



Field Report

About the research stay of Michael J. Kohler, BSc from the University of Innsbruck at UC San Diego

Introduction

I have always been someone who has been hit by the wanderlust here and there and in the summer of 2019 the idea to seek for opportunities to study abroad emerged in me in a serious way. Soon I realized that the University of Innsbruck offers multiple possibilities even for research stays overseas und thus I aimed high and applied for a scholarship by the Austrian Marshall Plan Foundation. The already existing contact with the University of California in San Diego was rather vague at first, but quickly intensified as both sides committed to setting up a joint project. Thus, the organization of e.g. visa matters was relatively straightforward, whereas a little patience and good nerves are surely beneficial in this process.

General impression

Once in San Diego I immediately fell in love with the Southern Californian lifestyle. I found a great place to live off-campus in a Facebook group and would recommend searching there, although a little caution against scammers is appropriate. I shared a house with a little garden with three Americans, which turned out great because I was instantly included in their daily lives and hobbies.

The only drawback was that I lived relatively far away from campus, which required individual mobility. But since I had the option to work from home as often as I wanted and intended to buy a car anyways it did not bother me that much.

I was positively surprised by the costs of living, which were definitely higher compared to Austria but not as enormous as I expected. The largest share of my expenses was my rent, amounting 900\$. This was in fact a good deal because most students pay around 1200\$ for a room in proximity to the university. Beyond this, groceries are only slightly more expensive if you look for stores like Aldi or Trader Joe's, while running costs of a car are generally lower than at home.

Quality of the host institution

At UC San Diego I was soon given an office place and worked with my supervisor's PhD students in a reasonable dry lab at the department of structural engineering. Since the University is home to the world's largest outdoor earthquake simulation facility, there was vast expertise on this field concentrated at this institution, which in fact is among the most prestigious in the world.





The campus was picturesque with an eucalyptus forest just around the corner and, if you are at the Institute of Oceanography, you even have first row ocean view. Apart from that there were loads of dining options for all imaginable diets, although I missed a cafeteria with more affordable prices.

Contacts within the host institution, inclusion in the organization

Although my host professor was very busy most of the time, he always had an open ear if I had any enquires and soon scheduled a weekly meeting, where even a second professor was regularly involved in addition to my home supervisor.

Apart from that, I did not participate in many campus activities, mainly due to Covid restrictions but also because I was working remotely in three out of two days a week and my life was more concentrated around my roommates and the friends, I made through them.

Recommendations for future Marshall Plan students and fellows

Although I met people who did not have a car, I highly suggest buying one. There is a Trolley network in San Diego that recently also reached the campus, but it will not take you anywhere thrilling. I went on a lot of trips (Mexico, Yosemite, Joshua Tree and Zion National Park) which I could not have done without a car with the same level of flexibility and freedom.

I was very hesitant when I first thought about applying for this scholarship, because studying in the USA always seemed hardly accessible for me. But now, looking back after mustering the courage, I can assure you that it sometimes only takes a moment of overcoming and you will catch a wave that will carry you to your goal.

Contact E-mail after completion of research stay

If you need any advice for your research stay in Southern California, I might be able and happy to help you so feel free to contact me:

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