"Wait? Why Laradise?" he asked. "Oh, that's simple" I answered. "Laramie is amazingly beautiful, the people are friendly, fun and outdoorsy; and the University is fantastic. I enjoyed every moment of it. Laramie is Paradise, that's why they call it Laradise!"

... and Laradise it was.

**SO WHY WYOMING?**

The most honest answer I can give you is: I did not plan on going to Wyoming. In fact, I was hoping to study in Colorado, instead the University of Long Beach in California accepted my application; and after weeks of paper work and getting ready for California, I ended up realizing that I cannot afford studying at CSULB. The costs are ridiculous! My nerves were at breaking point, all worried that my semester abroad may not happen. So I went to the ISO and with the help of Roman Behrens and Sarah Basel I was able to switch Universities in less then a day. You two are my heroes.

My new destination: The University of Wyoming! Even though I did not know much about Wyoming, it turned out to be the best decision I could have made.

**Fun Fact:** Even better than Colorado! Less people, more freedom, closer to the mountains. I love Wyoming!

So, my dear fellow student, let me tell you why Wyoming, the State of the Cowboys, turned out to be the best decision I could have made. Let me tell you why Laramie is called Laradise and what there is to do. I hope that maybe someday when you are sitting in your flight to Laradise my experiences will help give you some ideas to have a great semester abroad! But my greatest advice is: Do it and enjoy!

**GETTING EVERYTHING ORGANIZED**

Bureaucracy can be a b*tch, so start with the paper work early and you'll be fine. I’ve made wonderful experiences at the ISO in case you have any questions concerning VISA etc. My advice: get German travel insurance as soon as possible (UKV was my insurance), so you can waive the fees for the American insurance at UW. This will save you $900. Be prepared to pay for expensive books in your classes. Make sure to search Amazon or Ebay for second hand or look for an older edition (they are usually pretty similar) to save you a lot of money.
THE UNIVERSITY OF WYOMING

UW is the only university in Wyoming, hence its pride and joy; It shows! Sports are a big deal, especially football, so you will encounter the colors gold and brown quite frequently #GoPokes (Go Cowboys!). The campus is well organized and absolutely beautiful. Every professor I’ve met was helpful, kind, and fun, and so is the staff of the International Student Center. They are proud of their diversity, their solidarity and their academics. No matter what the politics dictate, UW is proud of every international student #Trump #NoThanks. The students I’ve encountered were incredibly nice, very liberal, and mostly outdoory.

The campus is located in the center of Laramie and easily accessible by bus, which is free in Laramie. Laramie itself is located in a valley surrounded by prairies, the Snowy Range mountains aka Medicine Bow National Forest and the Laramie mountains aka Happy Jack, Vedauwoo and Curt Gowdy State Park. You can also see the Rocky Mountains of Colorado in the distance, as Colorado is only an hour away!

**Fun Fact:** The elevation of Laramie, Wyoming is about 2200m which makes UW the highest university in the entire States. The nearest mountains are 2600m (Happy Jack) and 3600m (Medicine Bow Peak). You will be out of breath the first few weeks, you will get drunk really fast and if you work out, you will be a bad ass when you return home. #ElevationTraining

WHERE TO LIVE AND WHAT TO STUDY

If you decide to live on campus (e.g. River Village Apartments or Hill Hall) you will be able to either bike, walk or go to university by bus. You can rent a single-speed in-town bike for $25/semester at the UW Outdoor Program. Rent for housing is between $450-$550 per person. I decided to live off campus and found a house I shared with three other roommates only two blocks away from university for $395 a month (I searched online by using Craigslist). This made it easy to find American friends and get connected.

If you are an undergrad you need to study 4 courses or 12CP (Credit Points). As a graduate student you are required to attend 3 courses or 9 CP. It may not seem a lot, but courses tend to repeat two or three times a week, are filled with compulsory attendance and loads of homework. Trust me, the courses may not be super challenging, but you will most likely be busy, so make sure to find some time to travel and explore Wyoming!

UW offers numerous degrees and competent teachers. I studied Philosophy and Education in Wyoming; and met people from all over the world with all kinds of degrees. I’d like to thank my professors and fellow students at the Department of Philosophy and the Department of Education. Not only did I have my own office, I also learned a lot, made new friends, received help when needed, drank beer with my professor (thank you FP!) and received more time to work on my papers when I couldn't make it until the due date. The University of Wyoming felt like a big family to me, thanks to you.
Wyoming – Outdoor Heaven!

Let’s get this straight: if you consider yourself more of a city person who likes to go shopping and partying, and who has never been in a pair of hiking shoes, small town Laramie is NOT going to be fun. In fact, the entire Mid-West or West is not going to be fun for you. Do yourself a favor and apply to universities such as Long Beach or Florida State.

Do you consider yourself outdoorsy, adventurous and open-minded? Congratulations, you just found the best place to live and study in the US. #Laradise

Laramie is outdoor heaven and UW has everything you can dream of to support you and your adventures. The Outdoor Program at UW offers weekend trips to all sorts of National Parks and Forests around the area, such as Grand Teton National Park, Yellowstone National Park, and Medicine Bow National Forest. They also offer trips for kayaking, climbing, snowshoeing, mountaineering and many more, all of which are very affordable. Equipment such as camping or skiing gear can be rented fairly cheap and are good quality. I’ve rented a sleeping bag, backpack, hiking poles and a sleeping mat many times to go on backpacking trips in Wyoming or Colorado, and stayed warm and cozy even when the temperatures dropped below 0°C.

Fun Fact: Wyoming is the least populated State in the entire US. You may not see a lot of people, but you will see one of the most breathtaking landscapes the West has to offer. Here are places I’ve traveled to or can highly recommend if you are interested in visiting National Parks: Grand Teton National Park or Devils Tower Monument in Wyoming; Yellowstone or Glacier National Park in Montana; Black Hills or Badlands National Park in South Dakota; Rocky Mountains or Great Sand Dunes National Park in Colorado; Arches or Canyonlands or Zion National Park in Utah #LifeIsAHighway

Mountainbiking

The outdoor program rents out fat-tire bikes and hardtail-mountainbikes. Downtown, you will find two bike shops (All Terrain Sports & The Pedal House) which rent out full-suspension mountainbikes. I flew my full-suspension mountainbike all the way from Germany to Wyoming (for $250 roundtrip) and would do it again. Happy Jack (mountain area just 15 minutes outside of town) offers one of the best single trails for downhill. My absolute favorites: Death Crotch and Aspen Trail. Curt Gowdy (25 minutes outside of town) has fantastic trails if you like it a bit more technical with big rocks. Try: Stone Temple Circuit.
Hiking & Backpacking

Vedauwoo offers beautiful day hikes, scrambling and climbing only 20 minutes outside of town. Medicine Bow National Forest (only 45 minutes away) offers beautiful day hikes. A must do is Medicine Bow Peak (3600m), which is a great and relatively easy 4-5 hour loop with amazing views. On the border to Colorado are several wildernesses which offer great backpacking opportunities if you like to spend two nights and three days on average in the mountains (2 hour drive). I highly recommend Rawah and Zirkel Wilderness! For bad weather: UW has an indoor climbing wall and a big gym that’s free for UW students.

#ZirkelWilderness #Backpacking #RawahWilderness

How The Heck Did I Get Around?

Laramie is a pretty isolated place and there is no such thing as public transportation as we know it. So to be able to get out of town, I bought myself a car during my stay in the States. In town buses will help you to get around. They will take you to University, Downtown or from the dorms to Walmart. At night you can call a Saferide, which will get you from the bars to your home or from home to the bars – all for free and for your own safety. If you would like to explore the outdoors outside of town you can either rent a car in town or find someone with a car ;-) #LifeIsAHighway

#2003FordTaurus #MyCar

What Else Is There To Do In Laramie?

Next to all the typical fast food chains, Laramie offers delicious restaurants, numerous breweries and bars. My favorites: Crow Bar for the best burgers (especially vegetarian), Niko Sushi during lunch hours, and Coal Creek Tap for the best beer (if you are 21 or older). If you like to play pool while enjoying a drink or two, Mingles is the place to go. If you like to dance, go to Buckhorn. And if you enjoy shopping, I can highly recommend Laramie’s thrift shop Nu2U. Don’t worry about bringing too many clothes to Wyoming. The summers are hot, the winters are cold, and you can find everything for cheap at Nu2U!

Every Friday during the summer months until late fall there is a farmers market with live music and delicious food downtown. 1st Street offers an all organic Food Co-op store and little restaurants such as Sweet Melissa’s if you prefer vegan/vegetarian restaurants. Laramie is known for its alternative stores and people, which I highly enjoyed. Don’t get me wrong, though. If you are looking for the typical American burger or steak, you will find it. And if you get the munchies in the middle of the night, Domino’s Pizza will always be there for you.
If you are looking for good outdoor stores I recommend: Cross Country Connection, Atmosphere (all self-made in Laramie) and Nu2U (thrift shop, consists of two stores: one for clothing and one for outdoor gear. All second hand).

The University of Wyoming offers a lot of activities for its international student, such as a get together every Friday afternoon to enjoy a coffee and share experiences with other students.

**DO TRAVEL**

It doesn't matter if you plan on traveling before, during or after your semester. What does matter is that you do travel. Not only are domestic flights inexpensive, gas is also very affordable; and there is nothing better than meeting new friends and exploring the country. So much to see, and only so little time left. I had a wonderful time road tripping all the way from Wyoming, down to Colorado, New Mexico and Texas during Thanksgiving #ThankYouKurt #SkippingClasses and enjoyed every weekend backpacking trip I made #RockyMountains. Do travel!

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**BOTTOM LINE**

**DO IT.** Laramie is an amazing town with amazing people. It's called Laradise for a reason. If you are looking for an American experience, if you enjoy the outdoors and would like to study on a beautiful campus with friendly and competent professors, the University of Wyoming is THE place to go. The one thing I regret is that I only studied there for a semester instead of an academic year. So choose wisely, you may fall in love with this place.

**BEST,**

**KAYLA JANE**