I decided not to open a local bank account out of ease,

however it did make drawing cash expensive as I had to pay an \$8 fee every withdrawal.

What financial advice would you give students attending the same university as you?

Definitely save more than you expect to need, I chose to live without restricting myself too much, but if you try and budget more effectively it definitely won't cost you as much as it did me.

What was the average cost of a can of coke or coffee in your host country?

\$1.00 for a can of coke

C: Visas & Insurance **Please note this information is recommended by VUW students & current at the time of their exchange. For all up-to-date visa information you must check with the embassy/consulate of your host university.*

Did you have to apply for a visa? If so, was it difficult? What was the process, how long did it take and how much did it cost?

I had to apply for a J-1 Visa through the American Embassy. It involves an online form and flying up to Auckland for an interview to get approved, it takes a few days to process and you receive your passport and visa make via courier.

Do you have any advice for future students when applying for visas to your host country?

I left this quite late and the embassy was having problems printing Visas, so definitely get this done as early as possible to avoid any delays.

Did your host university have a mandatory insurance? Or a particular insurance they recommended? If Yes, what was it and how much did it cost?

Health insurance was mandatory at UH, they had a recommended plan endorsed by the university that was RIDICULOUSLY expensive, I went for ISO insurance, significantly cheaper and recognised as an acceptable alternative by the university.

What insurance company did you use and would you recommend it to future students?

I used Southern Cross for my travel insurance and ISO for my health insurance. Both were straightforward and easy to use, making a claim on ISO for a doctors visit was very easy as it was recognised by the university and so they took care of it. Definitely recommend both.

D: Academics at Host University

Which courses did you take while on exchange? Please rate the difficulty of each course (1-5, 1 = Very Easy & 5 = Extremely Difficult) and leave any comments you may have.

Course Title	Language of Instruction	VUW course equivalent or elective	VUW points/credits value	Rating (1-5)	Comments
VUW Trimester 1/YEAR					

VUW Trimester 2/YEAR					
PSY680 Cultural and Community Psychology	English		15	3	A really good paper to look at some applications of psychology and taking a different view and community approach, pretty laid back lecturer and expectations
PSY789 Research Credit	English		15	2	Research paper involved checking in with supervisor about current research, very relaxed with no formal assessment
CUL610 International Cultural Relations	English		15	4	Heaps of readings and expectations to contribute in class but in spite of this I loved the paper and the professor, really extended my ability to critically analyse what we see as common sense
SOC725	English		15	4	Challenged my thought processes in an insightful way – although difficult I really enjoyed this paper and the professor was my favourite

Course Registration/Enrolment

Please describe the registration process at your host university. What kind of help was available?

Registration was stressful, you can't enroll online until you get several holds lifted and as an exchange

student you have to get the professors of courses to override your lack of prerequisites. With limited seats in the classes, getting hold of the professors was almost impossible in some cases so it was very frantic and unnerving. In spite of this, it all worked out in the end and once you get hold of the professors they tend to make room in classes for you where needed.

How successful were you in registering/enrolling for classes you wanted? What advice would you offer to next year's exchange students about registration at your host university?

I enrolled in all the classes I wanted, one I changed after the first lesson and the add/drop process was very easy at UH too. Definitely come with an idea about back-up courses and try and make contact with coordinators well before you arrive would be my advice.

Do you have any advice for future students when choosing and applying for courses?

There are so many great courses at UH so I would definitely take advantage and try and take something that wouldn't be offered at VUW. In regards to compulsory subjects, try and get in contact as early as possible to explain your circumstances so that they know to let you in.

Academic Experience

How did your academic experience differ from your time spent at Victoria? Did the academic experience meet your expectations?

I found the papers I took at UH were very heavy on readings and participation, most classes had up to 30% of the grade based on contributions in class which I wasn't used to, it means you really have to be on the ball. It was very discussion based and I had no final exams, only essays (albeit long ones – 25 pages each)

How did the style of teaching at your host university compare with that at VUW? How did the workload compare to what you would expect at VUW?

Very discussion based, more so than at VUW, no powerpoint aids and a strong reliance on student run discussion which was different, even in post-grad I still find the professors take a lecture-based approach. There were many more readings than at VUW but fewer assessments, so the workload was the same level but focused in different areas.

What would you recommend as an appropriate course load for other VUW students visiting your partner university? What specific courses would you recommend to visiting VUW students? Why?

For a graduate student, 3 courses is probably the optimum. I started off taking 4 and everyone thought I was crazy, so I replaced one for the research points which was a lot easier. I strongly recommend all the courses I took, a bonus with these graduate papers was although they were 2.5 hours a lecture, you only had to go to one lecture a week (I only had classes on Wednesdays and Thursdays so gave me a 5 day weekend)

What advice would you give VUW students about succeeding academically at your host university?

UH was quite easy to succeed in, I think VUW sets their students up with different expectations which

makes performing well in Hawai'i easier than I expected. However in the courses I listed especially, you really need to stay on top of the readings to make valid contributions in class, otherwise it can be obvious you aren't keeping up – and like I said before, participation is a big part of academic success.

What was your impression of the computer facilities, library, and internet access at your host university?

I only used the computer at the university once, but it seemed good. They have wifi all over campus which stuffs up sometime but was generally pretty consistent. The libraries are a great place to study – I found Sinclair to be in a great location and nice and quiet. As an international student there are also secret places you can go to get free printing in the international building which was awesome.

If you went to a country where English is not the native language, how did you prepare for this? Were there any intensive language courses provided by the host university?

n/a

E: Accommodation

What form of accommodation did you stay in?

I stayed in off-campus self sufficient accommodation run by Hawaiian Student Suites called Pacific villa

What were the pros and cons of this form of accommodation?

I chose Pacific Villa because it was halfway between the beach and the university, was recently renovated, and included all expenses. It was definitely one of the most expensive options, however having all bills paid for and it fully furnished was great, and the location meant easy walking distance to the university as well as Waikiki. I expected it to be a bigger complex but was surprised at how small it was, but having it all occupied by students was also a plus.

What accommodation would you recommend to future students?

I had a friend who stayed in the dorms and that seemed like a lot of fun, I was surprised that it wasn't just filled with freshman. Dorms are also a good option because of the mealplan and airconditioning. Pacific Villa was good for the autonomy though which I thought would be beneficial as a grad student.

How early can you move into accommodation?

I couldn't move in until quite late, the weekend before the first week of class. You can opt to move in early, but it's \$50 a night extra, so I decided to stay in hostels until it was time to move in which was a great decision as I met a lot of fun people.

What options were available for meal plans or cooking facilities? How satisfied were you with the food?

Pacific Villa doesn't have a meal plan – it is all self-cooking. The unit comes with a full kitchen shared between two people though making cooking for yourself really easy, however you do have to provide your own cookware and serveware which I didn't expect.

If you lived in off-campus housing, how easy was it to find? What should future VUW exchange students know about living off-campus?

My off campus was in a great location which was a lot more central than I actually expected, very easy to get to on foot or by bus and easy to find.

Do you have any tips of advice for future students when applying for accommodation?

Definitely think through what you want to get out of the accommodation, and look at all the resources you can, I looked at facebook pages, reviews, student evaluations and university recommendations to make my decisions which was pretty helpful.

F: Personal & Cultural Connections

What was it like making friends? How successful were you at making friends with local (i.e., not international) students?

I managed to make a large group of friends who live on the island and I am so grateful for that, everyone is super friendly and if you put yourself out there a bit it is really easy to make friends and make lots of them.

What was it like to adjust to the culture of your exchange country/university?

The culture isn't too shocking, it's pretty laidback but also very americanised. I didn't think it took too much adjusting at all, except for the unexpected language barriers provided by the New Zealand accent.

What, if any, cultural differences did you find particularly challenging? How would you recommend students to prepare for these differences?

Like I said, the accent was the biggest challenge. Saying things like "knackered" and having people think I said "naked", trying to tell people my names is "Jess" when it comes out as "Jiss", you get used to it, but it does get quite frustrating at times. There's no real way to prepare for it other than to just know to expect it and not be surprised when it happens.

What parts of the culture did you most appreciate?

Hawaiian culture isn't overly prominent in day-to-day life on Oahu, so it was mainly American culture that I was exposed to. It was actually very interesting learning about the history of Hawaii though, as I had no idea about the native suppression etc.

How were you treated by local people? By university staff and faculty? By students?

Most locals were very lovely, but there are some who don't like the tourist-driven economy of Honolulu, so as a white person I've been called a few names, which I find funny more than anything. University staff are sometimes very clueless but lovely, and the students were very welcoming, even though those in my grad classes were quite a bit older than me they were very inclusive and helped where they could.

As far as you could tell, how easy would it be for students with disabilities to study at your partner university? For students who are visible minorities in your host country? For students who are gay, lesbian,

bisexual or transgendered?

I feel like Hawaii is so laid back that minorities and the LGBT community would be readily accepted. As for disabilities, it's less obvious to know what aid is available, but I'm sure it would be quite easy to study at UHM.

Did you face any issues regarding discrimination in your host country? What were they, and what advice would you give to future students?

Some native Hawaiian's don't really like white people, but I definitely would not say I was discriminated against. Like I said it's more interesting than anything because it says a lot about the native history and treatment through colonialism. I honestly wouldn't expect anyone to be seriously discriminated against.

G: Extra-curricular/Social Activities

What organized activities (clubs, sports, etc.) were available to students? What extra-curricular activities would you recommend to future exchange students?

The University provides activities and lessons through the Uni Gym/ Rec Centre. I opted into two kayaking excursions and a surfing lesson which cost USD\$10 each and included transport and gear. There's no way you could find anything cheaper on the island! They also offer snorkeling, sailing, stand up paddle boarding and scuba as activities, which I chose not to opt into.

Definitely recommend using this resource, but get in quick! Spots fill up very fast.

What do you recommend other visiting students see or do on their weekends or holidays?

There are so many beaches and hikes to do in Hawai'i that you could spend each weekend on a different beach or doing a different hike. Definitely would recommend seeing as much of the island as possible.

What opportunities were there for students to work on-campus? Off-campus?

With the VISA requirements you could only apply for work on-campus. I decided not to in order to make the most of my time so am not really sure what options there were in regards to this.

What volunteer or internship opportunities were there for students?

I'm not sure.

5 things to take to your host country or region

1	Togs
2	NZ snacks (your new friends will love you for it)
3	Good hiking shoes
4	Raincoat
5	Jandals

5 pieces of useful advice would tell a VUW student going to your host university

1	Be open to all new people and experiences
2	Go on as many hikes as humanly possible
3	Make a friend who drives (super handy)
4	Do your readings at the beach
5	Don't waste your day sleeping!

Top 5 Things to do

What are your 'Top 5 Things To Do' future VUW students at your host university or city/country?

1	Koko Head Trail
2	A day trip to the North Shore for the famous shrimp and shave ice
3	Learn to Surf
4	Stand-up paddle boarding at Pokai Bay (we swam with wild dolphins doing this)
5	Sunset swim at Waikiki Beach

H: Personal Experience

Please write one paragraph about your exchange experience. Plus, don't forget to submit some photos to the exchange office!!

Going on exchange to the Hawai'i was one of the most rewarding experiences of my life. Although expensive and in ways studying in such a gorgeous place was difficult and trying at times, I would not change it for the world. Experiencing the island lifestyle outside of the tourist realms was priceless, with a different hike to do and beach to go to every weekend it never got boring and time flew by to the point where it was over before I knew it. Not only was the lifestyle great, but the university superseded my expectations. The lecturers were so knowledgeable and the content of the courses I chose to take challenged me and I really feel like I gained a lot through my experiences both inside and outside of the university. I have made so many friends both through the exchange, through my accommodation, and through spontaneous means and I would class them as friends for life. I got to try so many new things, including surfing, quad biking, stand up paddle boarding, cliff jumping and so many more which I am so grateful for. Overall it was a fantastic experience and I couldn't imagine a better place to spend a semester.