

# Victoria Abroad Evaluation Form

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

## A: Student Information

VUW degree(s)	Bachelor of Science
Major(s)	Marine Biology
Exchange Institution	University of Hawaii at Hilo
VUW Tri & Year of Exchange	2015-2016 Trimesters Two and One

## 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	\$200-1000 - I didn't buy all the required textbooks and still maintained good grades
Accommodation	\$550/month (off campus – recommend)
Return Airfare	\$1000
Local Transportation	\$2/bus trip, \$100 for a bike (recommend)
Meals	\$75 – cooking own meals
Visa	\$300
Health & Insurance	\$500
Personal Spending	\$1000
Communications (phone, etc.)	\$20-40/month
Other fees (specify)	
What unexpected costs did you encounter? What items were more or less than expected?	Food is significantly more expensive from supermarkets. Car renting is popular amongst international students.

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

**Nothing seriously stood out, just the price of weekly groceries.**

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

**Open an account with Bank of Hawaii. Ask for help from Todd Shumway or Jim Mellon and they will direct you to BOH attendants that can process your requests without requirements like social security numbers. I recommend opening a bank account immediately if you are staying for the year.**

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

**It is all circumstantial. Open a bank with a chequing account. Hawaii is still behind the times in term of financing. So things like online transfers just don't exist. Have a Hawaiian account that allows cash withdrawals (cash is used for a lot of things) and a cheque book for paying rent etc. You will get charged astronomical amounts for withdrawing cash from ATMs or paying using a NZ eftpos card.**

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

99c

**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?

**Yes – This includes a trip to the US Embassy in Auckland. Without flights, it costs around \$400 dollars if I remember correctly. This includes the SEVIS fee. It is not difficult, but the embassy can be intimidating.**

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

**Remember to book well in advance for the embassy appointment and pay extreme attention to detail when filling out forms.**

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?

**Yes it did. I arranged my own insurance through AA, as I was a previous employee and received staff discount. Thus my rates don't represent the average person.**

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

**As mentioned above. I used AA Insurance due to past employment. It is standard travel insurance and didn't include any special clauses worth noting.**

## 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
<b>VUW Trimester 1/YEAR</b>					
Biological Oceanography	English	Elective	3	4	Is more interesting than it sounds. Dr Turner has a great teaching style. I came away knowing I had learnt a lot
Evolution	English	Elective	3	3	Was slightly disappointed with this class. Too general and so skipped

					over the topics I enjoyed.
Biology of Fishes	English	Biol 372	3	5	Dr Beets is a figure at UH and I loved his teaching style and personality
Atoll Ecosystems	English	Elective	3	5	Karla McDermid is an inspiring woman and teaches the class with lots of hands on learning
<b>VUW Trimester 2/YEAR</b>					
Conservation Biology	English	Elective	3	5	Rebecca Ostertag is extremely good at her job. It took me a while to get used to her personality but once I did, she became one of my favorite teachers at UH. Her teaching style involves a lot of discussion which I thrived in.
Avian Biology	English	Elective	3	5	Pat Hart is a loveable professor with a never ending list of avian-related achievements. Field trips were once in a life time opportunities for bird enthusiasts.
Marine Mammals	English	Elective	3	4	
Marine Mammals Lab	English	Elective	1	5	4 hours weekly on the Makani 'Aha 40ft research vessel studying humpback whales. Can't complain. Also Captain is an inspiring skipper and always looking for people to help aboard the boat.
History – Before 1500A.D.	English	Elective	3	3	Really interesting topics, but the teaching style

					was lazy and relied too much on students reading an expensive textbook.
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### **Course Registration/Enrolment**

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

**Any problems I ran into, I went directly to Todd Shumway or Jim Mellon. They are exceptional at their jobs and go above and beyond. Registration is particularly easy. It is completed online. Any problems that arise are quickly solved by discussing with your future professors. They are very accommodating to international students.**

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?

**Registration opened at 4am NZ time. I missed it and didn't manage to enroll in one of my preferred courses. However, after email communication with my professor it was sorted out quickly and easily. I would recommend being on the ball when registration opens. As more popular majors like business fills up fast.**

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

**If possible do a bit of research or communicate with past students about potential professors. My courses at UH were made by exceptional professors. Similarly I did not enjoy courses where the professor was inadequate.**

### **Academic Experience**

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

**The academic experience was the best I have ever experienced in my education. The level of interaction and encouragement between professor and student was exceptional. There were so many more opportunities at UH and the environment of the university encouraged participation. I have not experienced this at VUW if I am to be honest.**

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?

**Workload was constant and somewhat time-consuming but the grading was very lenient with opportunity for extra credit in every class. Teaching style was exceptional with small classes and good interaction with professors. Every professor knew your name and showed direct interest in your education.**

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?

Four courses were standard for international students. I would recommend five as I still had a lot of time on my hands, despite numerous activities outside of class. VUW students should find the course load easier than home. Marine Mammals lab is a must if prerequisites are met. No where in VUW or many mainland colleges will you get that level of hands on experience aboard a marine going vessel.

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

**Stay on top of your homework. Prepare for every exam and test. You do not need to go out of your way to study hard. The grading is lenient and forgiving.**

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

**Internet access was somewhat patchy but high speed. The library was extremely helpful and offered every kind of facility required.**

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?

## **E: Accommodation**

What form of accommodation did you stay in?

**Off campus student apartments (Hale Haumana and Tobhi Hale)**

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

**Significantly more freedom than on campus. Cooking your own meals was perfect for my lifestyle. Met the majority of my closest friends through my accommodation. Downsides included a noise restriction at 11pm and the manager was a little crazy.**

What accommodation would you recommend to future students?

**I recommend exactly what I did. It was significantly cheaper than on-campus accommodation and in a lot of ways significantly better.**

How early can you move into accommodation?

**I moved in on the 17 August 2015 to Hale Haumana and then transferred my belongings into Tobhi Hale before winter break in late December. Both of these apartment complexes are run by the same manager and so she made this transfer process easy.**

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

**On campus dining halls are expensive and not particularly healthy. I cannot comment with any authority as I purchased and cooked my own food which I enjoyed.**

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

**It was simple to find. Tobhi Hale and Hale Haumana are the go to's. You have complete freedom which was exactly what I wanted. It was easy to make friends as the majority of people at Hale Haumana are internationals just like you and so are going through the same early friend-finding struggles.**

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

**Get in early as it fills up quickly and there aren't many openings to begin with.**

## **F: Personal & Cultural Connections**

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

**First semester I was primarily friends with international students though I made close friends with an American early on and that introduced me to a whole bunch of other Americans, which opened up all kinds of local activities, parties etc. Second semester I developed a few key friendships with locals who I then hung out with almost exclusively. I enjoyed this very much and their interests reflected my own. It's easy to make friends with internationals, but if you're staying for the year I would highly recommend putting yourself out there and making friends with Americans or locals. They open so many more avenues and you don't lose all your friends when you stay on for the next semester.**

**My key message is to really put yourself out there and be sociable, even if you're introverted (like me). You won't make friends sitting in your apartment by yourself. And your entire experience is based on the people you chose to hang out with and the activities you did.**

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

**American life is different. And Hawaiian life is a mix of American and local. Hawaiian culture is addictive and inviting and had a huge impact on the majority of my international friends and myself.**

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

**Understanding pidgin! The more Hawaiians you surround yourself with, the more you'll understand pidgin.**

What parts of the culture did you most appreciate?

**Outdoor enthusiasm, environmental respect and protection, and the welcoming attitudes of locals.**

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

**Extremely well. Everyone, including other students are respectful, polite and inviting. I did find some other students to be a little superficial or disingenuous.**

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?

**UH Hilo is considered one of the most diverse universities in the United States. This includes ethnicity, gender and sexual orientation. I have actually never been in an environment that was so accepting before.**

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

No

### **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?

**Social soccer, basketball, volleyball, pool facilities, extensive gym with great classes (check out the boxing class – I loved it).**

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

**The Big Island is an outdoorsman's dream. It has some of the best diving/spearfishing on the planet. There are a number of world famous hikes (White Road). Hunting – especially with the bow - is extremely popular with the locals and most are happy to take you out. The beaches, especially Kona side, are world renown. Get outside. That's where the Big Island comes into its own. If you're looking for shopping malls or clubs, you've come to the wrong place.**

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

**Plenty of opportunities to work on campus, however my experience showed that they hired residents and locals as a priority.**

What volunteer or internship opportunities were there for students?

**I volunteered aboard the Makani Aha research vessel as a deckhand, gaining a multitude of maritime knowledge. I volunteered in the BioAcoustics laboratory analyzing sound clips of the native Hawaiian Oma'o songs and calls for my second semester.**

#### **5 things to take to your host country or region**

1	Dive gear/spearfishing gear
2	Surfboard
3	Hunting gear (particular a bow if you've got one)
4	Shorts, t-shirts and sunnies – forget your dress/going-out clothes
5	Guitar or instrument

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

1	Make friends with locals/Americans – I had so many amazing opportunities because my closest friends were locals or lived in Hawaii. Transport is no longer an issue when you're friends with locals.
2	Don't be afraid to branch out from your initial friend group. I realized my interests were not reflected in my early friends, and so I found new friends whereby I was doing the things I loved every weekend.
3	Get out and explore Hawaii's outdoors. It can become a dreary place if you just stay inside.

4 Don't even bother with Honolulu

5 Get involved with extra-curricular activities at UH – just say yes to everything.

### Top 5 Things to do

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

1 Kauai's Hanalei Bay is a surfers dream and one of my fondest memories of Hawaii.

2 Get SCUBA qualifications. UH offers one of the cheapest rates on the planet. I achieved Rescue Diver Status and saved over a thousand dollars compared to NZ prices.

3 Jump South Point – The Southernmost place in the United states. 40ft jump into the Pacific!

4 Maui's Road to Hana is one of the scariest but most rewarding drives I've ever done. Single lane road right on the cliffs of the Northern Coast, one thousand feet up!

5 Mauna Kea Summit for Sunset

### H: Personal Experience

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

My experience cannot be summed up in a paragraph. Hawaii completely changed my life and who I am. That sounds cliché, but it's true. The experiences I had could fill a book and I feel like I achieved Hawaii. I put myself out there and said yes to anything and everything and as a result I lived a life many people dream of. I assisted a master thesis in the bioacoustic analysis of the Hawaiian Thrush, bird watched in Hakalau Forest Reserve, deckhanded aboard a 40ft research vessel, studied humpback whales in the wild, placed in archery tournaments, surfed world renown locations, spearfished almost every coastline of the Big island, dove with a wild whale shark, octopus, eagle rays, 3 species of predatory shark and hundreds of species of reef fish, dove for prawns in freshwater rivers, completed two advanced SCUBA qualifications, freedived with world record holders, camped on deserted beaches by moonlight, hiked around the rim of a valley, rode sugar cane water chutes through the mountains, trekked the Nepali Coast, drove the Hana highway and the entire coastline of Maui and the Big Island, climbed waterfalls, jumped off cliffs, slid down river slides, fought in Kendo, and met and made life-long friends with people from France, Canada, Norway, Austria, Brazil, America and finally. Hawaii has it all, you just have to go and get it.

