

Fake it until you make it

What Nisal wishes he
knew before moving to
Australia to study



When Nisal first arrived in Australia back in 2022, he didn't have a lot of expectations. He knew he was moving to a country with good universities and plenty of opportunities, but aside from that, much of the journey before him was unknown.

Although that might sound overwhelming to some, for Nisal, he remembers feeling excited, rather than nervous.

"I felt empowered because this was the first time in my life I was living in a whole new country by myself with my own responsibilities and path forward."



Watch 2025 SOSH In Their Words: Nisal



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THOSE FIRST FEW DAYS

Nisal had moved to Australia from Sri Lanka to study medical science, with the long-term goal of eventually studying medicine. He knew the road ahead would be a long and challenging one, but he was determined to make the most of it, whatever that looked like.

“I trusted myself to make correct decisions and, if not, they would be valuable learning opportunities.”

Despite his positive outlook, his first few days in Australia were still full of uncertainties. Arriving in the midst of the pandemic, he was required to complete a COVID-19 test on arrival. He remembers taking the test, seeing it was negative and then not really knowing what to do next.

“I decided to go to the reception of the university accommodation I was living in and showed the negative tests to the residential assistants, to which they were a bit taken aback. Like, ‘why are you showing us this?’ I was equally confused not knowing what the correct thing to do was.”

Later that day he had to return to reception to get some help on setting up a bank account. They showed him which bus to get and where to go, but he found the whole process a lot more stressful than he expected and decided to walk instead.

The bus system took him a few days to understand, and even when he thought he’d figured it out he was surprised to find out he needed to stick his hand out to let the drivers know he wanted them to stop.

“I assumed they would see me and stop, but [they] just drove past,” he said.

It was only after several buses whizzed past him that he noticed passengers on the opposite side putting out their hands and figured out what to do.

THE AUSTRALIAN UNIVERSITY EXPERIENCE

Then there was university itself. Because he had missed orientation week, he arrived on campus without knowing where his classes were or how things worked. But among the confusion, Nisal found firsthand evidence of that classic *“laidback Aussie attitude.”*

“I remember one time I was in a two-hour lecture. Twenty minutes into it, someone stood up, picked up their bag, waved to the professor and left the lecture theatre. I was astonished. I even took a video to send my friends back home because that would never happen in my home country,” he said.

Coming from a very different education system, he was struck by the flexibility and transparency of Australian universities.

“I was very surprised to hear professors say, ‘If you’re feeling stressed, we can make arrangements or alterations to the schedule or exams,’” he said.

He also appreciated the detailed learning guides that outlined assignments, exams and readings in advance.

“That made me feel like I was in control. It was a very empowering way of learning.”



NEW RESPONSIBILITIES

Outside the classroom, however, independence came with responsibilities he hadn't fully anticipated. At first, managing his own schedule felt exciting. But balancing lectures, work, cooking and all the challenges of daily life soon became exhausting.

"I remember being very tired just thinking about how much work and university responsibilities I had in my head and realising that I wouldn't be getting a day off for at least two weeks."

Mealtimes were another challenge to overcome. Back home, Nisal says his cooking skills barely extended beyond eggs and toast, and now he was responsible for preparing three meals a day. He says he *"definitely burned a fair few meals to end up with something edible."*

THE POWER OF CONNECTION

Despite the learning curves, Nisal's experience has been mostly a positive one. He believes most of that came from introducing himself to people, asking questions and saying yes to opportunities that initially felt intimidating.

Though there were challenges, Nisal feels that having a good support network, largely built from his university accommodation connections, helped him to more easily overcome them.

"Building a support network was easy only because I was in the right places. I decided to live in the university accommodation when I first moved to Australia as I didn't know anyone here, and that led to lots of great connections with some amazing people who really helped me through university and settling into Australia."

"The power of knowing people is huge," he said.

"The support networks don't find you. You have to be proactive and fake confidence."

DISCOVER MORE STUDENT STORIES

This article is part of the Allianz Partners In Their Words series, where five international students share their experiences of living and studying in Australia.

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