

MY ADOPTED HOME

Now, it feels like home

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Marcella Purnama

A new international student muttered this question to the girl in the mirror one day, “When will it start feeling like home?”

I could see it in her eyes - fear of the new life, but there was a spark of excitement as well. She was afraid that she would never make friends - that she would never get through the feeling of homesickness.

Yet two years later she muttered another question, “When did it start feeling like home?” And she smiled.

That first day was scary; that first attempt to talk to someone was nerve-racking. What could be more challenging than speaking broken English and living a thousand miles from home. I thought to myself.

Yet I survived, and I not only survived, I have lived a beautiful life.

After those first few weeks, soon enough you will discover how to do your housekeeping stuff. From the 101 of cooking - that oil combined with water will splash badly - to getting red stains on your white shirt because you just throw all your clothes into the same washing basket.

And yes, you will know the trick of how to skip classes and still be able to get a pass, how to choose which tutorials to skip, how to get more days off, and how to meet the bare minimum requirement for attendance.

Of course, it will take some time until you finally skip your first class. If you are a straight A student, I'd say a couple of months. If you were like me (I skipped my O- week and all my classes on the first week - well, I had a not-getting-my-visa-on-time issue), I'd say three weeks tops.

But let me tell you this from the start: homesickness is inevitable - especially during those lonely weekend nights when you are fed up with watching DVDs alone with some instant noodles. Or when you have just received a bad score on a test. However, immunity is achievable. You just have to practice.

And you will make new friends; I can assure you that. I remember that feeling - the feeling when I tried to find seats during busy lunchtime at the Union House, with no company at all. After a week I gave up and ate my lunch alone somewhere else - somewhere less obvious.

Before long I was burying myself in the library, finding excuses in my unfinished assignments, when in fact I didn't want to be seen eating lunch alone, so I preferred having lunch with my laptop. But yes, in time, one person will ask you for lunch, and suddenly, you'd feel at home.

Trust me, you'll find new friends.

A third of you may even continue your studies to Masters or PhDs, and finally move to Melbourne permanently.

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In time, you will even master how to fare evade without getting caught (yes, I did it a couple of times, being a poor student who prefers the money to be used buying coffee instead of paying the extremely expensive full fare), and you will know which days are the cheapest to go to the cinema.

You will be a master of time - when to wake up, which train schedule to take, when to run for a tram, or how to arrive at classes just two minutes after they start.

Sure, you'll still miss your mom's cooking, and the smell of your old bed in your home for more than 17 years. But one day when you're home, eating your mom's special dish and sleeping on your own bed, you'll miss your small apartment and the smell of fresh roasted coffee in the morning.

I know, I've been there.

Change is always scary, yet it is inevitable. The sooner you make peace with it, the sooner you can taste the best of both lives.

It's uni life in Melbourne, and if you are going to spend the next three (or even more) years here, oh yes, you'll be able to call Melbourne your adopted home. Not necessarily replacing your own, but as parents can love their children perfectly instead of giving a divided love, you can also have two homes and feel connected to both.

One day, you'll get to the stage when you're in Melbourne, and you'll feel like home.

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