

Experience Report

- ☐ University Exchange Programme
- ☐ Erasmus+
- ☐ PROMOS

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Dear Outgoings,

During your stay abroad, you were able to gain a variety of academic experience and collect numerous personal impressions. In order to share this knowledge with future outgoing students as they plan and carry out their own stays abroad, you agreed to write a report on your experience in advance of your exchange. This report must be submitted to the International Office of the University of Greifswald within four weeks of your return.

I hereby agree to the publication of my Experience Report in

- ☐ anonymized
- ☒ non-anonymized (enables future Outgoings to contact me)

form.

Please send the completed Experience Report via Email

for Erasmus+ to:

erasmus@uni-greifswald.de

for our University Exchange Programme,
PROMOS and Erasmus+ worldwide to:

outgoing@uni-greifswald.de

Information about your stay

Study subject(s)	4 courses on ecological topics
Type of stay (e.g. studies, internship, language course etc.)	trimester study exchange
Country of destination, city	Australia, Gold Coast
Host institution	Griffith University
Period of stay (mm/yyyy to mm/yyyy)	03/2026 to 06/2026

Please respond to each question in continuous prose. Each field must contain a minimum of 750 characters.

What were your personal and academic motivations for going abroad? I had been curious about Australia for a long time, especially because of its wildlife and unique ecosystems. Having part of my family in California and travelling to many different countries for personal and academic reasons made me interested in experiencing new environments, cultures, and ways of life. Australia felt like a particularly exciting place to continue doing that. A major academic motivation for my exchange was the chance to focus more on marine ecosystems. I had already been studying ecology for some time, but marine ecology had barely been covered in my previous studies. Being in Australia allowed me to explore this field in one of the best possible settings and to connect what I had learned about terrestrial ecosystems with new knowledge about coastal and marine environments. This was especially meaningful to me because I have always enjoyed spending time in and around the ocean. I was also interested in Australian culture and history, particularly the cultures and perspectives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Living in Australia gave me the chance to learn about these topics in their local context rather than only reading about them from a distance. Studying in another language and adjusting to different teaching methods and university culture was challenging, but that was part of what attracted me to the exchange. It helped me become more confident, independent, and adaptable. The Gold Coast was also a great place for my interests outside university. With its warm weather, world-class waves, beaches, mountains, and nearby rainforests, there were endless opportunities to be outdoors. Overall, the exchange brought together many things that are important to me: ecology, the ocean, travel, new cultures, outdoor activities, and personal growth.

How did you manage to prepare for your stay? What should future Outgoings pay special attention to? (Application to the host university/institution, visa arrangements, flights, accommodation, health insurance, funding etc.)

Overall, I managed to prepare quite well for my stay. However, if I were to do it again, I would definitely start earlier. It is difficult to know in advance how much time it takes to organise your leave from your home university while also sorting out your visa, accommodation, finances, insurance, transportation, necessary equipment, and course selection.

Future outgoing students should pay particular attention to accommodation. Finding a suitable place on the Gold Coast can be difficult, and rent is often expensive. The general cost of living is also higher than you might expect, so it is important to include some extra room in your financial planning.

I would also recommend making a clear plan for your academic goals before choosing your courses. Apply as early as possible, as places in some courses may be limited. Ideally, choose subjects that complement your previous studies and allow you to explore areas that you have not covered much before.

At the same time, do not only plan the academic side of your exchange. Think about which places, activities, and experiences are most important to you and make a bucket list before you arrive. An exchange is a very special opportunity, and you may not get the same chance again. With an early start and a clear idea of what you want from the experience, the preparation—and the exchange itself—will be a breeze :)

What did you experience at your host institution during your stay abroad?

(Conditions at the host university/institution, courses taken, exams, participation in conferences or workshops)

During my stay at my host institution, I took courses in Marine Ecosystem Modelling, Environmental Microbiology and Ecology, Coastal Environments, and Conservation Biology. In my opinion, all of these courses delivered very well on what they promised, and I can highly recommend them. They allowed me to explore several new topics while also building on the ecological knowledge I already had.

Coastal Environments was especially memorable to me. The course gave me a much deeper understanding of coastal dynamics and ecology, including the natural processes that shape coastal areas and influence the ecosystems found there. We also went on excursions to saltmarsh and mangrove ecosystems, as well as rocky shore ecosystems. These field trips gave us the chance to observe the habitats and ecological processes we had discussed in class. Studying these topics while living on the Gold Coast made the course feel particularly relevant and helped me connect the academic content with the environment around me.

I also noticed some differences in how university studies were organised compared with my home university. In my experience, there were more individual assignments throughout the trimester, with each one making up a smaller part of the final grade. This meant that the workload was spread more evenly across the semester. Overall, I sometimes felt as though I had less to do, mainly because there was not the same stressful rush to study for major final exams at the end of the trimester. I enjoyed this structure because it encouraged me to engage with the course material regularly while still leaving enough time to experience life outside the university.

What were the language requirements like and how did you cope with them?

(e.g. language courses offered, working language, everyday communication)

I would say that the language requirements were at a fairly high level. Studying in an academic environment is probably one of the most challenging things you can do in a language that is not your native language. You not only have to follow lectures and understand technical terminology, but also read academic texts, write assignments, participate in discussions, and communicate your own ideas clearly.

Fortunately, there was plenty of support available, and I always felt comfortable speaking up when I had a question. All the lecturers and other teaching staff I interacted with were approachable and gave us many opportunities to ask questions. They were also happy to explain individual topics in more detail whenever something was unclear. This made it much easier to adjust to studying in English and gave me more confidence over time.

In the beginning, concentrating throughout an entire lecture and understanding specialised vocabulary could sometimes be tiring. However, this became easier as the trimester went on, and studying in English ultimately helped me improve both my language skills and my confidence. To really make the most of an exchange, I think it is important to already have a strong foundation in the language used at the host university. Otherwise, it can be easy to miss important details in lectures, assignments, and course instructions. You do not need to understand everything perfectly from the beginning, but a good base level makes it much easier to participate actively and benefit from the experience.

What personal impressions do you take away from your stay, and how would you evaluate the overall experience? (Daily life, cultural differences, formative events, were your expectations met?)

I really enjoyed the experience of studying at a different university because it gave me a genuine insight into the daily lives of students in Australia. It was interesting to experience a new academic environment, different teaching methods, and another university culture firsthand. The exchange also helped me develop my academic profile in areas that had not been covered as deeply as I would have liked during my previous studies. I was able to explore new topics, broaden my knowledge, and gain a clearer idea of the areas I may want to focus on in the future.

Living on the Gold Coast, close to the ocean and surrounded by beautiful ecosystems, was another major highlight. I had the opportunity to go on many amazing trips and spend my free time surfing, fishing, snorkelling, diving, hiking, and cycling. Being able to combine my studies with so many outdoor activities made the exchange especially enjoyable and worthwhile.

I also found it surprisingly easy to make friends at university. The people I met were generally very open, friendly, and welcoming, which helped me settle in quickly and feel comfortable in a new environment. I had a very positive impression of Australians in general and appreciated their relaxed and friendly attitude. I also loved listening to Australian slang and gradually becoming more familiar with it.

Overall, I would evaluate the experience extremely positively. It allowed me to grow academically and personally, meet great people, and experience a completely different lifestyle. The exchange gave me many memories, friendships, and experiences that I will carry with me for a long time.

What practical advice would you give to students who are planning a stay abroad?

(e.g. timing during their studies, optimal travel time, funding options, language preparation, etc.)

As mentioned before, one of my main pieces of advice is to start preparing as early as possible. Organising your visa, accommodation, insurance, finances, transportation, course selection, and leave from your home university can take much longer than expected. Starting early will help you avoid unnecessary stress shortly before your departure or during your first weeks in the destination country. It is also worth making a realistic budget that includes higher living costs and some extra money for unexpected expenses and activities.

Before leaving, think about what you want to gain from your exchange, both academically and personally. Choose your courses carefully, apply for them early, and make sure they fit your learning goals. At the same time, create a bucket list of places you want to visit and experiences you do not want to miss. However, leave some room for spontaneous plans, as these can become some of the best memories.

My biggest advice is simply to make the most of this opportunity. Be curious, speak to new people, try unfamiliar things, explore your surroundings, and do not be afraid to leave your comfort zone. Learn as much as you can, but also have as much fun as possible. A stay abroad can pass incredibly quickly, so appreciate your time there and take every reasonable opportunity that comes your way.