

GOING INTERNATIONAL

Experience Report - Sydney

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During my final year at university medical school I completed a two months elective in Obstetrics & Gynecology at Westmead Hospital in Sydney, Australia.

The Westmead Hospital

The Westmead Hospital is a teaching hospital in the west of the city of Sydney, about a 45 minutes train ride from central station. They have one of the biggest birth units in New South Wales (state on the East coast of Australia) with about 3,000 births per year and a well-known institute for Maternal-Fetal Medicine.

The Hospital & the Elective

On my first day, I was welcomed by the elective coordinator who showed me and other students around the hospital, organized the hospital ID and introduced me to my supervisor. You have to bring your own clothes to wear in the hospital, and this includes proper shoes (no sneakers) and no jeans. For the birth unit and for the operating theatres I was provided with scrubs from the hospital.

My supervisor was a midwife, who coordinated my schedule that consisted of 8 hours shifts at day or night time, mostly together with her or other midwives that were happy to teach students. The birth unit was very busy and consisted of around 13 labouring beds and 2 assessment rooms. I had the chance to assess the cervical status, read CTGs, learn about induction of labour and was also able to assist women in labour. In cases of peritoneal tears or episiotomies, I learnt how to stitch them. In more severe cases, I watched vacuum and forceps deliveries and I was able to assist in emergency C-sections.

I was also able to rotate to the operation theatres; to the maternal fetal center, which did high-tech antenatal ultrasounds on lots of suspected birth defects; to the antenatal clinics, with specialist clinics for endocrine disorders in pregnancy; to the gynecology clinics, with specialist clinics in urogynecology; to the private hospital to see private antenatal doctor visits and operations; and to the antenatal and maternity wards as well as the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU). All in all, I explored various and different aspects of obstetrics and gynecology and in addition to that, I had the opportunity to be hands on in the birth unit.

Sydney & Australia

Sydney is a great place to explore Australia. It is a big, vibrant city, but also has a great number of beaches. Bear in mind that European summer months are Australian winter months, but temperatures during the day are around 15-20°C in winter with lots of warm winter sun.

Around Sydney there are a few national parks, such as the Blue Mountains with nice hikes around waterfalls and the Royal National Park, which is located in the South of Sydney and offers hikes along the coast. Of course, you can feed some kangaroos and hold a koala in a various number of parks in and around Sydney.

There are cheap flights in Australia for weekend trips to Melbourne or other cities of interest. If you have the opportunity, you should stay longer after your internship and explore the East coast of Australia, especially the Great Barrier Reef, and enjoy warmer temperatures even in winter in Queensland. My personal highlight was the Ayers Rock, which is a giant mountain in the middle of the desert in the center of Australia.

Application and Documents

Applications start about one year ahead around July with an application form that can be [downloaded](#) on their website (see also Applications for Westmead Hospital). It usually takes about 3 to 4 months to get an answer. Once the elective placement is secured, you have to provide the requested documents: I was asked to send my CV, vaccination records and a letter of recommendation from the Dean of the University.

You also have to organize a travel insurance and more important you must apply for a medical indemnity insurance. The latter is free for medical students (see also [Medical Indemnity Protection Society](#)).

Furthermore, you must provide police clearance certificates from the country you live in, plus a national police check from Australia, which you can apply for online. It will be sent directly to the hospital and I got it back on my first day there.

Costs and Financing

There is an application fee of AUD 100, which you only have to pay once when you want to secure your placement. If you do a placement of up to 4 weeks, the fee is AUD 900. If you do a placement of up to 8 weeks, the fee is AUD 1,100.

In addition to this, you have to pay for the flight (around EUR 800-1,200), the police checks (around AUD 30 and EUR 20) and the travel health insurance.

Australia, and especially Sydney, is not cheap. Accommodation at the hospital costs around AUD350/week (!). You might be able to secure a cheaper room privately, but public transport is expensive (AUD 3-5/trip), with an AUD 60 weekly travel cap.

To summarize, my experience in Sydney was great and I would recommend it to everyone. Next to being able to see a different health care system and learning a lot in the hospital, Australia is an amazing country to explore and to live in.

Interesting Websites

- [Applications for Westmead Electives](#): here you can apply for an elective at Westmead – Sydney Medical School
- [Medical Indemnity Protection Society](#): “MIPS’ main role is to assist members in the event that there is an adverse outcome in the course of their professional practice.” - free after registration for medical students
- [National Police Check Australia](#): the online application section for the National Police Checking in Australia
- [Opal card \(Public Transport\)](#): the Opal card is very helpful when using public transport for a longer period of time; you reload and reuse it to pay for your travel
- [Exploring Sydney](#): very helpful website, which includes current events in and around Sydney
- [Australia Tourism](#): interesting website about Australia and what to do once you are in Australia

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