

## Things you should know about Australia...

I am a third-year undergraduate student at Boston University, Massachusetts, originally from Providence, Rhode Island, studying abroad in Sydney and interning at Commercial Service. I have put this together based on my observations of the transition from the US to Australia and my insights on the costs of living here.



### Adjusting to Australia

#### 1. Culturally rich but not a culture shock

Relative to most other places around the world, the transition from the US to Australia is probably one of the easiest to make, the hardest part is shaking off the jet-lag. Some people like the confusion and alienation that accompany a big culture shock, which, by definition, forces the traveler to adapt and learn quickly. Australia is not a culture shock in the sense that while there is much to adapt to and much to learn, compared to most other destinations our cultural differences are mild and compatible: English is the predominant language; we have similar tastes in food and pop culture; our governments are friendly.

Australia is full of new and unfamiliar experiences, but breeds the kind of culture that understands and welcomes the American traveler, allows them to adjust at his or her own leisure and may even facilitate that adjustment.

#### 2. \$\$\$

In recent years, Sydney has held a spot among the top “most expensive cities to live in” in the world, ranked near Paris, Zurich, Oslo, Tokyo and Frankfurt. Living in a thriving city that is culturally rich inevitably comes at a cost. Keep in mind that Australia also has a strong currency and we are presently on the unfortunate end of the \$USD-\$AUD exchange rate. Today (April 2012) there are about 1.04 US dollars to the Australian dollar (this is not so bad compared to the 1.59 USD to the Pound, 1.31 USD to the Euro).

This is a good website to stay up-to-date on world exchange rates:

<http://www.x-rates.com/>

One reason for Sydney’s high cost of living is the minimum wage, which, set above \$16, is more than twice the minimum wage in most states. Consequently, it is not customary to tip in this country, as all workers receive at least that minimum wage—unlike, for example, restaurant wait-staff in the US—and do not rely on tips. There is also a high tax on some

consumables like alcohol and cigarettes. A few other things that are noticeably more expensive include: rent; movies; toiletries.

### 3. Some Comparisons

- Australia's K-mart is like our Target. Conversely, Australia's Target is like our K-mart.
- Australia's Coles is like a Shaws or a Stop-N-Shop. So is Australia's Woolworth's.
- Australia's Gloria Jean's is like a Starbucks.
- Australia's Pie Face is also kind of like a Starbucks.
- Sydney does actually have at least one real Starbucks.
- Australia's Hungry Jack's is like a Burger King.
- Australia's Tim Tam is like [insert favorite candy bar here].
- Australia's Sumo Salad is like a mix between a Panera and something healthier.
- Sydney's Market Street and surrounding area is like New York's Saks Fifth Avenue or Boston's Newbury Street as the city's central shopping area.
- Australia's Dick Smith is like a Best Buy.

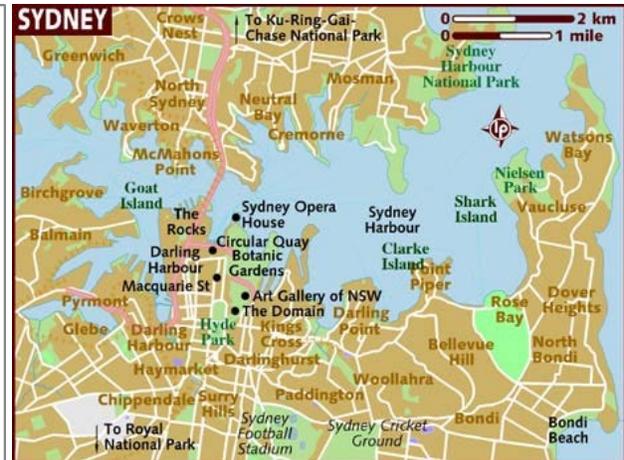
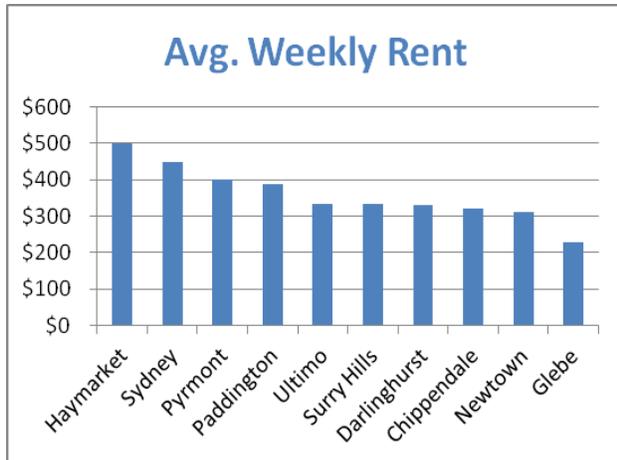
## Expense Analysis

### 1. Things you need

Things you need include housing, food, transportation and toiletries. Most of your money will go towards things you need, namely housing and food. I have been posted up in a Boston University-owned dorm for the past three months so unfortunately I don't have any personal insight on housing costs.

#### Housing:

Here are some statistics from the internet in the graph below regarding some of the suburbs around the city, listed in order of decreasing average weekly rent. If you look at a map of Sydney and surrounding areas, you will find that these suburbs are also almost perfectly listed in order of increasing distance from the city.



Set against the average rents from some of the most expensive US cities to live in, it is clear that housing stands out as one of the driving forces that make the overall experience of living in and near Sydney more costly.

Rent in the city is naturally more expensive, as are other essentials like food and clothing. Public transportation in Sydney is convenient and reliable, so it's not a bad idea to consider renting an apartment in the suburbs further from the city. Downtown Sydney is not the only area worth exploring; there are many interesting, exciting and often less-expensive things to do in the different suburbs as well.

### Transportation:

Transportation costs in Sydney are similar to many US cities, like Boston or New York. MyZone covers most forms of public transportation, including services provided by CityRail, Sydney Buses, Newcastle Buses, Sydney Ferries, Metro Light Rail and private bus operators. For individuals who are going to be traveling multiple times a week, the best and most cost effective way to purchase tickets is in bulk. Here is some basic info:

BUS	Adult Single	Adult TravelTen
MyBus1	\$2.10	\$16.80
MyBus2	\$3.50	\$28.00
MyBus3	\$4.50	\$36.00

TRAIN	Adult Single	Adult Weekly
MyTrain1 (0-10 kms)	\$3.40	\$26.00
MyTrain2 (10-20 kms)	\$4.20	\$33.00
MyTrain3 (20-35 kms)	\$4.80	\$39.00

The cost of bus tickets depends how far you are going. Many rides into Sydney only require a MyBus1, which is sufficient for covering short-distance rides. I use a MyBus1 to get into the city from Central Station in Chippendale, which is about a 15-minute ride. Longer rides, such as the 40-minute trip from Central to Bondi Beach require a MyBus2. Even longer rides, such as the 1 ½-hour trip from Central to Palm Beach, require a MyBus3. Again, if you are

planning on traveling such a distance multiple times the best way to buy tickets is in bulk, otherwise tickets can be bought individually. The same idea applies to train tickets. **Many buses are pre-pay only.** MyBus tickets can be bought in any 7-11. Train/ferry etc. tickets can be bought on site.

Where to find bus routes & times/ other transportation info (NSW):

<http://www.131500.com.au/>    [<< some ticket examples]

**Food:**

Food and coffee are a little more expensive in Australia. The cost of food depends on the location. Food can be expensive in the city and there is money to be saved by bringing your own lunch to work. The most affordable lunch around may be anywhere from \$7--\$15, depending on where you are.

Grocery store items are also more expensive. A sample of prices from a Sydney grocery store versus one in NYC taken from last year’s CPI index:

Item	Sydney, in \$USD	NYC, in \$USD
Milk, 1 liter	\$1.80	\$1.40
Loaf of bread	\$3.40	\$2.40
Eggs	\$4.00	\$3.20
Chicken Breasts, 1 kg	\$11.00	\$6.60

Produce in the grocery store can be expensive, too. However, there are many markets, such as Paddy’s in Haymarket (close to the city) where fresh fruits and vegetables can be bought very inexpensively.

**Coffee:**

A coffee can range between \$2.50--\$4 depending on where you are. Coffee is confusing to order at first because American iced coffee virtually doesn’t exist anywhere aside from a few chain stores, such as Gloria Jean’s, that have adapted their menus to confused Americans who miss their iced coffee. In most places, however, iced coffee involves espresso, milk, and ice cream. And virtually all coffee drinks are made with espresso. And all drinks use steamed milk. A “Flat White” is like a cappuccino. And they do make very good Chai Latte’s.

After some trial and error I have found that to get the closest thing to an American coffee, order a “Long Black” with cold milk and sugar.

**Toiletries:**

Toiletries are sometimes twice as expensive here. A normal bottle of sunscreen can be \$20. I would advise to buy all the toiletries (and cosmetics, for girls) that you think you may need in the states beforehand and bring them with you.

### **Familiar friends you will find here**

- McDonald's
- KFC
- The GAP
- Basically any other chain clothing store including designer chains
- 7-11
- ABC family television network
- Virgin Mobile
- The Apple Store
- Lots of familiar toiletry brands like Dove and Colgate and cosmetic brands like Revlon
- Max Brenner's
- Subway
- IMAX Theaters (home to the world's biggest screen)

### **Bank to use:**

Westpac has convenient ATM locations pretty much everywhere, and is Australia's partner bank for Bank of America. Most other banks, like Citizen's, don't have partners in Australia and taking out money as well as charging a card come with high fees that add up quickly. I would recommend opening up a Bank of America checking account a few weeks before coming to Sydney to get the task out of the way beforehand. You can also open up a Westpac account upon arrival.

### **Some general observations and tips for saving \$\$\$**

- FOOD AND COFFEE are **more expensive by the beach**. Nearby options are limited and, depending on which beach, the cheapest sandwich around might be \$10 or \$15. It's easier to bring something.
- EVERYTHING costs more in convenience stores. Milk is \$4 at 7-11.
- BUS TICKETS are **cheapest when bought in bulk** [travel ten = a 10-ride bus token, \$16]
- MOVIES are **discounted on Tuesdays**.

- Some NIGHT CLUBS with covers on the weekends have **free entry on weeknights**.
- Be careful with ONLINE GROUP DEALS, because some are a scam.
- Many great PLACES TO VISIT are **only a \$15 round-trip train ticket away**, like the Blue Mountains, which take about 2.5 hours to get to.
- If bought in advance, a FLIGHT TO MELBOURNE is **only \$120 round trip**, and takes a little over an hour to get to.