

# Victoria Abroad Evaluation Form

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

## A: Student Information

VUW degree(s)	Law and Arts
Major(s)	History, Religious Studies and Law
Exchange Institution	University of Hilo, Hawaii
VUW Tri & Year of Exchange	Fourth Year, first trimester

## 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 (USD)
Accommodation	\$ 5,000 (NZD)
Return Airfare	\$2,700 (NZD)
Local Transportation	30-50 (USD)
Meals	100-200 (USD) Majority of my meals were included with my accommodation costs.
Visa	170 (NZD)
Health & Insurance	1,200 (NZD)
Personal Spending	3,000 (NZD)
Communications (phone, etc.)	50 (USD)
Other fees (specify)	200 USD – Courses such as getting scuba certified and other opportunities like swimming with dolphins.
What unexpected costs did you encounter? What items were more or less than expected?	I guess the most unexpected costs were to do with the initial set up once I arrived, buying items such as clothes hangers and bed sheets. Food was definitely more expensive than I had thought.

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

I actual expensive were pretty accurate to what I had originally estimated.

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

A main way I managed my finances was through setting up an American bank account in order to view my balance in US currency and after exchange rates and fees.

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

I would definitely recommend setting up an American bank account, it is very easy and saved me a lot of bank fees.

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

The cost of a can of coke was about 2-3 USD and coffee anywhere from 2.50-5 USD.

**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 I did have to apply for a student visa and I also applied for a travel visa so that I could travel after my semester finished. You are allowed to travel in the United States for up to a month after your student visa has expired but if you want to travel any longer than that you will need a travel visa.

The student visa from memory cost about \$170 NZD and a travel visa was less than that. Applying for the Visa was moderately hard just due to all the different forms you need to fill out and then bring with you to the interview.

The process starts with completing an online process which end with you booking your interview- the whole process took me a few weeks as you have to go to an interview at the US embassy in Auckland.

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

My only advise would be to do it as early as possible to be safe with timing.

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 my host university did require mandatory insurance. My host university offered insurance however it was cheaper to go with the STA full coverage option which cost me about 1,200 NZD.

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

I used STA travel insurance and yes would recommend, it was ok..

**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>					
HIST 152	English		15	3	World History post 1500's- Had professor Bitter, he was a great professor, very funny and lively.
HWST 111	English		15	1	This was a Hawaiian Studies paper that gave a great general background to Hawaiian history, culture and beliefs.

HIST 327	English		15	3	This was an environmental history paper with Professor Inglis, she was a very knowledgeable and interesting professor, I definitely recommend taking one of her classes.
HIST 383	English		15	5	This was a US history paper taken by Professor Smith. Professor Smith is another great professor but is a very harsh but fair marker. I loved the course and his teaching style, you definitely learn a lot but I would only take one of his classes if you are dedicated to the work load- very reading intensive.
<b>VUW Trimester 2/YEAR</b>					

### Course Registration/Enrolment

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

My university required an online enrollment prior to arriving at the collage. I did this online an the date and time of the enrollment opening was clearly provided.

Basic information was available from the host university about course enrollment prior to my arrival. Upon my arrival the international advisor was available to assist with any question or problems that you might have.

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?

My course enrollment was semi-successful. I managed to get all 5 courses approved and enrolled in at my host collage but was later informed that taking 5 course was overloading and therefore I had to drop a paper that I had already done almost half a semesters work for and bought the books for.

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

My only advise would be to double check how many papers Victoria allows you to take, obviously getting 5 papers approved doesn't not mean you can take them all, little details like these can cause problems later.

## **Academic Experience**

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

I guess the main difference I found at the University of Hilo compared to Victoria was the amount of regular quizzes and tests. I had fortnightly quizzes for most of my classes or regular pop quizzes. Reading were important as professors would call on the class to answer questions specific to the readings. I really enjoyed the style of teaching as everything you covered was included in the mid-term and final exam where as in NZ I find the midterms and finals cover only certain aspects.

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?

The style of teaching was more personal at Hilo, certain professor were hard on their students but fair. In particular professor were available to read essays or other work before the deadline if you wanted feedback, this was extremely helpful for papers that were 12-15 pages.

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?

I completed four courses at the University of Hilo and this was a moderate to relaxed course load. Originally I was taking five papers which was a moderate course load, so my recommendation would be for 4-5 papers but since 5 papers is overloading I would definitely recommend 4 courses. This gives you enough time to complete extra activities outside of your studies. I completed history papers at Hilo but a very popular degree was the sciences particularly with a focus in marine biology.

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

My advice would be to find a buddy in your class, this makes it very helpful for revising before a test or if you have and questions. Furthermore I would hugely recommend that if a professor offers to look over an assignment before the deadline to take the offer, that feed back is the key to showing you're organized at improving your grade.

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

The internet access was great all over campus, didn't have a problem with that. The computer facilities that were in the library and the library were not open 24 hours which I found very odd, however hours did lengthen during finals week.

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 the university dorms.

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

The main pro's of staying in the university dorms were that you were already on campus, the costs including everything so there were no hidden or extra costs and also majority of the international and national exchange students chose this accommodation, meaning that you were close to your friends.

What accommodation would you recommend to future students?

My first choice of accommodation would still be the dorms.

How early can you move into accommodation?

I moved into the dorms a few days before orientation begun

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

There were three different meal plan options 7, 10 and 14 meals a week and also a number of points that you could spend in the food court area. The food in the dining hall ranged average to bad. Kitchen wise in my hall there was no kitchen but there were kitchens in many of the other halls and we were free to use their kitchen too.

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

N/A- I lived on campus.

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

The only advise I would have is that I would definitely stay on campus but look into purchasing of borrowing a mini fridge when you first arrive, it makes everything a lot easier.

## **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 was very successful in making friends that were not international, actually 90% of my friends were American from all over the main land. Forming friends early on in the semester is key as groups form fast. The orientation is what really allowed me to meet the national exchange students and locals at the university.

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

I think the most different aspect I found on my exchange was tipping and also the terms used by New Zealanders and Americans. As long as you are open to a new experience and to learn about others this will be a fun and interesting interaction.

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

There was nothing in particular that quite challenging, as previously stated I do think a basic understanding of the Hawaiian history particularly the overthrow of the last Queen would be important to understanding important debates and views held in Hawaii today.

What parts of the culture did you most appreciate?

I loved how alive the Hawaiian language was and how prominent the Hawaii beliefs were in Hawaii.

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

I was treated great by everyone, people in Hawaii really love the NZ accent and also the people of Hawaii love how New Zealand has an Island culture like Hawaii.

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?

Not too sure to be honest but I know the university did have a disability service that were open to any students who might need to use it, this included note takers and other options.

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

I personally didn't face any discrimination while I was at the university of Hilo. I do recommend before attending the university having a basic background knowledge of the history of Hawaii. On the big Island cultural issue and current events are very important, the social unrest from the over throw of the Hawaiian monarchy is still a very live issue for Hawaiians today.

## **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?

There was both a wide variety of clubs and sports. Sports ranged from basketball, volleyball to soccer. Clubs also included physical activities to social and even academic focuses.

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

During the weekends I would definitely recommend exploring the Island with friends and the best way to do this is through the free weekend trips offered through the school. During spring break I would recommend looking at visiting another Island with friends, all the Islands are so different and very beautiful. Kauai was my favorite Island to visit.

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

Due to the study visa international students are prohibited from working off campus but on campus jobs are available through the university website.

What volunteer or internship opportunities were there for students?

There were many volunteer opportunities depending on what you were interested in. During orientation week the university clubs all advertise and give out information about opportunities and advantages of join their club.

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

- 1** Sun screen- always very hot and sunny. Even on rainy days you will be surprised by how easy it is to get sun burnt.
- 2** Insect Repellent- I didn't find mosquitos much of a problem but especially in certain parts of the island it is worth having.

3	Sun glasses- for obvious reasons.
4	A Go Pro- Due to all the outdoor opportunities a Go Pro is one thing my friends had that I wish I had acquired prior to my exchange.
5	An Umbrella- surprisingly Hilo is the rainy side of the Island, it is common for Hilo to be sunny on minute and raining the next. Also umbrellas are unusually expensive in Hilo.

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

1	<b>My first piece of advise would be to take every opportunity- even the weekend trips that seem less exciting can be pleasantly surprising.</b>
2	Make friends with a local. A majority of my friends were national exchange students from the main land of America however it was the three local Hawaiians that know all the secret spots and how to get there. It is sometimes very hard to find places in Hawaii if you haven't been before or don't have someone with you that has.
3	Don't stick with the international exchange students. As much as it is great to make friends with the international exchange students, youre on an exchange and making friends with the locals is what will really give you a great experience on your exchange.
4	Take time to explore the Island. There is so much to do on the Big Island that 5 months almost doesn't give you enough time, so make sure you start exploring early.
5	Finally leave sometime after your exchange to travel, you'll be surprised about how close you become with your friends and visiting them on the mainland is a great way to finish your exchange.

### Top 5 Things to do

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

1	<b>Go on the weekend trips, they are a great way to see the island for free and with your friends. The Island is quite big and usually it is hard to get around without a car.</b>
2	White Roads- This is a huge waterslide in the middle of Waipo Valley. Very beautiful and fun.
3	Green Sands Beach- Located on the southern side of the Island and is one of the only three green sand beaches in the world.
4	Scuba Certified- This is offered through the school and a great price and is a fantastic opportunity to do especially with a friend.
5	Kona side- Kona is where you will find the tourist in the Big Island. Kona has some great food places and beautiful beaches.

### H: Personal Experience

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

Doing an exchange at the University of Hilo has definitely been one of the best experiences of my life. Having the opportunity to study in a new country, to meet new people and learn through a new style of teaching, was something I couldn't have enjoyed more. Hilo is a smaller University compared to a lot of the other American Universities but there are a lot of pros to that. Hilo is small enough that you will know everyone in your class and most of the people who live on campus by the end of the semester. Due to Hilo being very popular for exchange students you

will also meet a variety of people not only from all over the United States but also from all over the world. The friends I made at Hilo are definitely life long friends and the adventures you can go on around the island is endless. If you are one who loves the outdoor, the heat and trying new things then there would be no better place to do an exchange than at Hilo.

