

At the highest point hikers were allowed in Wilsons Promontory National Wildlife Park.



1 [CONFIDENCE]

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Traveling abroad has always been an exciting experience for me. I have been traveling by plane to foreign countries since I was a baby. This should be second nature to me by now — or at least that is what was going through my head as I was saying goodbye to my family and preparing for my flight to begin my next journey. Before that day I traveled many times, all with my mom as my partner. However, this was the first time I was going to travel for six months all on my own. To my surprise, the feelings that surged through me were not overwhelming joy and excitement, but fear: fear of not knowing what was waiting for me across the world, fear of not being able to drive to my mom's house (because I was going to be 9,027.3 miles and an ocean away) and especially, fear in my abilities to do this on my own in a completely new environment. In the moment, I began to question my decision to leave behind all that I knew and felt comfortable with to go live in a completely

different country — Australia — where I had nobody. I let the tears roll down my face as I managed to say my last goodbyes and hop on the plane.

Once I was in the air, I started to calm down. I realized that everything my mom had taught me about travel was still with me — and it even seemed to be second nature. My tears subsided. *You are prepared for this*, I told myself. I could feel my perspective change yet again, from fear of the new and the unknown to excitement — and a bit more confidence in my knowledge and abilities.

It did not take very long for me to fall in love with Australia and the whole experience once I arrived at the university. From the start everyone was extremely nice, making it easier to connect and make friends. I never got tired of walking out of my old dorm building and through a “forest”

that led straight to my classes. The process of hiding from the magpies during their famously dangerous breeding season never got old, and neither did the constant reminders that all animals in Australia are bigger and more potentially dangerous. I will forever miss passing through the university's miniature rainforest in order to get to the science wing, which allowed me to truly appreciate the nature of an ecosystem that I had previously only heard about in class.

Though it was intimidating at first, I pushed myself to leave the friendly environment of the university and explore. I quickly learned the transportation system and visited other parts of the city, making and taking new friends with me along the way. And once all classes had

finished, I took a trip along all of Australia's east coast by plane and Greyhound bus. I learned to enjoy what carrying my two backpacks felt like as I got lost looking for my next hostel or the location of my tour. I even learned the vital skill of how to obtain the best bed and position at the hostel within the first night — something I had no idea was important until I ventured out into the Australian world. Within two weeks, I managed to visit eight different and magnificent cities within Australia, made over 20 friends from around the world, and experienced one of the most magnificent locations possible: The Great Barrier Reef without the massive bleaching.

In addition to all the traveling and new friendship, my Australian journey gave me more confidence in my academic career and the path I was



taking toward my future. I excelled in my classes and was able to communicate with professors that did research in the Marine Biology field (something extremely hard to find in Oklahoma). I learned about new species that I had not known existed.

Overall, my experience in Australia taught me how important it is to be confident in what you are doing and how you are doing it. While at first I was afraid, traveling on my own for the first time in a large country taught me that I could rely on all the information I have learned from past experiences. The confidence I gained throughout my miniature adventures continuously

helped me make friends with people from across the world — not just those from familiar places. Being the only Oklahoman student traveling in Australia at the time taught me to be positive, not fearful. I realized that if you are not positive in what you are doing, it is easier to miss fun and important moments in life.

If I had not gotten on that plane — if I had not had the confidence to pursue my passion of traveling to Australia and studying Marine Biology — I would have missed out on so much, both academically and personally. This experience has changed me in the most positive and advantageous ways.



The rainforest ecosystem at Monash University.