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Person to Person in Australia

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Person to Person in Australia

For the past three months, I have lived with eight Australians while attending University. I have found out that there are many cultural differences between Australians and myself. When I chatted with my RA, Emma, she reminded me of some of these differences and similarities.

Some of the surprising elements of common Australian life that surprised me were the slang, food, festivities, gap years, 21st birthdays, and the diverse multicultural community. Right from the start, the Aussie accent and slang were some of the strange customs that stood out to me. Instead of sweatshirt it is “jumper”, a trunk is a “boot”, a barbeque is a “barbie”, candy is “lollies”, McDonalds is “Maccas”, flip flops are “thongs”, thank you is “Ta”, french fries are “chips”, etc. Peanut butter is certainly an American obsession; most Aussies only eat it on bread, and think it’s strange (or in my case, mildly amusing) to eat it with anything else. Most Australians engage in festivities at bars and clubs on Sundays and Tuesdays because it is cheaper. The weekends are meant for going home and resting, or playing footy and netball. The university system is generally three years for most students, and it is quite common to take a gap year between secondary school (high school) and university. This gap year is normally a time for travel or working to save for uni. Although the drinking age is 18 here, twenty-first birthdays are seen as a right of passage for entering adulthood, and all of these parties are extremely formal. Usually the family of the person turning twenty-one hosts a large formal gathering of family and friends, and the group reminisces about the guest of honor and their coming of age. Like most Americans, I imagined the normal Australian to be tan, blonde, and beautiful, Emma reminded me of how wrong this perception was. I did not how multicultural Australia was until I started to tour and see the suburbs of Melbourne, and enjoy a wide array of ethnic food.

I think the main cultural differences and values of Emma and myself are based on the Australian versus the American outlook on life. I can attest that Australian university life is much more relaxed. This may be due to a distinctively different university system, or enthusiasm is placed elsewhere. For an example, I believe that many Australians value sports like footy (Australian rules football), especially in Victoria where the passion and hatred for certain footy teams is extreme. Emma and I agreed that there are many people in the 18-21 age group that highly value social gatherings and having fun, just like American college students.

My perception of Australia has changed because of all of the surprising and unexpected elements of Australian life that I did not anticipate. Through interviewing Emma and living the Aussie lifestyle, my perception of America has changed too. I have gained a relaxed perspective from Australia but also see America as a place of comfort that I didn't realize before. I had my moments of frustration because I stood out constantly due to my strange American habits and accent; and I initially did not fully understand the Deakin University system. Yet, this has made me realize how appreciative I am of Linfield College, and the small intimate dynamic in the classroom. I have to admit though, traveling Australia was incredible, there is nothing quite like it. There will be many times where I am going to miss the sunny beaches of Queensland to the unique wildlife Australia inhabits.

person interviewed: Emma A. housemate/RA on Oct. 8, 2011