

**Exchange university**

University of Technology Sydney

Degree programme

MSc Real Estate and Construction Management

My exchange studies at UTS - a wonderful experience in one of the most vibrant cities in the world

Before departure

Before the official start of my studies at UTS at the end of July, I arrived in Australia over a month early. This early arrival was part of my plan to explore more of Australia, including a journey down the East Coast. Approximately two weeks before my courses started, I decided to settle in Sydney. This time was crucial for me to get to know the city a bit and to scout for apartments. At the start of the semester, I took advantage of the extensive and interesting introductory program offered by ActivateUTS which is comparable to THS at KTH. This program was a constant feature at the beginning and throughout the semester, providing various events and excursions. These activities were perfect for getting to know the university, meeting new people, and immersing myself in the city's culture. Most of these events were either free or very affordable, though they required early booking due to high demand. Additionally, there was a day, similar to what I experienced at KTH, that was dedicated to introducing all the clubs and associations the university has. It was an excellent opportunity to explore various groups and find communities aligned with my interests. Both, the individual clubs and ActivateUTS, hosted numerous events and parties throughout the semester, all of which were accessible on one website. Moreover, there have been introduction events which helped to integrate into the university's learning system, course structures and university procedures.

Upon arrival

Upon my arrival for exchange studies, my decision to apply was driven by a desire to experience diverse cultures. Having already moved from Germany to Sweden, I was keen to step outside of Europe and explore a different part of the world. Australia, with its stunning natural beauty, diverse landscapes, warmer climate, and beautiful beaches, had always appealed to me. Regarding preparations, I didn't need to take any language courses as English proficiency was a prerequisite. The university accepts previous studies in English at the KTH as sufficient proof of language skills, so no additional language certification was required. Health-wise, no special vaccinations were necessary for Sydney, which is a modern city with standard vaccination requirements. For travel within Australia, there were also no specific health risks that required extra vaccinations. The KTH also offers a very well health insurance, another important aspect I was happy about. The visa process was surprisingly straightforward, especially with German/European citizenship. The approval took just a few days, much quicker than the several weeks often suggested online. However, the visa did come with a cost of 4,815 SEK that I had to pay myself. Overall, my preparations for the exchange were relatively simple and hassle-free.

Financials

In terms of finances for my exchange studies, I did not receive any scholarships from KTH or other institutions. Scholarships for Australia are quite limited, especially for people like me who are already international students in Sweden. At the university, there were no tuition fees, and I didn't have to purchase textbooks or similar materials. Joining student clubs was affordable, costing around 170 SEK per semester, which allowed me to engage in various activities and social events without much financial strain. Regarding the cost of living, I found that everyday expenses in Australia were generally cheaper compared to Sweden. Items like groceries, dining out, and coffee were noticeably less expensive. However, public transportation costs were about the same, but without the convenience of a monthly pass - each trip was charged separately and there are no discounts for students. The most significant expense by far was housing. Rent was high, with monthly costs averaging around 14,000 SEK. To offset these costs, there are a lot of part-time jobs. The pay is quite reasonable, with a minimum of around 160 SEK per hour.

Accommodation

Finding accommodation in Sydney posed its own set of challenges. Initially, securing a spot in university housing was extremely difficult. However, as the semester progressed and some students moved out to find alternative accommodations, spaces in university housing gradually opened. These could then be taken over from other students. However, the university housing costs were comparable to, if not higher than, private rentals and offer very little space. Sydney is known for its incredibly high rental prices. As a result, living in a shared apartment is way more common than a single or two-bedroom apartment, as the latter were scarce on the market. Given Sydney's extensive size, looking for accommodation a bit outside the central areas was a viable option, especially considering the city's efficient public transport system. The best resource I found for housing searches was Flatmates, a website dedicated to finding shared accommodations. There I also found my accommodation. While Facebook also had many listings, I quickly learned that caution was needed there, as many offers turned out to be scams. Vigilance and thorough vetting were essential in navigating these online platforms to find a suitable and safe place to live.

University and studies

UTS, was significantly larger than KTH, with about three times the number of students. The campus itself was sprawling, featuring modern and impressive buildings. These facilities offered a variety of study and relaxation spaces equipped with state-of-the-art technology. The university offered a wide array of programs and courses, encompassing fields like law, business, sciences, engineering, architecture, design, fashion, health, technology, communication, and mathematics. It seemed like there was no subject that you couldn't study here. The language was English, which greatly facilitated my understanding and integration into the academic environment. While I didn't come across any language courses, they might have been available. Academically, the structure was different from KTH. Here, I took four courses per semester, all running concurrently rather than being split into halves. My typical day usually involved self-studies and attending about two lectures, with some of them being on-campus and some online. Some of these lectures were mandatory, but most were not. In addition to lectures, nearly all courses had tutorials involving practical work in small groups. These sessions were focused on tasks closely related to the course content and proved to be very helpful. The assessment structure was quite intensive, with multiple tasks and assignments throughout the semester contributing to the final grade. Most courses involved three main assignments, including group work, individual tasks, presentations, and sometimes weekly one-hour quizzes. The final assessment was either another assignment or an exam. Each of these assignments was accounting for about 30-40% of the final grade. Grading was categorized into High Distinction, Distinction, Credit, Pass, or Fail. Achieving high grades, such as High Distinction and Distinction, was considerably challenging, more so than in Sweden.

Courses

When selecting my courses for the exchange program, I aligned my choices with the courses I would have taken at KTH to facilitate the credit transfer process. I chose Managing in a Multicultural World (21717), Sustainable Urban Design and Development (16266), Creative Problem Solving (21854), and Minor Project (15345) as a counterpart to the Theory and Methodic course at KTH. However, one significant aspect to consider when planning courses at the university was the discrepancy between the course offerings listed online and their actual availability. Most courses advertised were not available upon arrival, necessitating flexibility and a readiness to adapt. Eventually, I had to change three out of my four initially chosen courses, but thankfully I still found alternatives closely aligned with my original selections. Each course had its unique strengths and offered valuable learning experiences. My favorite was Creative Problem Solving (21854). It was very interactive and fun and equipped me with skills crucial for addressing problems innovatively and managing change effectively, applicable in various professional contexts. Managing in a Multicultural World (21717) enhanced my understanding and skills in dealing with diverse management practices and cross-cultural interactions, critical for international business decision-making. Sustainable Urban Design and Development (16266) deepened my understanding of sustainable practices, building upon my previous knowledge from Sweden and introducing me to the Australian sustainability governances. The Minor Project (15345) course, devoid of traditional lectures, focused on self-directed research, resulting in three major submissions. This course significantly bolstered my academic research and writing skills and was a huge enrichment, preparing me for my master's thesis. It allowed me to explore a chosen topic in urban planning or construction in-depth and taught me how to do academic research and write a report about it. I would describe it as the most educative of all the courses I have done. Overall, each course contributed significantly to my academic and professional development, providing me with a broad spectrum of knowledge and skills applicable in my future career.

City and country

Sydney and Australia captivated me with their beauty and diversity. The natural landscape was truly impressive, marked by stunning beaches, picturesque walking trails, vegetation, and expansive parks. The weather in Sydney was pleasant as well, though not as hot as one might expect. This was particularly noticeable when arriving during the European summer, which coincides with winter in Australia. Therefore, packing some warmer clothing is advisable to accommodate the cooler temperatures during this period. One of the most delightful aspects of my stay were the Australian people. They were incredibly friendly and outgoing, which made integrating into the new culture and environment much easier. Their warm and welcoming nature stood out, especially in comparison to the more reserved demeanour I experienced in Sweden or what I know from Germany. This difference in social interaction greatly enhanced my overall experience, making my time in Australia not just an educational journey, but also a culturally enriching one.

Leisure and social activities

During my leisure time in Sydney, I embraced the opportunity to explore the city and the country as much as possible. Sydney, with its vast expanse, offered an array of activities. I frequently visited beaches, took strolls around the city, enjoyed local restaurants, and generally tried to experience as much of the city and country as I could. For fitness and sports, I regularly went running in beautiful neighbourhoods and visited the gym. Additionally, Sydney boasts a variety of cool studios offering activities like dance, cycling, and boxing, which I tried and thoroughly enjoyed. The UTS own gym was a great option, being relatively affordable compared to other gym chains, although it was only open on weekdays. The university itself also offered a wide range of sports, including tennis, football, cheerleading, and more, catering to various interests, hobbies, and cultural backgrounds. These sports activities were not just fun but also a great way to meet new people. In terms of cultural offerings, Sydney was rich with museums, markets, festivals, and other cultural events, providing endless opportunities to engage with the city's vibrant culture. Socially, I made contacts right from the beginning, particularly during the orientation days and related activities. These initial interactions were crucial for building a

social network, making it relatively easy to meet and connect with other students. This aspect of my exchange experience was particularly rewarding, as it allowed me to form friendships and immerse myself more deeply in the student life and culture of Sydney.

Sustainability

Sustainability was a notable aspect of my experience in Australia, despite the inherent challenge of traveling sustainably to such a distant location. Air travel to Sydney was unavoidable, but once in Australia, I made conscious efforts to travel sustainably. During my travels across Australia and in my daily life in Sydney, I relied only on public transportation. Buses and other public transit options were my primary means of getting around. The commitment to sustainability was also evident at the university. There was a significant emphasis on sustainable practices, particularly in the design and operation of campus buildings or in the content of the courses. This focus on sustainability in the university's infrastructure was inspiring and highlighted the institution's dedication to environmental responsibility.

