

# Australia



Semester exchange report

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## Introduction

From July 2018 to October 2018 I went to Australia for an exchange. A week after my 3rd semester I had to be in Australia for the exchange, so there was not much time in between. It was at Deakin University in Geelong (an hour by train from Melbourne). I went there to experience something new, live in another new country and I always had the dream to live at a place to learn how to surf. Geelong is half an hour from some world-class surf beaches, like Torquay. So this was a chance I simply had to take!



## Living in Geelong

A little bit about Geelong. It's a small but cute city, there is not too much going on except for university activities and clubs. The nightlife is not that great, so don't expect to get blown away by that. But maybe I'm getting too old for that kind of student life (I'm 27). Also remember that you're not going to live in the city of Melbourne. Even though an hour by train from there is relatively close in Australian terms, my experience and what I saw from other students is that you don't go there often just for an evening. If you want to visit Melbourne and/or go out there it's best that you know someone there where you can crash. For me it didn't matter, because my intentions to go there was more surf-orientated than student-life. And the surf there, it's just unreal. Regularly there were dolphins joining us, coming really close, while you sit there out in the ocean waiting on some waves. It was the closest I got to nature. Just you, the ocean and the locals of land and sea! [Here's a drone video](#) a Danish surfbuddy made of us surfing at Torquay.



*My house and board*

For the people reading this interested in surfing: I bought a 2<sup>nd</sup> hand 8 foot board and new 3/4mm wetsuit for 2700 DKK. The water on the South coast is quite cold, around 12 degrees, so you need a wetsuit at least of that thickness. My friends had a thinner (and broken) one and they were freezing all the time, no fun (and they even had boots as well). Also, you need a car to get with your board at the beach. There are busses going to Torquay, but they are not reliable and it's just a little difficult to travel in with a board. I was lucky because my roommate had a car left and I could rent it from him during my time there.

## Finances

Living in Australia is expensive, but just as Denmark. Some things are more expensive and some things are cheaper than Denmark so overall it's the same. For example mobile data is more expensive, but food and restaurants are a little cheaper in Australia. Tip: go to Coles (the biggest supermarket) in the end of the day and get a complete grilled chicken for 2 dollars, because they need to get rid of it in the end of the day. Serves like 4 people!

Be prepared to pay a great sum of money before you even leave Denmark. You have to pay for visa, flight ticket, insurance etc. up front.

Travel Insurance Dr. Walter (cheapest and best for exchange students, I did some research): 2500 DKK for 7 months

Health Insurance, mandatory by Australian government: 1425 DKK

Flight ticket (single trip): 5400 DKK

Visa: 2700 DKK

Sidenote – Filling in the visa application took me 8 hours.

When arrived, I opened a bank account there, because I've heard it's not a big deal to get one and it's easier to pay your rent etc. But some friends just used their Danish bank account, so it is possible. Use TransferWise to transfer money from your Danish bank account to the Australian one, otherwise you'll pay a lot of commission for the bank. I lost 200 dollars with that....

I paid around 3500 DKK per month for rent, which was medium price range. The room was great: spacey and really nice Australian roommates. More about that later in this report.

I got a simcard from Vodafone and for a medium mobile data plan I paid 140 DKK per month. A friend just kept her Danish phone nr and plan, so that is also possible.

For food, I paid an estimated 600-800 DKK per week. I cooked a lot myself, or with friends. Maybe went out for dinner once in 10 days on average. The bar 'The Deck' opposite of uni has dinner deals every day. It's not great food, but it's cheap and convenient if you go home late from uni.

## Getting a room

There's two ways of getting a room there: via Deakin or by yourself (<https://flatmates.com.au>, <https://www.facebook.com/groups/117412174975402/>). I chose to search a room for myself because I wanted to live with locals and also the Deakin rooms are quite expensive. One benefit though is that the Deakin dorm is right next to the uni, so you can just walk there and also walk to most shops and supermarkets. The Deakin rooms are nice, in a new building and have a great view on the bay. In winter it's actually quite cold in south Australia (like 10 degrees) and the Deakin building is well insulated – surprisingly not the standard over there. Most other buildings are a little bit older and have very little or even no insulation, so in my room for example (in an ordinary house) it was super cold. I had to sleep with multiple sheets, because there was also no heaters in the rooms. The houses there are made for warm weather, so you even more appreciate the Danish hygge. That's the one thing in Australia I disliked, it was cold everywhere, even in houses and restaurants.

But one more thing about the Deakin dorm: there is too many rules. I was there quite a lot in the beginning of the semester, but later they changed the rules of having guests. I was told that guests are not allowed at all anymore later on. I couldn't even have dinner anymore at friends in that dorm.

That is just ridiculous, considering also the amount of money you pay for a room. It feels like they didn't really figure out a good way yet to manage the dorm and the residents, since it's still new.



*Beautiful view on the bay from the Deakin dorm*

Start getting a room early. I started around 5 days after I arrived and that was already too late, because, quite unexpected in a city like Geelong: it's hard to find a nice room on bike distance that is also not too expensive. So when I was looking, I got into a sketchy room because I just really needed a place to stay. The Australian housemates were great, but the room was full of mold. Due to health risks I continued searching and eventually moved into a house which was a 15-20 minute bike ride away from the university. I lived there with four aussie roommates and a dog. They are around their 30's and really friendly and I actually spent quite some time with them in my spare time. They were a big part of my experience there, and already right after we met they were willing to help me with whatever I needed. They were not students (one was a doctor, one an engineer, and one had several smaller jobs) which makes you get to know people out of the university circle. I even helped one of them out with some jobs he had (bartending in a bar, and setting up jumping castles at a party). That made me experience an Australian wedding party and a mourning 'party', which ofcourse I'd never thought I would do in my time there. So I highly recommend to step out of the comfort zone and just find a place yourself instead of living in the dorm.



*Tequila moving-out party*

## Social life

The friends I had most contact with were the other exchange students from KEA, besides my roommates. Also some Australians, which some of them I knew already from when they were in Copenhagen for an exchange. Australians are in my opinion more friendly and open than Europeans (at least the Dutch and Danish). That makes it quite easy to make friends there. One thing though that happened to me but also to friends of mine there, was if you for example set a time or date to meet up, they sometimes didn't show up (sometimes without notice).

Also my Australian groupmates at university were sometimes quite frustrating to work with, because some didn't respond to messages, didn't show up at meetings or came very late, or even totally disappeared and were unreachable for weeks. I think it is because of the heavy workload at Deakin. They are just so busy (more busy than us because they have more units/subjects than exchange students from KEA) that they can't focus on every unit all the time. Also, Deakin is quite individual orientated so the students aren't the best group workers.

I didn't do a lot of social events, because I spent most of my free time surfing. But I know that there is a lot of student clubs and events you can go to if you want, like free pizza events or sport clubs.

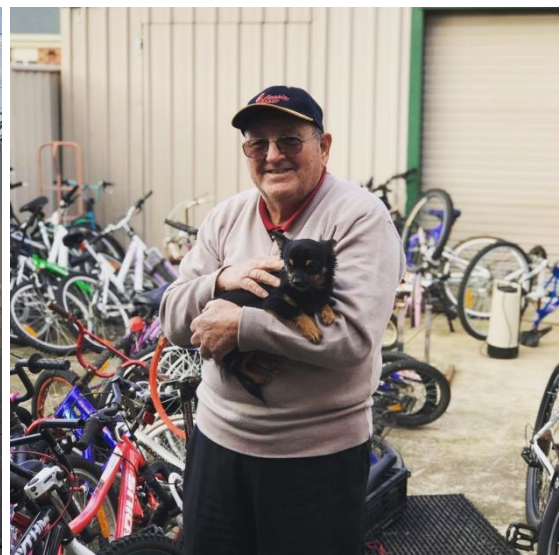
Living in the Deakin dorm is also quite social, because in every apartment there are living like 8 students. Most of them are in the age of 18 to 22.

## How to get around

Busses in Geelong itself work fine and cheap, a lot of students travel to and from uni by bus. There are special Deakin shuttle busses that take you without charge to the different uni locations. I preferred to take the bicycle though, because I just love biking. I got lucky that I got a free bike from a guy called John. He receives lost bikes, he fixes them and anyone can just go to his place and pick a bike for free. Awesome! That was a very good start of living over there. Just give him a call and ask for a bike: 0419319664 (Australian phone nr).



*Free bikes*



*John 'the bike guy'*

Geelong is a little bit hilly, so quite honestly it was pretty tough sometimes even though I have biked all my life. That's probably the reason people there don't bike. Everyone has cars, I even think that biking is considered uncool as well haha. So sometimes you get some strange looks from people in traffic.

## The university and units

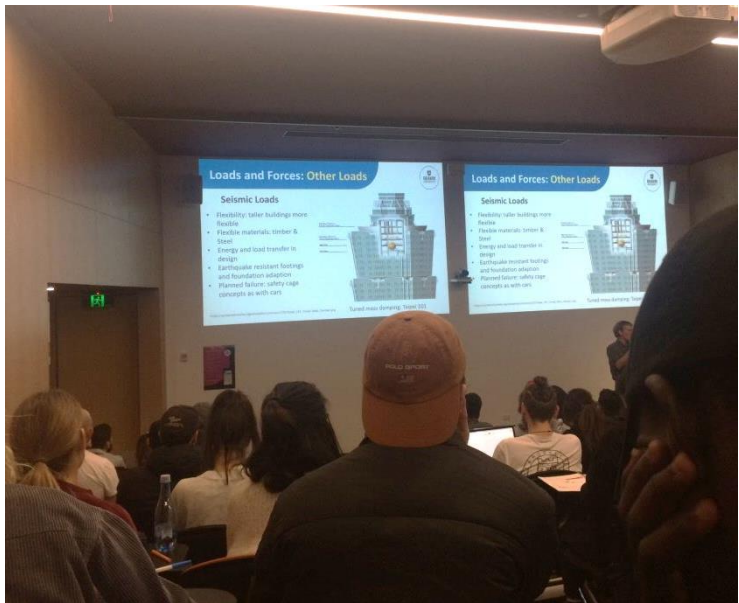
Deakin's facilities are of a high standard. A good library, good unit management system for students (a little confusing in the beginning but later on it works good), good class rooms, recorded classes etc. They even have an app to find rooms and such, and a store where you can buy study materials. There's also a workspace like the Makerlab at KEA where you can let them lasercut your models and you only have to assemble it. The university has a strong organization which works well together.

I've had three units: Construction & Structures 3, Building Environmental Studies 1 and Modelling Studio. What I liked most about these units is the way how they are set up: each of them have their own assignment – different than KEA, where there is one big assignment and all the subjects lead to that. KEA's way sounds good on paper but is hard in practice because it means that all tutors of all the subjects have to have their noses pointing in the same direction. Every semester I've had here, this was causing a problem, with a lot of questions and different feedback from tutors. Because every unit at Deakin has its own assignment, there is clarity and structure.

Don't go to Deakin if you want to get better at Revit. They are not BIM oriented. Deakin is mainly about developing concepts and visualize that in a convincing way. So you learn to make concept designs, maquettes, reports, and get skilled in graphic software like Photoshop and InDesign. I don't think they ever make keyjunctions.



*Friend making a maquette*

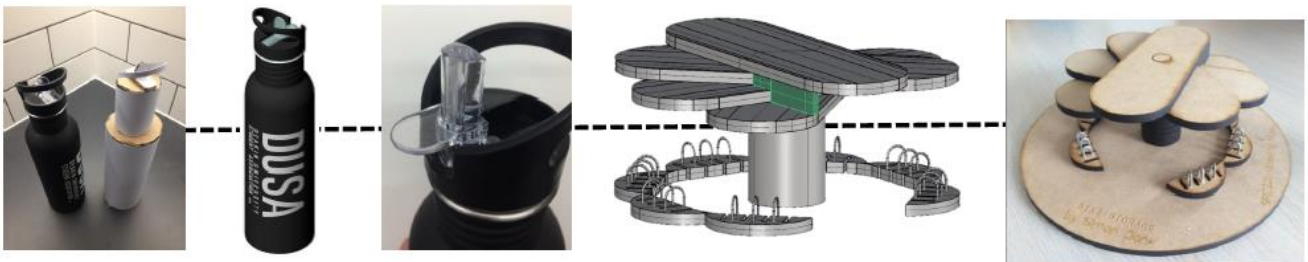


*A class of Construction & Structures 3*

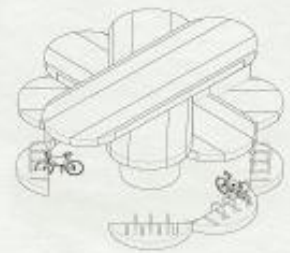
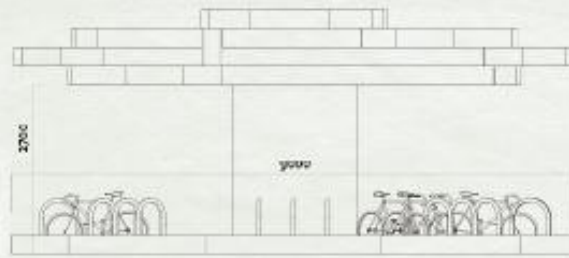
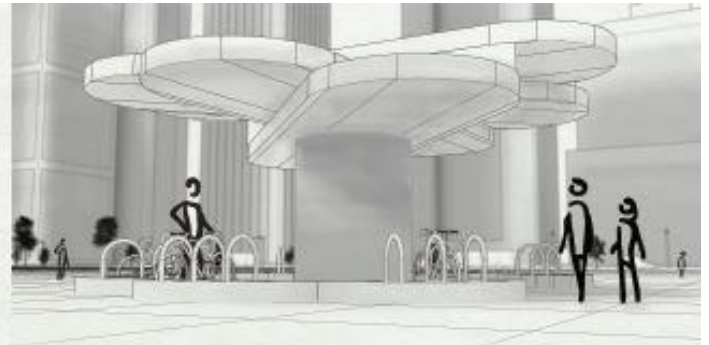
With Construction & Structures 3, we got thought about high-rise buildings. It was my favourite unit because it's very technical. We went deep into materials and structural systems. The tutor, who was an experienced carpenter but also a great speaker and teacher, was very structured and organized. This unit was setup so that we had one full day of this unit. We started in the morning with a 2 hour class in a lecture hall – just listening and taking notes. And then later that day we had a seminar, which is a 1 hour smaller and more personal lecture where he basically summarizes the content he taught us earlier that day and questioned us. The deliverables (in group work) were in the form of reports, so you're writing and research skills have to be on top because in general, the Deakin students are more skilled with that.

Building Environmental Studies 1 was about the environmental impact buildings have. I thought it was really interesting, but the tutors (two professors) weren't that didactic skilled which made a lot of students lose interest. It felt also a bit like this subject is still very new and undeveloped, which matches the idea I have about Australia not being concerned that much yet about the environment in daily life (could be wrong). Anyway, I still learned a lot. The assignment was to change a building's carbon footprint and energy consumption, by making use of 'green' methods (like natural ventilation, solar heating, etc). We had to learn and use software to actually test our applied methods and predict its efficiency. The deliverable (in group work) was a report and a 3D model. A downside of the assignment though, was that the building (a residential house) we were asked to make more environmentally friendly was already of a high standard... And we also had to make a video of the 3D model, which I think is a lot to ask because we're not video-editing students. That just takes a lot of time.

Modeling studio taught us how to use Rhino, typical architect's software. It's not BIM and mainly about making complicated shapes to develop concepts. It seemed a good idea for me to learn a different software than Revit but I learnt mostly that Revit is actually in my opinion a better and more useful software. We had one 4 hour class each week, and every week we got small assignments to get familiar with Rhino. Besides that we had to work on our final assignment – which was making a bike storage out of an ordinary object.



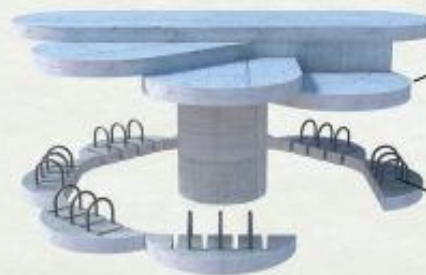
*Modelling studio: from bottle to bike storage*



## bike storage

designed and made by Simon Donk

SRC221 modelling studio  
deakin university



### white concrete

made with a portland cement with a very low amount of iron compounds, which gives the concrete a white color

### stainless steel

a steel or corrosion resistant alloy containing 10.5% or more chromium



## To conclude

Deakin offers a high level of education so if you're looking for a challenge, this is it. My knowledge has expanded about high-rise buildings and environmental-friendly building methods. I got better at academic writing, InDesign and Photoshop, and got introduced to Rhino. But this exchange also broadened my view of the industry, and the study/work culture in Australia.

Besides the studies, Australia is wonderful and the Australians are great and open people to be around. Yes it is expensive, and yes I'm totally broke now and can't get a new laptop or new phone, because my old phone fell off my motorbike during my roadtrip through Vietnam... And yes, people told me it was a bad idea and didn't understand why I wanted to be so far from home.

But it is all worth it - you'll gain knowledge, close friendships and great memories.

A sincere thank you to Andreas, KEA and Deakin for giving me this opportunity.