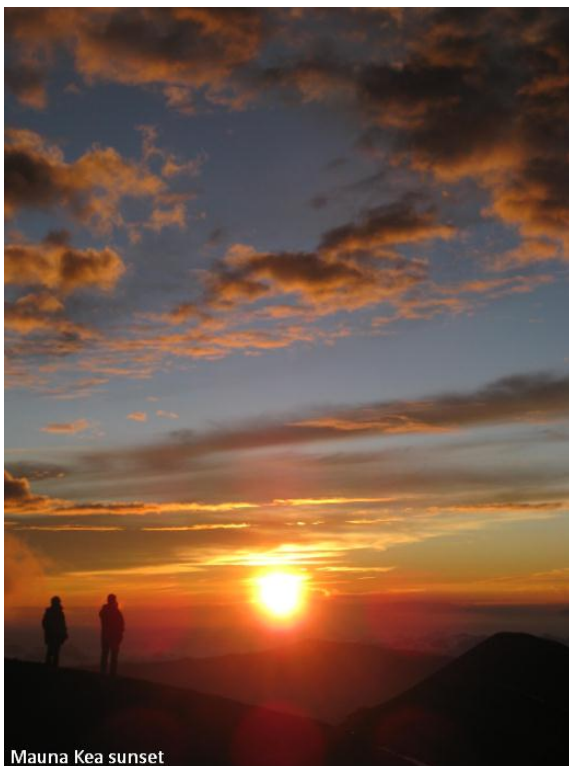


University of Hawai`i at Hilo – Annelise Rogerson

Aloha! My two semesters at UHH were the most amazing ten months of my life, and I highly recommend that anyone with the chance to go on an exchange make the most of that opportunity. Overseas travel, especially that which allows one to study their chosen field from the eyes of another culture, is an incredibly valuable experience that greatly enriches a student's education. My time at UH Hilo opened my eyes to many different cultures, due to Hawai'i's unique social character: American influences are clear in everyday life; traditional Hawaiian values are strong; and tourism lends an international perspective.

Living on the Big Island is a fantastic way to truly experience the real Hawai'i – having spent some time in Honolulu, it is clear to see that you must get away from the big city to see the true culture of the state. It is also worth noting that although the weather in Hawai'i is fantastic, it was not quite what I had been expecting – Hilo is on the windward side of the island, and the trade winds bring a lot of rain. Hilo experiences about 360 days of sunshine a year, but it also rains on most of those days! Don't let that put you off, though – it is a unique city that is very easy to fall in love with, and you get used to the rain. The Big Island also has many amazing landscapes to explore. A half hour drive from Hilo will get you to the lava-lake caldera of Kīlauea; within Hawai'i Volcanoes National Park, it is the most active volcano in the world, surrounded by unique native rainforest. A little further along your drive and you will come to the desert region of Ka`u, covered in many lava flows. On the summit of Mauna Kea, the tallest mountain in the world, you can visit the best astronomical observatories in the world, play in Hawaiian snow, and watch some of the most beautiful sunsets you'll ever see. On the leeward (Kona) side of the island is the city of Kailua, where it is almost always warm and sunny, and where there are some great white sand beaches and fantastic snorkeling/free diving reefs.



Mauna Kea sunset



South Point

The University of Hawai'i at Hilo campus is large, but with a small, friendly atmosphere. There are lots of green spaces where there is always something in bloom. The classes are relaxed and informal, with a lot of time for discussion among peers or with the teacher. The unique environment presented on the island means that many classes involving laboratory sessions have field experiences: my oceanography lab had us out in Hilo Bay on small boats taking real data each week, and a geology course went into a closed section of the National Park to make measurements contributing to field research being undertaken to predict future eruptions. When choosing courses to take at UHH, I strongly encourage you to take courses specific to Hawai'i – there are many courses in Hawaiian language, and classes that focus on cultural or scientific aspects of the islands. Although these may mean a more complicated cross-crediting process, they allow you to gain a stronger understanding of the place you are living in, as well as providing you with knowledge that would be unattainable anywhere else in the world.



When beginning an exchange, it's good to be open to changes you may not have anticipated. I originally signed up for a single Fall semester, however after falling in love with the island and with someone I met there, I extended it to a full school year, and on completion of my degree I'm returning to the island to live. I also moved out of my dorm room early, after having a terrible experience with an untrustworthy roommate - though most people have fantastic experiences and their roommates become close friends, be prepared for any possibility. Go into this adventure with an open mind, a positive attitude, a determination to make the most out of every opportunity presented to you, and be willing to adapt. It may not just be your perspectives of America that change, but those of life, New Zealand, yourself, and the world.

Local knowledge and experience is a good thing to have in Hawai'i – there are often many fantastic things that are hidden from tourists eyes, so making friends with locals is a great way to properly experience everything you can. Here are some local tips and knowledge that I would have liked to know when I arrived in Hilo:

- The bus service around the whole island is free, and is a great way to explore your new home – there are also student taxi vouchers available on campus

- The tsunami sirens get tested at 11:45am on the first business day of each month
- Ken's House of Pancakes is a fantastic diner selling cheap local food and is open 24/7
- Target is far superior to Wal-Mart
- Hilo Bay has really dirty water that may look nice, but swim at your own risk – this includes Honoli'i, a local surf spot
- Island Naturals is a locally-owned organic and natural food store with a great deli for delicious, healthy food
- The UH Hilo theatre puts on some fantastic performances, from musicals and plays to dance and music, with cheap tickets for students
- It's not tacky to have a flower in your hair – girls: right side means single, left means taken!
- Renting a car is a great way to explore the island, but note that there are certain roads that rentals aren't allowed on and your insurance won't cover anything that goes wrong there
- Hawaiian Time is a common phenomenon, but unfortunately does not apply to your classes
- America is a big place – don't be fooled by any stereotypes you may believe, it is impossible to place all Americans in one category, and most negative things you may have heard are incredibly false
- My favorite snorkeling spot is Honaunau, and my favorite beach is Hapuna – these are both on the Kona side of the island, but well worth the drive
- Tipping is really important, the standard is between 10-15%, though it's always good to over-tip someone who gave really great service – tip anyone who helps you, such as taxi drivers, waiters, etc.
- The staff at the Center for Global Education and Exchange are really helpful and friendly, if you have any questions or concerns they always do everything they can to help
- The International Student Association puts on an International Night show every Spring – if you can perform anything New Zealand related (song, dance, drama etc), take what you'll need, as it's a great thing to take part in
- Sea turtles and other wildlife are easy and exciting to see, but it is illegal to touch the turtles, so enjoy them from a distance
- Hawai'i does have the ozone layer protecting it, but you'll still need sunscreen!

Make the most of every opportunity you get – that includes taking advantage of having a USA visa, and vacationing on the mainland – if you do a full school year you get a few weeks off over Christmas, and there are many exciting places to be discovered across the country, as well as on neighboring islands.



I left on my exchange hoping to expand my horizons and looking forward to a “study vacation”, and I now return to New Zealand after a longer time away than I had originally planned, and find that my final semester here is another study vacation, as I will return to Hawai`i, my new home. UH Hilo is a fantastic university that will offer you a unique perspective in whichever field you choose to study, and I strongly urge you to take on the challenge of this potentially life-changing opportunity.

Mahalo and Aloha!

Annelise