

**Flinders University, Adelaide, Australia**  
**Fall 2007**  
**Reflection #1**

Making the decision on whether you should go to Australia or not is a simple one, as long as you are willing to accept one simple statement.

Do not go to Australia unless you are willing to fall in Love.

Before I left for my 4-month exchange program at Flinders Uni in Adelaide, South Australia my mom jokingly told friends that the one worry she had was that I would fall in love with a boy and never come home. But in the end she shouldn't have voiced her worries so light-heartedly. The end result is much worse than she feared— I fell in love with the entire country. I fell in love with this strange bouncing marsupial I still can't manage to stop being amused by. And with the landscape that so easily ranges from grapevine covered rolling hills to steep rocky cliffs perfect for mountain climbing to endless kilometers of coastline. And being a person who doesn't generally like cities, I was surprised that I even fell in love with Sydney—a city with a population of 2 million that still maintains the warmth of a small town in southern Georgia.

But to sum all of my feelings for Australia up neatly, all that I can tell you is “no worries.” No other place that I've ever been to has had the ability to adopt a simple pair of words that appears simply to be a cultural stereotype into a mantra to live by. One of the many lessons I learned during my stay in Aus is to not let things bother me as much. Not just the small things either, but “big” things as well. And if you ask why, the only response I will be able to make is “no worries.”

So let's assume you've already chosen to go to Australia. Let's assume that you are completely willing to fall in love, and that you are willing to take the risk of having a small part of you never want to come home, even though you love it there too. So what next? Looking back I don't think I would have done anything differently, but I suppose there are a few things I wish someone had told me. For starters, I can guarantee you that you won't need as much stuff as you think you will. Pack everything you think you might need, and then (I'm fully serious here) leave at least 1/3 of it at home. The coldest Winter day there is comparable to our average Autumn day in Virginia, so keep that in mind too. And have you heard Baz Lurhman's song “Wear Sun screen?” If you haven't, it's really

good and you should listen to it. But seriously, wear sunscreen. Australia is much closer to the ozone hole than we are. So wear sun screen.

If you're going to Flinders Uni in SA, I recommend living on campus in the flats. The townhouses on campus are pretty old, and the dorms are...dorms. The flats are nice though and it will be easier to stop by to see friends. Or you can do what I did and live off campus, there are plenty of share houses within a short walk or bus ride to campus and Flinders has a website that can help you find a place too, even while you're sitting here at your computer in the states.

You won't be able to see everything in Australia that you were hoping to, so just be content with what you can see. I could give you advice on where to go, but the truth is that it is all just so amazing. Watch the sun set over the ocean, it will be gorgeous every single time, without fail. Eat salt & pepper squid and prawns. Buy a pair of thongs. Wear your bathing suit everywhere you feel like it, and wear your shoes only to the places you feel like it too. Listen to triple J, it might actually be the best radio station the world over. Call home, your family actually does realize just exactly how far it is from here to there.

**Flinders University, Adelaide, Australia**  
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**Reflection #2**

Before July, I had never left the U.S and the farthest I had ever been away from my family was two hours away, at JMU. I didn't know anyone from another country and was always jealous of my peers who travelled around the world and who seemed so much more cultured than I was. Today, I can say that I have been halfway across the world. I have friends from many different countries who I plan to keep in touch with. And I have officially caught the "travelling bug," which makes me want to go to even more places and meet more people from all over the world.

My time in Australia was one of the best experiences I have ever had. I was extremely nervous going into it, but now that I am back home I would definitely do it over again if I had the chance.

Before I came to Australia, I pictured kangaroos hopping down the streets and everyone looking like the Crocodile Hunter. I really had no idea what the culture would be like. I was very surprised how much Australia was like America. I thought that everything would seem really foreign to me, but just walking down the road I couldn't tell that I was in another country (except for the fact that the cars drive on the left side of the road). The first thing I noticed coming into the country was that the people were all so friendly. I

literally didn't meet one unfriendly person the entire time I was there. I came into the University Hall at Flinders halfway through the year and was from another country, yet everyone made me feel so welcome and made a point of welcoming me into their community. It was incredibly easy for me to fit in and accommodate to the lifestyle. My hallmates all seemed really interested in the American culture and surprised me by knowing so much about our politics. I was there during Obama's election, and that was a huge time for Australians. I was able to see how our president truly affects the entire world, as every newspaper there would have some mention of Obama each day. It made me proud to be an American, but also made me want to research the politics of other countries so I could be more aware of what is going on elsewhere in the world.

I don't know if I had an official culture shock. I didn't really get homesick until about 3 months in. I was having so much fun and meeting new people that I didn't really think about home. I still talked to my family about 3 times a week on Skype, which I strongly recommend for anyone going abroad. It was great to be able to see my family and talk to them about what was going on. I didn't feel so far away from them when I was able to see their faces. When I did get homesick, there was always someone to talk to or something to distract me with. I really wasn't ever bored and there was always something going on in our hall.

Some things that I wish I had known before I left are that I wish I had known more about what the weather would be like. I came in July, but that was winter time for Australia. In Adelaide especially, which is where I lived, it was the coldest part of Australia. I brought mostly summer clothes and didn't prepare enough for the weather. It got down to the 40s while I was first there. I also should have looked up how to convert Celsius to Fahrenheit because often times I had no idea what the weather really was because it would be listed in Celsius. It was also strange using the metric system and the money definitely took me awhile to get used to. But I really liked having these new things in my life because it was something different and exciting. I picked up on the Aussie slang pretty quickly, but it was really interesting hearing their language. The first time someone asked me "how ya goin'?" I didn't really know what to say. It was funny to me how they thought that I spoke with an accent when I had never thought of myself as having an accent. I liked the fact that I was different from everyone and had a different background. Especially since the Aussies think so highly of Americans.

I made some really good friends while studying abroad. It was incredibly easy to bond with the other Americans who were there, since we had so much in common. One girl I met from New Mexico ended up coming with me on our mid-semester break and we stayed in hostels and traveled around Australia. I am hoping to visit her again one day. The Australians were also super easy to get along with because they were so laid back. Two of my friends drove me to the airport when I left to come home and stayed with me until I boarded the plane. A few people are going to be coming to America next year and we have made plans to meet up. I definitely plan on returning to Australia in the next few years to catch up with everyone and to explore more. I would even consider living there when I'm older.

My accommodation was the best part about my experience. I stayed at a dorm, but it was completely different from any dorm I lived in at JMU. It was so much better because everyone in the hall knew everyone and we were all friends. It was like a big

family. There were events set up when I first got there so I could get to know the other new students and exchange students. We put on events in the hall such as pub crawls, toga parties, and formal dinners. There was also a huge sports aspect that I loved. Everyone in the hall came out to the sporting events and supported each other. I played for our hall's soccer team, competing against other colleges in South Australia. We ended up winning our championship and got a trophy. It was such a great experience. I also participated in our Athletics Day and ran in our hall's 5K towards the end of the semester.

The classroom situation in Australia was slightly different from here. For one, all of the lectures were put up on the school's website, so attendance wasn't mandatory and you could always listen to what you missed online. There were also classes called tutorials where you would go in with a small group from your lecture class and have a discussion about what you learned that week. I thought that was a really interesting concept and something that we should think about implementing here. It made everyone have a reason to do the readings and gave them a place to be able to ask questions in a small group setting.

In conclusion, I wouldn't trade my experience abroad for anything. I believe that it really made me a better and more rounded person. I feel more cultured and knowledgeable about the world than ever before. I came back home to find everything the same, and that was kind of hard for me at first. I definitely missed my home and friends and family, but there was also a part of me that missed having new and exciting things in my life. I will continue to keep in touch with the friends I met abroad and will be saving up my money to go back there someday. I can't stress enough how every person should be able to have the experience to study abroad. There's something about leaving home all by yourself and going to new places that makes you stronger and helps build character. I hope that everyone someday gets to visit Australia.