

An Exhilarating, Fulfilling and Unforgettable Escapade: UC Berkeley

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Study Abroad

Program: Study Abroad › Exchange
University: UC Berkeley
Location: California, United States of America
Experience Faculty: Applied Sciences › Computing Science

I met students from all over the world congregated in one place. Everyone was friendly and approachable; I could start chatting with strangers in the dining hall.

Experience Details
Semester: Summer
Year: 2023

Introduction + Preparation

Packing

I did not have much to pack. Some notable items included a week's worth of clothes, a laptop, phone, toothbrush, toothpaste, floss, towel, shampoo and conditioner, slippers (for showering and using the bathroom), school supplies, a pillow and blanket. Many students purchased pillows and blankets after arriving in Berkeley to conserve luggage space.

Travel and Transportation

I commuted via BART from the airport (SFO) to the Downtown Berkeley station. No transfers were necessary, and the ride took about an hour. I recommend loading an electronic Clipper card (equivalent to our Compass card) before arriving in California. That way, you can board the BART immediately upon arrival. I lived at the International House (iHouse) which was, approximately, a 25-

There are a few shuttles that operate around campus that are also free for students. They are useful if you do not want to or feel unsafe walking at night.

Preparation Tips for Future Students

I intended on taking classes at Berkeley from May 21 - August 12 (Session A + D). However, the class got cancelled in less than one week before it began. I had already booked my departure and return plane tickets without cancellation accommodations. Because I did not want to pay thousands for another Session A course that I disliked and that will not constitute SFU credit, I decided to attend my Session C (June 18) class instead. As a consequence, I lost a few hundred dollars on my plane tickets because I had to purchase new ones. Class cancellations are very rare, but they can happen. It is important to have a backup class or purchase plane tickets that allow modifications/cancellations. I was, however, able to change my I-20 and housing session dates without any fee.

I bought an eSIM on Amazon before I arrived, which was convenient because I could access cellular data immediately. The eSIM only lasted one week, so I transitioned to a T-Mobile phone plan instead (I got it installed in-store). Mint Mobile has some cheap phone and data plans, but unfortunately, they could not process my credit card. Many students use Mint, and they all recommend it. It is owned by T-Mobile and is significantly cheaper.

During my Experience Orientation and First Weeks

I took two classes: Math 110 (equivalent to SFU Math 338 Advanced Linear Algebra) in Session C (June 18 - August 11) and Theatre 5 (Public Speaking and Presentation Skills) in Session D (July 3 - August 11). Course codes numbered 0-99 are lower division and 100-199 are upper division. My math class had 36 students and my public speaking class had 24. Class sizes are generally smaller during the summer because most Berkeley students do not take summer session classes.

The instructor for my math class is a GSI (Graduate student instructor). Despite Berkeley's world-class reputation in mathematics, they did not have a professor assigned to teach the class. I was slightly disappointed because the tuition is astronomically high. I suppose the silver lining is that my GSI created relatively easier exam questions

Accommodation and Living

I lived on campus at the International House (iHouse). The iHouse is not directly affiliated with Berkeley's dormitory housing program; I had to apply separately on their website. It is not difficult to secure an offer at the iHouse during the summer because not every room is occupied. It is located on the southeast corner of campus and all my classes were within a 10-minute walking distance. I chose the iHouse because it has an excellent reputation for food (and I can confirm: in terms of dining hall (buffet-style) food, the iHouse is the best on campus). People were approachable and friendly. You can sit down at a random table during breakfast, lunch or dinner and strike up a conversation with strangers from all around the world. I met over 50 people in one week just by doing so! Also, I was shocked to learn that I was the only Canadian exchange student living at the iHouse during the summer! Most residents were from China, Korea, Japan and Singapore.

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Day to Day

Here is my weekly schedule! (Note that I did not have my morning class for the few two weeks, as it is a Session D course). As you can see, on some days I had classes for five hours. My morning class was long, but the workload was minimal. Hence, my math class in the afternoon proved to be much more exhausting, despite its short duration.

Every day, I would wake up at 7:40 a.m., brush my teeth, and head down to the dining hall for breakfast. If I woke up late, I simply took a piece of bread and made a beeline for class. After

lecture material that I did not fully comprehend. Sometimes I gave up because the content was

responsive and some are flaky, but sometimes people will be interested in meeting up. This summer, there was a "student hangout" Discord where students would plan impromptu meetups. Someone could ask "anyone down for boba rn" at 11 PM and people indeed would be "down."

The campus has excellent hiking trails, such as the Big C and Fire Trails. These short hikes are great to admire a sunset over the view of campus.

San Francisco is about an hour away from Berkeley via transit. The Golden Gate Bridge is a must-see. Other tourist spots include Pier 39, Lombard Street, The Painted Ladies and the Palace of Fine Arts.

You can rent a car via GIG Car Share for just over USD 100 daily, gas included. With five passengers, this works out to be \$20 a person! Using this car-sharing service, I travelled to

- Point Reyes. Gorgeous views of cliffs and exquisite blue water. It is only an 80-minute drive from Berkeley.
- Half Moon Bay. Popular tourist area south of San Francisco. The beach here is popular; lots of folks come to relax and take a dip in the ocean.
- Stanford University. Honestly, the Berkeley campus looks better in my opinion.
- Mount Diablo. 80-minute drive east of Berkeley. We planned on hiking up the mountain but it was dangerously hot to do so (38 degrees Celsius+) and thus ventured up via an Uber instead. The view at the summit was mediocre. Dry and barren California land.
- Mount Tamalpais. We hiked up this mountain and back down to Stinson Beach. Craziest day of my life—we took an Uber to the hike BUT no Ubers or Lyfts were picking up from Stinson beach. We got stranded and had to hitchhike back to Berkeley. The couple that picked us up was incredibly warm and kind. They got stranded a few years back at the exact location and also had to hitchhike home. And they were reciprocating the favour by picking us up. We were so grateful for their generosity because they did not plan on heading toward the direction of Berkeley. Lesson learned: Check that Ubers/Lyfts are operating from your intended pickup location to avoid becoming stranded.
- Big Sur. 3-hour drive from Berkeley with a collection of state parks. Most known for Bigsy Bridge. The drive along the highway is quite scenic.

There is a very cool semi-circular structure on campus, colloquially known as the "echo chamber." It is in front of the Valley Life Sciences building. If you stand at the center edge and speak, you can hear your voice amplify. Even some local students do not know about this!

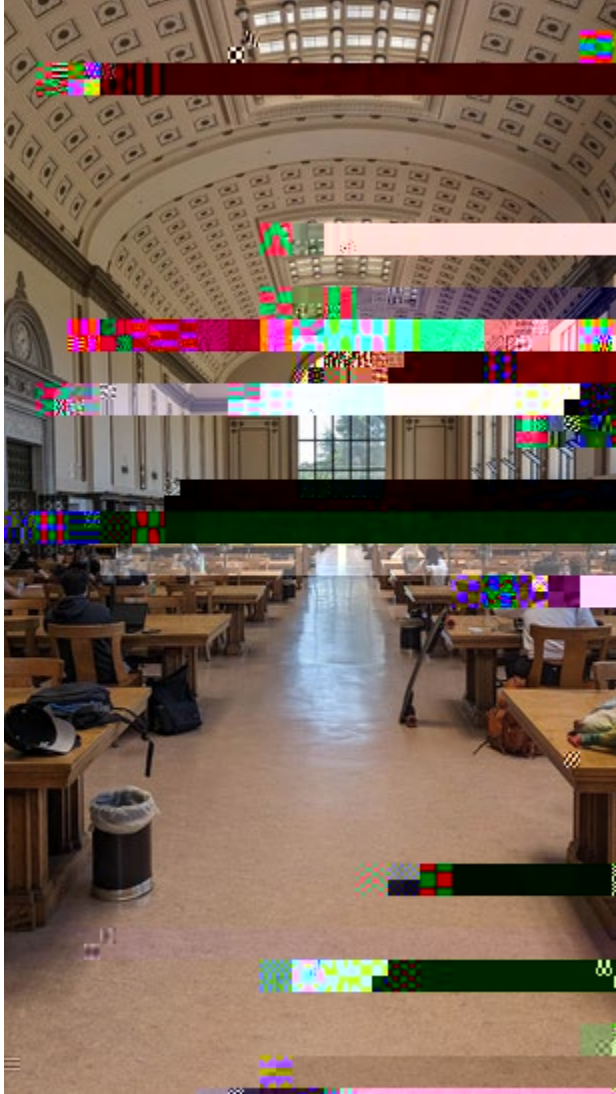
Raleigh's is a local pub where many students like to congregate. They have "Taco Tuesday" on Tuesdays where they serve cheap tacos! (I heard they're subpar. I only went for the social experience, not the food).

Wrap Up

Everything in Berkeley is fast and abundant. The campus is vibrant and lively, with students



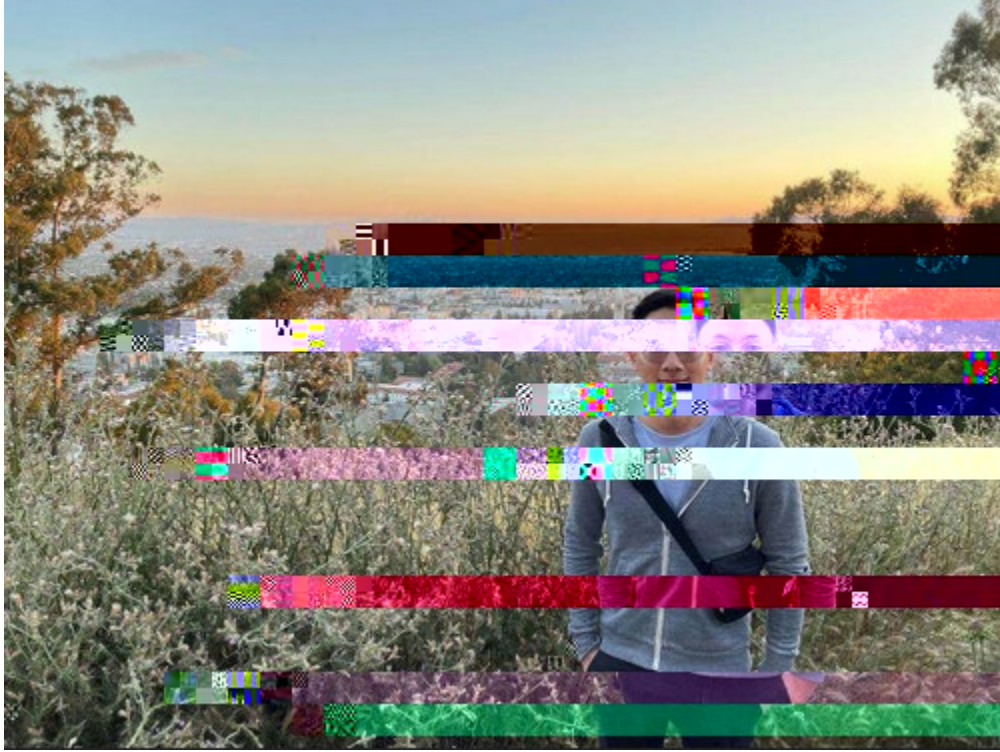
Golden Gate Bridge



Doe Library



Campanile



Big C Hike



Point Reyes

