What am I supposed to do about housing in Australia?

First, please be well aware that you are responsible for selecting, securing, and paying for your semester housing, even if you are on financial aid. Semester housing for the Australia program is not pre-arranged and it is not included in your EAP fees (see your budget under the Money Matters tab, which can be found on the UCEAP Participants page).

Each university has a housing office where you can obtain information about on- and off-campus housing. While it can be very practical to live in the university halls of residence or other university-managed facilities, past EAP students have also rented private flats (apartments) and shared rental houses. These vary in quality and cost and are at a premium near the universities, but most students have reported good experiences with private rentals.

University-specific housing information is usually included with the acceptance letter and informational packet that is emailed to you by your host university. If housing information is not included, you can 1) contact the host university directly to request the information, and 2) see the host university’s web page on housing and accommodations for international students (see links below). Most of the host universities allow you to apply for housing before you have been officially accepted.

Below you will find some general information about university-managed accommodation and private rentals in Australian university towns and cities. Following that, the advantages and disadvantages of on versus off campus housing are outlined. Specific notes about each university’s housing options are included; most of these notes are based on input from past UC students.

(By the way, you can also ask questions of current and former UCEAP participants. Visit our UC EAP Australia Facebook page to interact with current and past students).
Important General Information:
• Know that most Australian students live at home while attending university. Students do not travel away to attend university unless they live in rural areas where there are no universities. This means that there isn’t an American-style dorm life. Many of the students who live on campus are from other countries (Australia has a large proportion of non-Australians enrolled in degree programs).
• Be careful about how far away a rental may be from university. Distances often take much longer to travel than in most of California. There are few highways and a lot of traffic. For instance, a 5-mile commute in Melbourne can easily take 45 minutes or more on public transport.
• It makes more sense to live on campus in some locations than others. Students at The Australian National University, La Trobe University, The University of Western Australia, and University of Wollongong often prefer on-campus housing for a variety of reasons, including location and a difficult housing market.
• For general off-campus rentals and shared housing, you can reference the following websites; however, local housing offices and bulletin boards are usually a better option for students.

Gumtree.com.au (similar to Craigslist)
Realestate.com.au (select Rent or Share)
Domain.com.au (select Rent or Share)
Quokka online (browse by House and Home, Real Estate, then by Houses/Flats to Let or Flatmates and Board)
EasyRoommate.com (need to register, may need to pay)

• For on- and off-campus housing, see your host university housing website:
The Australian National University
The University of Melbourne
The University of Queensland
The University of Western Australia
La Trobe University
The University of New South Wales
The University of Sydney
University of Wollongong

Overview of Options

Residential colleges

Advantages
You can set up housing in a residential college before you leave the U.S. and likely move straight in when you arrive. Almost all residential colleges are very close to campus and most are on it. Almost all have one student per room. Most provide academic facilities, like computing, support, tutoring, and general help learning about bureaucracy, available facilities (library, gym, banks, etc.), public transport, places to go, and special deals. Nearly all have social, cultural, and sporting programs, which are mostly good or outstanding. The friends you make may have cars, which can introduce opportunities like camping and excursions; some may be from rural areas and invite you home for the break.
Disadvantages

Residential colleges are usually the most expensive option. Often, the residents are international students, which makes meeting Aussies difficult, and many may be first-year students living away from home for the first time. There may be rules or restrictions you don’t like. You may encounter “Fresher” initiation during O-Week. Although new student initiations are something that universities in Australia do not endorse, they exist in varying degrees at different residential colleges. While some UC students find these activities harmless, others may be disturbed by the rituals that take place at the beginning of the school year and/or semester at some residences and may see these as hazing. Keep the following in mind:

- Participation is not required; you can freely choose to opt out of such practices.
- If you feel threatened at any time, you can contact the UCEAP Study Center, the College Dean of Students, and/or the International Office of your host university.

In addition, you may not like the food; it may be inferior to UC dorm food and there may be only one main dish option per meal. Eating hours tend to be more restricted than at UC. A few colleges, however, are self-catering; each floor or suite has a kitchen, and you can buy your own food and cook individually or in groups.

University accommodations are generally closed during holidays and other times when the university is not in session. At some host institutions, extra lodging costs are charged during orientation, school breaks, and holidays.

The duration of the housing contract may be a full year. Before signing, ask questions and be fully informed about the cancellation policy. Read the fine print!

University-Owned or University-Affiliated Apartments

Advantages

You can set up housing before you leave the U.S. and likely move straight in when you arrive. Almost all university-owned/affiliated apartments are close to campus. They are cheaper than colleges, but still more expensive than off-campus housing. Some provide extra facilities, like computing or Internet connections. It can make social life easier, since your neighbors will also be students. You will have more freedom and fewer required or expected activities than in the residential colleges.

Disadvantages

Some (not all) are a poor value for the cost, with small rooms, maybe two in a room, cumbersome and unresponsive management, inadequate cooking facilities (e.g., a hotplate), extra charges for phone, Internet, and laundry, etc. There may be rules you don’t like (curfew, noise, guests) imposed by management without consultation. The social life may be minimal, with no programs, rooms too small for guests, and no common areas. Again, many students will likely be international and first-year students, as well as some graduate students.

The duration of the housing contract may be a full year. Before signing, ask questions and be fully informed about the cancelation policy.
Off-Campus Apartments and Shared Houses
Rental rates in Australia are usually listed by the week, not by the month.

Advantages
Usually, this is the cheapest option with the most freedom and your own room. Kitchen/cooking facilities and common areas are adequate and there are no restrictions with guests. Good roommates can become close friends and introduce you to their friends. If they are Australians, they may know good places to go and can generally ease you in to the local life. Many students felt that getting the housing they really wanted was worth the inconvenience of not knowing where they would live in advance.

Disadvantages
It’s challenging to set up off-campus housing before arriving in Australia. It’s usually best to see the place and meet your roommates before committing to a living arrangement. A bad roommate can dominate your life. Australia has some shoddy apartments and gouging landlords, just like the U.S. Apartments are often unfurnished, although student flats and shared houses will be furnished.
Prices can be high the closer you get to the university. You need to be careful with the lease, which may be longer than you need, and you may need to get utilities (phone, water, electricity, gas) turned on. If you are arranging this type of housing in advance, be sure to check with the host university about its real distance from your host university.
You need to be very careful with the lease, which may cover a period of time longer than you need. Read the contract thoroughly before signing, especially with regard to any penalties involved in canceling the lease early.

How to Get Off-Campus Housing
You can prearrange to stay in a hostel or an inexpensive place for a week or two while searching. University housing services are very helpful, and some provide places to stay or leads to them (e.g., youth hostels). They also have bulletin boards (and the locations of others), regular meetings where you can get tips or meet potential roommates, and plenty of good advice.
Most students find acceptable-to-excellent places and roommates in about a week or two. Public transport is better in most Australian cities than in the U.S., so you can easily live a mile or two from campus. Many students move into a shared place that already has furniture. If you do not select a furnished apartment, you may find roommates that already have furniture or buy it from secondhand stores.
Some UC students stay together. This can be a great option, but know that if you travel in a group of Americans, you may be more immediately comfortable but you are less likely to make friends with Aussies.
Your best resource once abroad will be your host university housing services. Housing services can give you advice about housing options, leases, and your rights as a tenant. They’ll provide maps, recommended suburbs, and estimates on what things should cost and good deals. The people in those offices are often local tenants themselves, so they are sympathetic and informed. (A few universities will block you from some parts of their housing website unless you have a student ID, but you should still be able to find enough information without the blocked sections.)
Ideas for finding off-campus housing:
• Take the search seriously and plan 1–2 weeks of serious research to find the best, not the first, option.
• Before you come, arrange to stay for a few nights in a college, youth hostel, or other inexpensive place. Most of the host university accommodation services will help you locate or even book temporary housing while you look for an apartment, so check with the host university accommodation office first. Here are some additional resources:
  • YHA Australia (youth hostels)
  • The Bakpak Group (Australian hostels)
  • Wotif.com (Australian accommodation, often at discount rates)
  • Stayz Holiday Accommodation (holiday/short-term rentals)

• Talk to your host university housing office.
• Don’t insist on being a short walk from the university. A 15–30 minute trip by bike or public transport might get you something cheaper and better. What you save on rent may be much higher than the transport cost, but don’t go so far that you rarely see your friends and spend too much time commuting; find a happy medium.
• Find out about the safety of suburbs from locals or the Study Center.
• Make sure public transport will get you safely to your home at whatever hours of the day or night you may be using it. Note that trains and trams don’t run around the clock.
• Usually, the best deal will involve roommates. If at all possible, meet them before signing an agreement. Good housemates are as important as good housing.
• The more research you do, the better your chances. Apartment rentals often come up only 15–30 days in advance, so it can be hard to arrange something ahead of time.

IMPORTANT NOTE! Are you a one-semester student? If so, do not commit to a year-long lease, as you could get stuck paying a stiff penalty for leaving before the year is up. Negotiate this carefully.

EAP Student Experiences
These notes are based on past student experiences. Take them with a grain of salt, because personal experiences are subjective and vary greatly. Some students love the same housing that others hate, and situations and options change each year (e.g., new chefs, new management, etc.).

1) The Australian National University
Nearly all students have lived in residential colleges or privately owned student accommodations such as the Uni Lodge. ANU exchange students who apply by the deadline are guaranteed accommodation. ANU’s colleges have more out-of-town Australians than others, which students usually like. Good things are said about Johns (private) and Burgmann (ANU-owned), which have very strong extracurricular programs (sports and non-sporting activities), as well as Bruce Hall and Burton and Garran (ANU), which is self-catering. All four of these housing options are on campus. Uni Lodge is right on the edge of campus and very close to Civic (downtown Canberra).

2) The University of Melbourne
Many students live in a university-affiliated apartment complex. Students report favorably about RMIT Village, but still note that the rooms are small and not deluxe by any means. Students who lived in residential colleges liked them, though it took a while for some to make friends, and some hazing
practices were reported. Some thought that the expense of College Square or on-campus housing wasn’t worth it. Students who chose off-campus housing were usually very happy with it, though some dealt with anxiety while still searching.

3) The University of New South Wales
   - **Residence Halls:** Students usually liked the experience, although many didn’t like the dorm food. Many of the students are first-year students, and UC students sometimes didn’t enjoy being surrounded by 18-year-olds looking to party all the time.
   - **University-Owned Apartments:** These can be full of exchange students. It can be easy or hard to meet people, depending on your roommates.
   - **Study Abroad Office Rentals:** Has a system for renting apartments in nearby Coogee. Varied quality. You end up with other study abroad students.
   - **Off-Campus Housing:** Arrive with time to look for places because Sydney has a tight housing market. The International Center is very helpful, as are bulletin boards (e.g., in grocery stores).

4) The University of Queensland
   Most of the recent students have lived in shared houses off campus. Some have stayed in university apartments, which are convenient and close to campus. It isn’t uncommon to commute for 30+ minutes to get to the UQ campus. There have been some concerns about hazing issues at UQ colleges.

5) The University of Sydney
   UC students largely live off campus (on-campus housing can be tough to get), but sometimes in residential colleges or university-affiliated housing. Students report relatively favorably about International House and Sydney University village, but they can be expensive.

6) The University of Western Australia
   Nearly all students live in UWA residential colleges. The housing market is exceptionally tight in Perth.

7) University of Wollongong
   Nearly all students live in residential colleges. Students report that the university apartments are occupied mostly by Australians, and they have more of an apartment feel than that of a residential college.