

Student Accommodation

[00:00:12] Sid

G'day, welcome to Western Sydney University. I'm Sid Sharma and I've got things every student should know. Today I'm going to help you find accommodation, a place to call home. You'll hear about the difference between off and on campus living. You also learn about being a good roommate. So let's get started. Here are five things every WSU student should know about accommodation.

[00:00:40] Sid

Number one. How to find temporary accommodation. It's always a good idea to have your accommodation sorted before you arrive in Sydney. There are plenty of resources on the WSU website to help you figure out that part of your stay but say that something goes wrong. What do you do? Who do you turn to and where do you go? Well, I'm chatting to Pete Hilt from the course information team. You might remember him from episode 1.

[00:01:04] Pete

Hey there.

[00:01:05] Sid

Pete say that you arrive at Sydney Airport and your accommodation is cancelled and you haven't gotten anything booked. What do you do?

[00:01:12] Pete

Yeah sure, look it's rare, but sometimes accommodation falls through or something like that and we definitely support students in that circumstance. They can call our Student Central team and we can put them in touch with the University Village, who do short term emergency accommodation for one or two nights just to get people through to the start of term when they can sort out their actual accommodation.

[00:01:34] Sid

And say you can't get in touch with the university or they are full are there any other resources that you can turn to in your time of need?

[00:01:41] Pete

Definitely, so AirBnB and Homestay, those kinds of websites can organise things the day of and other things like Hostel World can find you hostels all over Sydney, really cheap prices and they can book you in that night.

[00:01:56] Sid

It's also a great way to meet locals living in Sydney and get to know the culture a little bit more.

[00:02:02] Pete

Yeah definitely, especially those dorm type accommodations with a communal bar, it's a great way to meet some people.

[00:02:11] Sid

Number two. The difference between off campus and on campus living. Living on campus or off campus is a choice that is totally up to you and depends on what you want out of your accommodation. There are pros and cons to both living styles and you're about to hear a couple now that should help guide you in your decision. Here's Mamun, Olivia and Taurai.

[00:02:32] Mamun

Hi everyone, I'm Mamun, I'm an international student from Bangladesh studying Bachelor of Accounting in my second year. I live on campus at Parramatta North.

[00:02:43] Olivia

Hi everyone my name is Olivia and I am currently studying Masters of Teaching. I used to live at Parramatta campus and now I live with my family.

[00:02:53] Taurai

Hi, I'm Taurai. I am an international student from Zimbabwe. I'm currently studying my Master of Health science and I live in the Parramatta Village.

[00:03:03] Sid

Where did you first stay when you landed in Sydney? Where did you go?

[00:03:07] Olivia

The first time I came to Australia I lived with a host family. So I was doing a language course the things I would like to mention about host families is there's no free airport pick up - you need to pay for it. And someone like a taxi driver will pick you up and send you directly from the airport to your host family.

[00:03:32] Sid

And Taurai, tell me about your experience of where your first stayed when you landed in Sydney.

[00:03:36] Taurai

I came straight to the village, got picked up from the airport by the free shuttle bus service, which is great.

[00:03:44] Mamun

As soon as I landed the driver from the shuttle bus, he called me straight away and asked "where are you?" "I'm coming to find you". I came straight to the Village. I was very excited - I was like 'Yeah Village life! Here we go'.

[00:03:56] Sid

Olivia, you have had an experience of living with a host family, living by yourself in student accommodation and then living with your family as well. What are the differences in all three types?

[00:04:05] Olivia

When I was doing the language course I live with a host family, it was a pretty good experience and we became friends and still keep in touch now. Living with a host family means that someone can be there taking care of you so your parents won't be worried too much about your life and your city and then I moved to student accommodation because I wanted to be more independent. Living by yourself means that you need to cook for yourself, you need to pay all the rent and you need to do your work by yourself. So after that I graduated from my Bachelors course so I moved back with my family. I prefer to live by myself because family is always being too nosey!

[00:05:00] Sid

It's the Independence who doesn't love that right, being an adult. Tell me Taurai, what is your on campus student accommodation experience like?

[00:05:09] Taurai

Mine's been pretty great I'm blessed to have great housemates as well. I've heard some horror stories. I feel like when you get to live with really nice people you enjoy it a bit more and it's a great chance to meet so many different people from so many nationalities.

[00:05:30] Sid

What is the accommodation itself like?

[00:05:32] Taurai

It's pretty decent. We have a lot of space compared to what I thought it would be like. Obviously it's not like home so don't think it's going to be like your bedroom at home, but it is very spacious and everybody has their own privacy so it's pretty great.

[00:05:52] Sid

So I guess you've decorated your room?

[00:05:53] Taurai

Absolutely you have to make it a bit like home.

[00:05:56] Sid

Is there anything you don't like about living on campus?

[00:06:02] Taurai

Ok so, as with student accommodation I think you'll find that sometimes it can be a bit noisy if you're not somebody who likes noise, but that's something you learn to compromise about or live with because they do have rules where up to a certain time people can have parties and stuff like that but after that you have to keep it down, which is pretty great because they really keep to that.

[00:06:35] Mamun

Otherwise you'd call an RA.

[00:06:38] Taurai

Yep!

[00:06:37] Sid

What about you Olivia?

[00:06:38] Olivia

To me I hate cooking because one time my room mate set off the fire alarm and it cost her \$1,000.

[00:06:51] Sid

Did you all have to evacuate?

[00:06:51] Olivia

Ah, yeah. The whole building.

[00:06:57] Taurai

There's a few of those.

[00:06:59] Sid

So have any of you got friends that live off campus?

[00:07:02] Taurai

Yes.

[00:07:06] Sid

Say Taurai, your Friends that live off campus, how has their experience been different to yours?

[00:07:09] Taurai

They're living with their families, so there's that family factor. If you're in the Student Village you are there by yourself, it's more independent. So for them I've seen how much more they struggle when their parents are not there, where is for me it is something I have gotten used to. You are there on your own and you are getting to meet new people and you have to create a family.

[00:07:37] Sid

What about friends who live by themselves off campus and share accommodation?

[00:07:42] Mamun

They feel very lonely they call me up and are like "bro, can you come over?" I'm like "yeah sure I can come over, we'll talk".

[00:07:55] Sid

So tell me a little bit more about the actual accommodation itself how many people can live in one of these student accommodations?

[00:08:01] Mamun

You can start with a studio apartment you can live on your own and it can go up to 8 people, 8 bedroom apartments is the maximum.

[00:08:13] Sid

So it depends on your own personal preference. So, Mamun, how many people do you live with?

[00:08:19] Mamun

I live with 5 people including myself they are all boys.

[00:08:25] Sid

How much do you pay a week?

[00:08:26] Mamun

I pay \$230 a week.

[00:08:29] Taurai

I'm paying \$225 a week. But it depends on the contract you take as well I have a year contract so it's cheaper. Six months would be around \$10 more.

[00:08:41] Sid

One of the big factors in choosing whether to live on or off campus is price. Which brings us to number 3 - On campus living has its benefits.

So the amount that you pay every week, does this cover everything, or do you have to pay for your electricity and Wi-Fi? And bills on top of that?

[00:09:03] Mamun

It covers everything utilities are included in that.

[00:09:08] Sid

Wow. That's actually a really great deal. Living on campus means that you're close by but not exactly in the middle of the Parramatta CBD. How easy is it to get around from campus?

[00:09:20] Mamun

It's very easy there's a shuttle bus that goes around everyday from 7 a.m. to 10 p.m. and wait time is generally around 10 to 15 minutes. So it's very easy, you wake up and you're like "I'm late for class I gotta go!" You go to the shuttle bus stop, then the shuttle bus shows up and you're like "oh, that was easy".

[00:09:42] Sid

Say on the weekends, you want to travel to the harbour to go and see the sights. Is it easy to get around from here to places outside of the Parramatta area?

[00:09:51] Olivia

I think it's easy to get around. During weekends if you want to hang out with your friends in the city, you can always catch a shuttle bus to the train station or catch a bus to the city and it costs you maybe \$10 per day and on Sundays it's two and a half dollars. So it's pretty cheap.

[00:10:15] Sid

So during the week when you are actually on campus, you're probably not spending that much on transport?

[00:10:19] Mamun

Nothing at all.

[00:10:21] Taurai

Not a dollar.

[00:10:23] Sid

So guys living in a shared accommodation on campus, what are some of the other facilities that you can take advantage of?

[00:10:28] Mamun

There's a large pool that is one of the best things ever and a barbecue area. Inside there's a common room, lounge area where you can play pool and table tennis, watch movies, play board games and have a lot of fun. And let's not forget about the lovely RAs who answer every question you have regardless of how stupid they maybe.

[00:10:48] Sid

So what exactly is an RA?

[00:10:50] Mamun

A resident assistant. They are basically students who work for the village. They assist you in anyway they can.

[00:10:56] Sid

The RAs are kind of like a big brothers and sisters when you live on campus.

[00:11:00] Mamun

They are like our guardian angels.

[00:11:03] Sid

So you live on campus, there are definitely going to be social events going on all the time right?

[00:11:08] Taurai

Like the regular stuff is Wednesday barbecues, it's like a BBQ every Wednesday. Chaplaincy and red frogs, they alternate and they host the barbecue services and generally the RAs we were talking about, all of them have to do an event each month for us.

[00:11:27] Mamun

And let's not forget about the free Sunday breakfasts.

[00:11:30] Taurai

Oh yeah true, that too.

[00:11:32] Olivia

And usually students will have their own parties in their apartments.

[00:11:37] Sid

It sounds like you've got experience with that. Tell me a little bit more about the parties.

[00:11:40] Olivia

These are mostly students from other countries or on exchange or as international students we get together and have a few drinks and just chill for the night.

It's pretty cool.

[00:11:56] Sid

And it's a great way to meet other people who live in the village.

[00:11:58] Olivia

Yeah.

[00:12:03] Sid

Number 4 where and how to find accommodation off campus.

There are a fair few places that you can go to find accommodation in Western Sydney. If you're just looking for a room in a share house or an apartment, check out websites such as roomster.com or flatmates.com, you can also try a Facebook group such as Parramatta area housemates, or Western Sydney rentals.

If you've got a group of friends that you want to live with, try realestate.com or domain.com just make sure that you can sign a lease.

Leo Patterson Ross is from the Tenant's Union of New South Wales. I spoke to him to find out a little bit more about things you should look out for if you're renting in Sydney.

What exactly would a student need in signing a lease? Would they need a bank account? Would they need to provide pay cheques or that kind of thing as well?

[00:12:52] Leo

For the legal process, all you need is an agreement between the two parties, but renting in New South Wales and generally in Australia is a competitive process. People are put up against other tenants and then the landlord picks the best one in their opinion for that property. And so because of that, you often do you need to be able to show your ID, your bank accounts so that you can show you can afford to pay the rent.

[00:13:23] Sid

Ah, ok, right, so it's not necessary but it's best to have that kind of stuff available. I've also heard a lot about subletting, like I know a lot of Facebook posts they mention the concept of subletting. What exactly is it? Can you explain that for me?

[00:13:38] Leo

It is increasingly how particularly students house themselves, because particularly most people can't afford the place by themselves. So subletting is essentially where one tenant already has a lease to the place and then they have someone else move in on a lease under them. So there is two leases, one with the landlord to what now becomes the head tenant and one between the head tenant and the subtenant. These are residential tenancy agreements so long as it's in writing. If it's not in writing, you are not a tenant and you are not covered by the residential tenancy act in the same way.

You still have a contract, and you still have some rights underneath that, but it's much less clear what those rights and obligations are.

[00:14:31] Sid

Say I want to go and find a new place, what do I look out for at an inspection for a house or apartment?

[00:14:37] Leo

It's really useful to make a list of what you need before you go visiting places. If you really need a spare study room, if you really need aircon, which I really recommend in Western Sydney, if you need a garden space, or a balcony space, make this list in your mind before you go out looking to decide what's important to you and then go look on the websites and so on for the places that meet that criteria.

[00:15:08] Sid

So when you've decided what you like and what you need out of the place, whether it's a house, an apartment, air conditioning, study room. So what do you look out for when you are actually there at the inspection? What do you do? Cause there are all those glossy real estate people they're right, trying to get you through there as quickly as possible.

[00:15:24] Leo

Exactly. So you smile and make friends with the real estate agents, sometimes they are very uninterested. Usually they are the lowest paid and most junior people in the real estate agency office are the ones doing these inspections. So do try and be friendly to them, when you're walking through the place, checking for things which might have looked good in the ad, some of the photography tricks makes rooms look a lot bigger than they are, so getting a sense of the actual size, trying to picture where your furniture would go. I think as well, going around and paying attention to the power points, looking to make sure the power points are in sensible locations, otherwise you are going to end up with your bed or your table in some weird spot because that's the only place that the power points sit. Internet connections, phone connections, these kind of things, I think as well looking for signs of damage, particularly signs of things like water damage and mold - they can be hidden. They might be at the back of a wardrobe, behind the drawers, so opening things up, particularly if it's completely empty to make sure there's nothing behind.

[00:16:41] Sid

I know mold is a really big one. I was reading an article just last week about just how big of a problem it is in so many cities in rental properties. So, that's a really good tip. Are there any red flags you would look out for when you're at an inspection?

[00:16:52] Leo

Funny smells, dampness, particularly if there's carpet. Looking at how well, particularly if it's an apartment block, how well it's been maintained around the bins and things like that.

[00:17:08] Sid

I want to know a little bit more about bills. What exactly are you paying for when you're paying bills and how much are you looking to pay every week?

[00:17:17] Leo

The main thing that you're paying for is the rent. The rent covers essentially your right to stay in the premises. It can include everything, from bills and utilities and internet, or it can just be the right to stay. So that's something to be very clear on when you're moving in, so what does the rent actually include. The Resident Tenancy Act dictates what other things can be charged, so that's why utilities have to have a separate meter, because the residential tenancy act says that's the case. For other things like internet, it's actually not defined who should pay, the way that things are set up is that someone who controls the

house, someone who controls the phone line or the cable line pays for it and then you work out how to split the bill if you're in a sharehouse situation.

[00:18:07] Sid

Can you explain some of the traps that say a lot of students coming from overseas fall into? I know that there has been a couple we've tried to crack down on, especially cramming people into sharehouses, getting them to pay hundreds of dollars of rent a week and not even having space to move around.

[00:18:30] Leo

So I think that there's a general rule that people should be aware of, that there's usually 2 adults per bedroom. That's something to be aware of if it's more than 2, you're almost certainly in an unlawful dwelling and that often will be a lot cheaper, but it also means a lot of other things will probably be done dodgily and you may be in some danger of council eventually coming in and saying "well everyone has to get out".

Some of the most common traps most people fall into is understanding the real estate agents' role. Real estate agents are contracted by the landlord to work for the landlord. They are not a middle ground person, they are not a mediator between landlords and tenants - they are on the landlords side. So that's not a problem, so long as you understand that. Some people will go to the agent asking for advice or what should I do here. The agents have to protect the landlord's interests, it's actually that's their contract, so they may not give you the best advice because they can't lie, they can't break the law, but they can say what the landlord would prefer rather than what the tenant might prefer.

[00:19:48] Sid

Just a final question for you, say something does go wrong, say there's a dispute over a bond or over rent or something and as a student you don't know what to do, you don't know where to go for help. What happens? Where can you find those resources? Where can you find help?

[00:20:08] Leo

So as well as the online websites like tenants.org.au, often Unis will have welfare officers that you can go and talk to in person as an initial starting point. On tenants.org.au there's all the contact details for the local tenants advice and advocacy services. You can go to them, you can get advice from them. In extreme cases you might be able to get representation. The police that ultimately resolves disputes for tenants is the New South Wales civil and administrative tribunal and there are other community services so there's community legal centres, Redfern Legal Centre have a specialist international student solicitor, who can help with housing issues as well as any other legal issue that international students have. They cover the whole state even though they are based in Redfern. They are a good place to get abroad level of assistance.

[00:21:08] Sid

That was awesome you are such an expert on all things to do with rental rights and beyond, thanks so much for chatting.

[00:21:18] Leo

You're welcome, thanks guys.

[00:21:22] Sid

Whether it's on campus or off campus, chances are you'll be living with a couple of other people, so the final thing you need to know is.

[00:21:32] Sid

Number 5. How to be a top housemate. We also went back to Olivia, Mamun and Taurai on this, to see what they thought about share house etiquette.

So when you live with other people, surely there are some rules and expectations you have of each other. Tell me a little bit more about the share house etiquette that you guys abide by,

[00:21:52] Taurai

Respect. Just respect other people's space, other people's stuff, and ask if it's not yours, just ask, it's common courtesy.

[00:22:00] Olivia

And you need to clean up the things and the mess you make. So for example, if you cooked, you have to wash all your dishes.

[00:22:09] Mamun

Before you even start staying at the village, there is a mandatory online module which you have to complete and it is very serious. If you do not complete that, you will not be allowed to stay at the village.

[00:22:19] Sid

And what are some of the things that that module comprises of.

[00:22:22] Mamun

Illicit drug usage, harassment and respect now always.

[00:22:32] Sid

What do you look for exactly in a good roommate?

[00:22:35] Mamun

A person who is respectful and respects you. That is first and foremost and preferably tidiness, that's the most important thing.

[00:22:48] Olivia

Oh yeah I agree with that and also because we are students, at night we need to study so I would say maybe keep quiet.

[00:23:02] Taurai

Yeah I agree with both of them. I think on the other side as well, I like to meet people coming from different backgrounds, I feel like it helps me grow and improve on my qualities as well, I've learnt a lot of patience, I've learnt to compromise a lot more than I used to because you realise not everybody is the same as you. You cannot have duplicates of you as housemates unfortunately but it's still great. Respect is top, the first thing, just respect each other.

[00:23:44] Sid

And that's the thing about University, it's not just about learning new things academically, it's also about growing as a person. Thanks for listening, make sure you subscribe and check out the other episodes. If you have any more questions, head to westernsydney.edu.au. I'm Sid Sharma, see you soon.