



# GOING RURAL GUIDE

# PREFACE

## Welcome to the second edition of the Going Rural Guide!

A joint RAHMS- MedSoc initiative, this guide is a comprehensive resource which answers the many questions students may have when considering a rural placement for Coursework, ILP/Honours, or Phase 3.

For this Second Edition, we're excited to add the section "So you think you were shafted?" to challenge many misconceptions about a rural placement. The expanded 'Rural Research Section' reflects the increasing number of students completing their ILP/Honours rurally. We've also packed more information into the 'Campus Focus' sections and revised it so that it is relevant to both Phase 2 and 3 students.

We are very grateful to the contributors for giving their time to compose and revise sections. It is this generous giving of time which reflects the established culture of students helping students in UNSW Medicine. RAHMS and MedSoc are committed to upholding this culture, and thus it is with great pleasure that we have produced the second edition of the Going Rural Guide.

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# WHY GO RURAL

Going rural is a pretty damn fine time. It opens up massive opportunity to create memories, learning opportunities and friendships you'll truly value once we graduate. Here's a quick rundown on some of the major advantages for students going rural compared to the city-slickers.

## *Academic opportunity*

While Sydney hospitals are saturated with students from UNSW and more, rural health campuses have far less competition. Thus, rural placements offer virtually any ward-round, clinic or scrub-in experience! For example, cannulation and clinical skills, sitting in (and assisting!) birthing suites. It's not uncommon for consultants to know students' names, giving incredible opportunity to make connections from as early as 3rd year. Smaller classes mean lectures are run as tutorials, usually by consultants who guide you in a clinically relevant manner. UNSW has invested millions of dollars in the campuses, making them beautiful environments for study and leisure. Students have out-of business hours access to uniwide, air-con, free printing, fully-stocked medical libraries, plush sofas, and plenty of large screen TVs for after class movie screenings.

## *The people involved in your placement*

The Rural Clinical School societies run everything from one-on-one mentoring, academic and clinical tutorials, to social and sporting events. Whether you're interested in getaway road-trips to sprawling beaches, the snow or the wine country (#culture), heading out of the city has a lot to offer. Your Clubs are your main point of call, but throughout the year, they also engage with RAHMS for rural focussed support and MedSoc as the peak representative body for rural advocacy to Faculty. The administration and teaching staff are incredibly approachable, understanding and accommodating. Students feel more like colleagues than staff as they join you for trivia, dragon-boat races, pool parties, and Bachelorette screenings on the weekends.

## *The rural lifestyle*

While we all as students cringe at Sydney's traffic jams, rent in excess of \$250/week, and pretty crammed lifestyle, the rural campuses have great options for super cheap accommodation close to the RCS. While these places can be walking distance from your air-conditioned lecture theatre, houses and apartments either in a National Park or on the beach are an easy drive away from the hospital and are much cheaper than those in the Greater Sydney Area.

Coffs Harbour





# CLINICAL ALLOCATION POLICY

The Guidelines for the Allocation of Students in the Medicine Program to Clinical Environment (hereafter 'the Guidelines') governs the preferencing and allocation process in UNSW Medicine. We highly encourage you to understand all sections of the guidelines to allow you to make an informed decision when deciding your Coursework or Phase 3 preferences. Important points from the Guidelines are contained below\*.

PLEASE NOTE: At the time of publication of this Guide (March 2019), the Guidelines were under review. The editors do not expect the Guidelines to change significantly, however we encourage students to read the updated Guidelines when they are released by the Faculty. *For the current guidelines please [click here](#).*

**1. Rural Student Entry Scheme (RSES) students receive priority for rural sites, for both Coursework and Phase 3.** There are approximately 18 spots at each of the four Phase 3 rural sites (Albury-Wodonga, Coffs Harbour, Port Macquarie, and Wagga Wagga), resulting in around 72 Phase 3 rural spots overall. Each cohort in UNSW Medicine contains approximately 54 RSES students. Therefore, RSES students can generally assume they will receive whichever rural site they preference for Phase 3, if it is their first preference (this is less true for Phase 2). The exception to this would be where a rural site receives more first preferences from RSES students than there are spots, following which a computer will randomly select the required number of students, as per the Guidelines.

**2. RSES students are required to undertake an extended rural placement for a minimum of 24 months.** RSES students can expect to spend Phase 3 at rural campus. Therefore, an RSES student who completed Phase 1 at the Kensington campus and who is wishing to remain in Sydney for Coursework can attempt to do so by preferencing first a metropolitan site. However, such students should be aware that if there are unfilled rural sites based on first preferences, it is likely that RSES students will be allocated to those unfilled rural sites, even if they did not preference a rural site as a first preference (see 7.5.4 in the Guidelines).

*\*Disclaimer: the information contained within this guide pertaining to the Guidelines is based on student interpretation only. All students submitting preferences for Coursework or Phase 3 are strongly encouraged to familiarise themselves with the Guidelines before submitting their preferences. The editors of this guide take no responsibility for any misinterpretation of the Guidelines and consequent decisions based on the information in the Going Rural Guide (2nd ed.).*



## CLINICAL ALLOCATION POLICY

3. Students completing Phase 1 at Port Macquarie are expected to remain in either Port Macquarie or Coffs Harbour for the entirety of their degree.
4. Swaps must be organised within two weeks of allocations being announced. Swaps between two metropolitan sites or two rural sites are allowed. Swaps between a metropolitan and a rural campus will only be considered “in significant circumstances”, and must be approved by the Head of the Rural Clinical School (see 'Contacts' at the end of this Guide).
5. Allocations may be appealed within two weeks of allocations being announced, as per Clause 6 of the Guidelines.
6. Students who complete Year 3 at a rural site will generally be allowed to return to the same site in Phase 3, however there is no guarantee that this will occur.
7. Students who complete ILP/Honours at a rural site will have preference for that same site in Phase 3.

## RELOCATION ALLOWANCE

Faculty provides a \$500 Relocation Allowance for students moving to a rural campus in Phase 2 or 3, for extended placements only. This Allowance covers costs of moving and relocating, such as flights or fuel, removal vans, furniture storage, or terminating a home lease, up to \$500. The Allowance will only be paid if legitimate receipts or invoices are provided to the clinical school to which the student is moving within two months of being relocated.

Full details of this allowance, and how to apply, can be found by *clicking here*.



# ALBURY-WODONGA

First edition authors: Lucy McCrum, Damian Gill

Second edition authors: Jordan Vivian, Jimmy Niddrie, Brittany Hill, Lily Fitzpatrick



The border towns of Albury and Wodonga boast the most vibrant communities of all the rural locations. With a population of 100,000 people, 3 universities, and only 3.5hrs to Melbourne, it really has everything. Servicing a health catchment of more than 250,000 people, our two public hospitals are full of a diverse range of general medicine, general surgical, paediatric, rehabilitation and psychiatric patients.

One of the unique things about studying here is the experience of being ‘on the border.’ Albury and Wodonga each have their own hospital which we work between, and that’s not even counting the three private hospitals we have access to! This means plenty of varied experiences, and learning the nuances of both the NSW and Victorian healthcare systems.

# ALBURY-WODONGA

The Albury-Wodonga Medical Students' Society (AWMSS), is one of the best-run student organisations in UNSW. Not only does AWMSS have all of your academic needs covered, it also looks after your social, sporting and community ventures. Throughout the year, some of the events AWMSS run include:

- Weekly student-run Journal Club
- Weekly student-run academic tutorials
- Student mentoring groups
- Mixed netball competitions
- Touch football competitions
- Formal dinners
- Well-Being Nights
- Winery Walkabout
- Secret Santa
- BBQs galore
- Multiple community volunteer projects
- Mock biomed and ICE exams

AWMSS has also set up a 'doctors4doctors' program, which links students with great local GPs who bulk bill our students to encourage them to take care of their own health, and giving easy access when they do need support. Albury is also very passionate about visiting local schools with our Teddy Bear Hospital. These are a great way to get to know the local community, as we attend many of the local schools and local fairs!

Lastly, the admin ladies are amazing and are the Mother Hens everybody needs!

## Academics

Students are treated to a range of very dedicated tutors, who often give up their evenings and days off to give extra tutorials. In Phase 2 there are weekly neurology, pathology, intern and "Integration Tutorials". Integration tutorials are run by one of the heads of ED, and students work through a case presentation as if they are in ED, taking a history, doing an examination and developing a list of differentials, before investigating the patient. These tutorials prepare you very well for ICE. There is also weekly bedside tutorials during general medicine terms from rehabilitation and nephrology physicians for both Phase 2 and 3 students. Senior students and UNSW alumni now working in the area are more than happy to organise focussed tutorials, tailored to the topics students feel they need the most assistance with. If that isn't enough for you, there is a general medicine tutorial from a local physician every week for all students.

A potential disadvantage is the lack of cardiothoracic or neurosurgery, and many of our category 1 patients are transferred fairly quickly to tertiary centres in Melbourne. Lastly, as we are on the border, you will need to ensure you get a Victorian Working with Children Check, in addition to your NSW one.



# ALBURY-WODONGA

## *Accommodation*

In terms of living, most students live in East Albury, which is walking distance from the hospital. Rent is super cheap, and generally about \$100/week. There is also free student parking at the hospital.

## *Transport*

It is almost impossible to get around Albury without a car as public transport is definitely lacking, and you will have to go to Wodonga. If you're in third year, you may be able to get away with not having your own car if you source a bike or a few good mates to drive with. However, not having your own car or license can pose logistical issues, particularly in Phase 3.

## *Work opportunities*

In terms of earning some spare pocket change and paying for rent, there are plenty of part-time job opportunities throughout the hustling bustling city. People have previously worked in bars, restaurants, catering companies, the cinema, Bottle-O's, retail shops, the roller-skating rink... the list goes on. Tutoring and baby-sitting are also very popular and readily available options.

## *Lifestyle*

What do we do in Albury? If AWMSS hasn't organised your weekend for you, there is plenty to do around Albury. With plenty of uni's in town the nightlife is existent and a good time is always had at Paddy's. A summer afternoon spent floating down the majestic Murray River, or a winter evening huddled around the warmth of the community wood fired pizza oven never goes astray. Being so close to Melbourne there are heaps of cute coffee brunch places - make sure you check out the Proprietor and Boom Boom! Places like Beechworth, Rutherglen and Mulwala are all within an hour drive. You can even do a day trip to Falls Creek for a day of skiing in the winter! Melbourne is also only 3.5 hours away - a short drive or a \$30 train!

We should also mention the weather. Albury does get extremes of temperature - very hot and very cold! However, most of the facilities and houses in the area are built well to deal with this weather. Also there is no wind like Sydney and the sun stays out, so it's a nice cold! And if that doesn't comfort you, remember the snow is only an hour and a half away!

# THE STUDENT PERSPECTIVE

*Submission by Brittany Hill*

I returned to Albury in my fifth year, having loved my experience of completing third year in this beautiful town. The town is picturesque, with some many yummy restaurants and cafes! On the weekends, you can travel to the funky op shops of Yackandandah, taste Beechworth's famous honey, or travel out to the nearby ski slopes. The smaller cohorts at the rural clinical schools mean that you'll form many close and supportive friendships.

It's also very easy to get advice from those who have been through it all before you. We have so many student run tutorials, bedside tutorials from interns and unique classes from doctors with a passion for teaching. You'll also make friends with students from all the year groups, particularly at events held by our student society.

On a financial note, I have been able to pick up work quite easily and fit it in around our uni timetable. In 3rd year I worked as a high school tutor and for an events catering company- and I was able to work with this company again in fifth year. Quite a lot of the students here have jobs, and would be more than happy to pass on recommendations to new students.

I have also been lucky enough to live in two beautiful homes with other med students, for a fraction of the Sydney price! Most students live a short drive away from the hospital, and many live within walking distance. The money you save on rent can be put towards trips to see your family, if, like mine, they live a fair distance away!

In short, the town is gorgeous, the clinical school staff are so helpful, you'll have a rich social life (yes it's true I swear!), the doctors want to teach you lots of stuff, and the learning opportunities are seriously unparalleled. Don't hesitate to get in touch if you want any more details!

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# COFFS HARBOUR

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Second edition authors: Naomi Sirmay, Lucy Yang, Lisha Lobo, Carrie Lee



Looking for that rural academic experience, but can't leave the coast? Coffs Harbour is for you!

Coffs is about halfway between Sydney and Brisbane, and has everything for those who love the outdoors - stunning beaches, pristine rainforests, spectacular lookouts, and an overly sized banana. A population of 75000 means plenty of markets, festivals, and sports, all without the hustle and bustle of Sydney. Academically, this substantial population ensures you see a broad and interesting range of presentations come through the hospital doors.

So what are you waiting for? Choose Coffs for that charming coastal lifestyle and hands-on hospital experience!

# COFFS HARBOUR

## Academics

Coffs Harbour offers extensive clinical experience. A wide range of facilities are available to you e.g. operating theatre, pathology labs, clinics, ward rounds, meetings, and private practices. Additionally, students are encouraged to scrub in and assist with surgery too, e.g. cesareans, live births, and more! The clinical school is modern, with a relaxed atmosphere and access to the library, printing, NSW health database (useful for PowerChart access), tea/coffee and uniwide. The iSimulation centre in the hospital also offers pretty amazing simulations on childbirth and Basic Life Saving sessions.

Most teachers are great, and some are downright amazing - it's really helpful to have teachers who actually make the effort to teach consistently, and are willing to help outside of scheduled classes. Besides regular bedside teaching, there's also a mentor/buddy system, which is fantastic for getting to know wards, approaching patients in your own time, and free OSCE/ICE training. For third years, Phase 3 students also run non-timetabled tutorials, which are taught from a student's perspective - these are super helpful when preparing for exams!

Exam-wise, all Phase 2 and Phase 3 exams are held in Coffs. It's more comforting to do an exam in your own clinical school, with one of the examiners being someone you know. To support your learning, Coffs also has really amazing admin staff. Alison, our Head of Campus, is also super nice and available. The only few cons about going rural at Coffs Harbour are the use of video conferences, lack of scheduled pracs, and the smaller classes = they'll know if you skip (so don't skip!).

## Accommodation

Accommodation-wise, there's room for 12 at the clinical school, where you can live close to the other Phase 2/3 students. Since the clinical school is attached to the hospital, there'll be no need to travel back and forth, but even so, there's free parking at the hospital. 10 minutes drive from Coffs Base Hospital are the beach/tourist strips of Sawtell and the Jetty. To the north of Coffs (around 15 minutes drive) are other great suburbs with newer, larger houses such as Park Beach, Diggers Beach, Sapphire Beach, and Korora. For example, previous Coffs students rented a three-bedroom house on the banks of Bonville Creek in Sawtell for \$130/week per person. The house had 2 single bedrooms and a master for 2 people, 2 bathrooms, a 2-space garage and plenty of street parking, a jungle backyard and sizable front yard, as well as massive living spaces and a waterview veranda! This sun-bathed waterside villa was only 10 minutes drive from the hospital.



# COFFS HARBOUR

## *Transport*

Travel isn't too much of a problem within Coffs Harbour but you will likely need a car (or a roommate with a car). While it's a 6h drive back to Sydney, there are regular 40 minute flights available (Qantas, Virgin, Tiger and Rex) which can be quite cheap - normally one-way tickets can be booked for around \$60!

## *Work opportunities*

There are definitely work opportunities in Coffs! Good options are tutoring and hospitality work.

## *Lifestyle*

Social activities are great, with plenty of cafes and restaurants around, as well as surrounding towns and local beaches to visit. The CHUMS group (Coffs Harbour Undergraduate Medical Students) organises fundraising and events for the students like running and swimming groups, multi sports competitions, baking sales for the social event of the year (the Coffs Cup) as well as regular trips to local pubs and clubs for Salsa dancing or Trivia. Our hottest tips are Treeo and Split in Sawtell, Old John's in the Jetty or Hearthfire Bakery in Bellingen for brunch followed by surfing at Diggers Beach, the Promised Land waterfalls, laser tag, ice skating or skywalk. For cuisine, seek out the CBD's Ethiopian restaurant, Mana Chita, or vegan Japanese in Zen Japan . For a nightcap, you'll be looking at one of Coffs' many cocktail bars like Lime or Element .

# GRIFFITH

First edition authors: Jessica Brown, Cassie Jennison

Second edition authors: Laura Bawden, David Tighe



Where you can find a vibrant blend of multiculturalism, delicious food and wine, and true country hospitality? The one and only Griffith!

With 26000 people, Griffith is a cosmopolitan centre in the industrious Riverina area. The booming agricultural industry creates a busy atmosphere in the city, as well as producing some jaw-dropping cuisine. The larger than expected Italian, Indian, Afghani, and Pacific Islander populations lead to exciting cultural festivals and traditions (Salami Festival, anyone?!).

The academic freedom in Griffith means that learning is, almost entirely, what you make of it, meaning Griffith is your foundation for catapulting your Phase 2 learning to the next level!

*NB: Griffith RCS is only available for Phase 2 students (both Coursework and ILP).*

# GRIFFITH

## Academic

For the majority of the year, you'll be spending every morning during the week at the hospital, participating in ward rounds, theatres, clinics, and in the emergency department. The clinical exposure is unreal. The lack of residents and registrars at Griffith mean you have direct contact with consultants, some who are local and some who fly in from Sydney (networking, anyone?). This direct contact means you're the recipient of the consultants' teaching. Furthermore, you'll get to scrub in from your first week, assist in theatre, learn skills like suturing, cannulation, catheterisation, and intubation. Oh, and you'll actually get to do it on real patients. Lots.

Outside of your scheduled attachments, your wide-open access to the hospital means you can see patients on the medical ward, attend theatres, poke your head into maternity, or hang out in the ED to your heart's content. Moreover, the Head of Campus Damien Limberger and Campus Manager Cathy Pianca are all too happy to set you up with visiting specialists, be that ophthalmology, paediatric surgery, or geriatrics. Griffith also boasts a small private hospital (St Vincent's Private Community Hospital), which hosts a range of visiting surgical specialties, namely orthopaedic, plastic, and even vascular surgery. If you have a particular clinical interest, Griffith offers you the opportunity to spend oodles of time in that area. Ultimately, the clinical exposure you receive in Griffith is unparalleled, even compared to other rural campuses. All you need to do is to show up and be ready to learn. Finally, because there are only six full-time students in the hospital (there are occasionally rotating Phase 3 students), the hospital staff will come to learn your name. The importance of being known as a person, and not just as 'the medical student', in the busy hospital environment should not be underestimated!

Your lectures are given in the afternoons, and are delivered either by doctors from the hospital, or, more commonly, via video-conference from Wagga Wagga. All Sydney lectures and Moodle content is available online. The teaching in Griffith is unstructured, so you learn to become very self-directed.

Also worth mentioning is the fact that Cathy is generally happy for students to miss the occasional day of class to travel back to Sydney, which is always good for 21sts, or those with a significant other! Lastly, Cathy and Damien really care about your educational experience, so their doors are always open to hear about academic issues, personal issues, or even just a chat!



# GRIFFITH

## *Accommodation*

The house you get set up with is out of this world. Informally known as “The McMansion”, rent (inc bills) for this spacious house is around \$80 p/wk. A car garage is provided for 2 people along with 3 bathrooms (one is an ensuite, another has a spa bath), lounge room, playroom, and even a ping pong table! All beds are doubles (bar one) and the place is situated across from an oval, 10 minutes drive from the hospital.

## *Transport*

A car is essential. That said, if you’re a keen cyclist or runner, the hospital’s only 4km away, and it’s a nice ride to the hospital. Plus, there are showers at the clinical school! Coming to visit Sydney is a bellyache. Return flights cost minimum of \$300 return, or you can choose to stomach the seven hour drive.

## *Work opportunities*

Griffith is a great place to balance a casual job on the side. With a huge hospitality, industrial, and sport industry, you pretty much will have your pick of jobs. Previous students have worked in local gyms (LiveFit), as tutors (school and private based), in local cafes, and refereeing sport. The timetable is changeable but fairly accommodating for part time work, and if you are worried at all, you can reach out to Cathy or Damien.

## *Lifestyle*

Firstly, there are wineries everywhere. Secondly, Griffith is, somewhat surprisingly, very multicultural, which is manifest in the various cultural festivals throughout the year. Thirdly, there’s plenty of good restaurants around. A local pub also hosts weekly trivia, which is great for a house event. The music scene is also substantial, with open mic nights, battle of the bands, gigs every weekend, an orchestra, and the Muso’s Ball (a highlight of the year!). Whilst there are more than enough social events in Griffith, recognise that you’re going rural - you won’t find the niche events of Sydney.

Also, the town is HUGE on sport. There is both competitive and non-competitive leagues of netball, touch, AFL, WAFL, hockey, swimming, NRL, basketball, cricket, soccer, golf, cycling, running... There is an annual town 10km fun run, and a weekly Saturday running club (same as ParkRuns, if you’re familiar). A huge range of gyms around town will also cater for your iron-pumping needs (don’t forget to ask for the medical student discount!).

# PORT MACQUARIE

First edition authors: Georgina Dixon, Rachel Beattie

Second edition authors: Katie Richards, Jessica Brown



Boasting some of Australia's best and most beautiful beaches, and the first rural school offering a full medical degree (Phase 1 to 3), Port Macquarie is an incredible environment to further your medical education. Despite the beach providing a constant distraction, the amazing teaching, facilities, and RCS staff/doctors/allied health workers guarantee that you will come out with a great tan and excellent experience and knowledge. The coastal beach-holiday feel of the town permeates through to the hospital and everything happens in a relaxed way. There is a healthy balance of work time and play time, with good support and involvement through the different year levels - ranging from peer-tutorials, shared coffee runs, to Friday evening beers at the Surf Club or Moorebeer. The town itself has plenty of cafes, so you won't miss out on your brunch-fix.

# PORT MACQUARIE

Port Medical Society (PMS) organises some incredible events including the annual wine tour, commencement dinner cocktails and of course the annual Port Macquarie Medical Student Ball. In addition to this, the HUBS program, which caters to supporting junior doctors at the hospital, often runs events that include medical students such as women in medicine evenings, specialty pathway planning, and networking evenings.

## Academics

Like other RCS', Port is renowned for its thorough and hands-on teaching. During first semester there are two afternoon/evening tutorials a week which cover Case Protocols and are run by local doctors that specialise in that area. This is in addition to other teaching and tutorials. Semester two involves a continuation of similar tutorials, this time focusing on answering biomedical question. By semester two, most of the group has split into study groups, and the four allocated group study rooms at the RCS cater perfectly to this. There are plenty of anatomical models and other resources available to practice with. A local doctor also runs weekly anatomy tutorials focused on a 'clinically relevant' approach, which is really great Biomed Exam preparation.

Outside of this, students are always welcome at further education sessions run for doctors, as well as Grand Rounds and the Port Mac/John Hunter trauma breakfasts which discuss real cases and their management. Not compulsory, but these provide great learning, and are great for portfolio!

At the hospital, students are encouraged to be involved, such as scrubbing in to assist with surgeries, and participating in ward rounds, clinics, pathology labs, and GP consults. If you're keen to do more, doctors are always available outside of scheduled attachments to take you to additional clinical activities.

Both the RCS and the hospital are new, with modern facilities available for students such as the hospital library, computers with access to NSW Health databases, and printing. The RCS also has a great kitchen and common room area, with tea/coffee, a pool table, and a ping pong table.



# PORT MACQUARIE

## *Accommodation*

The rental market is mildly competitive, but nothing on Sydney - rent is very affordable. Many students tend to live in the Lighthouse Beach area, some live in town (near Flynn's Beach) or near Settlement City, and others live closer to the hospital (Lake Innes area). There are a range of housing options, but definitely check out a few different areas and decide if you want to be nearer to the beach (WOULD recommend!) or to the hospital. It is worthwhile speaking to existing students at the school as you might be able to get a group of people together to take over a sharehouse, or get your hands on some cheap(/free!) furniture.

## *Transport*

A car is pretty necessary, or at the very least, a kind roommate with a car. The RCS is on the hospital campus and so there is no need to travel from school to hospital, and there is free student-designated parking

Geographically, the Port RCS is the closest to Sydney. It takes about 4.5 – 5 hours to drive from Port to Sydney (divided highway all the way). There are flights available, but only operated by Virgin and Qantas, so while comfy, flying is quite pricy.

## *Work opportunities*

Generally there is work available in hospitality and nannying/babysitting (particularly for the doctors/hospital staff) and some tutoring if you can get your name out. Life is generally less expensive than in Sydney, but this is also reflected in pay rates.

## *Lifestyle*

Life in Port Mac is pretty relaxed. Depending on what you enjoy doing, there is plenty of opportunity to be involved in the Port Macquarie community - this is often the best way to make the most of your rural allocation and fully integrate and make friends. The local university has plenty of student-run parties and events that UNSW students are always invited to. Most students also play in sports comps be it rugby (girls and boys), soccer, netball and basketball, as well as the CSU multisport comp. Port Parkrun is a popular Saturday morning activity followed by the local farmers markets and a dip in the sea. There are plenty of nearby hikes and quaint small coastal towns to explore. Students who play a musical instrument can also join the local orchestra.

# WAGGA WAGGA

First edition authors: Lucinda Roper, James Kane

Second edition authors: Alec Hope, Jojo Wigram, Digby Allen, Marty Ryan, Maria Joseph



Located smack bang in the middle of Melbourne and Sydney you'll find Australia's largest inland city, a place so good they named it twice - Wagga Wagga. Boasting an urban population up around 55 000, a brand-spanking new hospital AND a beach\*, Wagga is much more than many might expect. So if you're looking to go rural but are scared of missing out on city life, Wagga may just be for you!

\*definition of beach may be loose

# WAGGA WAGGA

## *Academics*

As of 2016, Wagga officially opened its new hospital. Being the Regional Referral Hospital for the Riverina you'll get to see people from all walks of life with many varied presentations. Everything will also be shiny and new, with the clinical school also having undergone a bit of a reno and now featuring enormous flat-screen TVs for lectures and video conferencing, a comfy student lounge, a library with a range of medical textbooks and of course lovely staff on hand to help.

As we all know, the people involved in your clinical experience can make or break your placement. If past reports are anything to go by, this is an area in which Wagga excels. Students from all years receive the benefits of the established culture of medical teaching amongst senior consultants, manifesting in weekly ECG teaching, spontaneous bedside tutorials, or maybe even being treated to dinner by consultants when the reg in your team is rotating to a different hospital.

This culture of medical teaching also means you'll get plenty of hands on experience. You'll gain a lot of confidence talking to patients as you'll do it so often, whilst third years can become proficient in taking bloods and cannulating. There's opportunities to scrub in and participate, perform PRs and ABGs, or take part in excellent placement programs with GPs or even at the Junee gaol.

Timetables can change relatively frequently, unfortunately sometimes without much notice. Lectures are different from those in Sydney owing to different lecturers, though the slides are the same. Recordings of Sydney lectures are always available online.

## *Accommodation*

Accommodation is also one of Wagga's big draw cards. Many students form sharehouses that are visited on the traditional "around the world" house crawl at the start of the year, with rent generally much cheaper than it's Sydney equivalent. There's also the option to stay at the nurses quarters right next to the hospital, a steal at only \$38 a week, with bathrooms cleaned for you (!) and all utilities except internet included.

One big insider tip is to make sure you have adequate aircon wherever your new abode may be, with Wagga regularly hitting over the 40 degree mark in summer. Similarly, heating may be an idea for the winter months as it can get quite frosty.



# WAGGA WAGGA

## *Transport*

All places have their cons and as great as Wagga is, it's not exempt. The main downside is the commute. As it happens, Melbourne and Sydney are quite far apart, so despite being half way it is still a good 5 hour drive back to Sydney. There's also the option of catching the train, leaving twice daily at 1pm or 12am, costing \$45 and taking 6.5 hours, on which you can spend some time studying, or more likely watching a movie, reading, listening to music, or of course sleeping. While this may not be ideal for those with a significant other back in Sydney, many happy couples have been known to last the long distance.

## *Lifestyle*

Whilst Wagga is technically a city, it's a city of a different kind. While you'll find most of the big chains of Sydney, they are likely to be either on or very close to the extraordinarily long main street, Baylis St, meaning everything is easily on hand in one convenient location! The extra time you'll save normally spent commuting around the city to find what you need means you'll have much more time for the great things Wagga has to offer. Whether this be eating out at any number of good cafes and restaurants, visiting local breweries and/or wineries, or of course a visit to the famous Wagga beach - a lovely sandy spot on the banks of the Murrumbidgee river, which is great for picnics or even a bit of a dip - there's no shortage of fun times to be had. For the more athletic, you can join one or more of the many and varied sporting clubs, including netball, water polo, hockey or any of the footy codes. The proximity of the CSU campus also means there is no short supply of people in our age bracket to meet on the sporting field, or out on the town in Wagga's bustling nightlife.

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# SO YOU THINK YOU WERE SHAFTED?


*Bernard Chan, Wagga Wagga, Year 6 (2019)*

I distinctly remember receiving the email that sent me to Wagga for two years. It immediately prompted me to despairingly attempt to swap out. I was indignant at the idea of having to move out for the first time, away from family and friends, with very little say on the matter. However, while it was initially challenging, my perspectives changed rapidly following my relocation. I found the teaching to be of a considerably higher quality than I had previously encountered – on most days we would have multiple tutorials taught by consultants. There was a clear continuity in teaching as these doctors taught us weekly, so they understood our progress and needs. Also, living so close to hospital and each other meant there were a lot more opportunities to spend time outside of medicine: playing football; cooking; seeing friends. Finally, I am fortunate enough to be part of an incredibly social and supportive cohort, who have all helped to make Wagga a warm and welcoming environment to live and study in. For all these reasons, fifth year was definitely one of the most enjoyable years of my degree thus far.

*Peter Sara, Albury-Wodonga, Year 6 (2019)*

I lived in my family home in Western Sydney my whole life. I remember putting so much effort into my preferences and then submitting them with the confidence I would get Liverpool. When I first received the email saying my base hospital will be in Albury, I was shocked. I'd never lived out of home, let alone in the country. Did I need my own car? (yes) Would they find accommodation for me? (no) I wasn't sure how I'd fare with figuring all that stuff out while also studying med. I initially fought the allocation; I found an international student who wanted Albury and pleaded with MedFac to swap. Alas, their policy doesn't allow for international students to be placed in rural hospitals.

Port Macquarie



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After some time, I actually started to warm up to the idea. Developing my independence from the nest was an attractive concept so I stopped fighting it and started looking for accommodation. I joined a Facebook group for the campus and had meetups in Sydney with some of the crew before we started our next year. The cohort pretty much divided into groups to find houses together. And yes, I mean houses. Accommodation in Albury is so cheap! We were living in a 3-bedroom house with a backyard for just \$320 a week. Furthermore, our house was just a 2-minute drive/15-minute walk from the hospital! Over the next year I began to forget what it meant to experience traffic, or to struggle to find parking. Gone are the days where I had parked a 15-minute walk from Liverpool hospital after my 15-minute drive. All my friends are within a ten-minute drive from one another in Albury, so meeting up is much easier than in Sydney.

*Naomi Sirmay, Coffs Harbour, Year 5 (2019)*

I got shafted. Boy was it interesting to read an email suddenly imagine my life for the coming two years panning out completely differently from how I had expected five minutes prior. I had expected I would be at POW, where I had spent the past 4 years, or perhaps at St George, which many of my best friends had preferenced. But no, Coffs Harbour it was, and seemingly without a good reason. Following a pretty scary conversation with my parents, I began to get my plans in order for the coming year. Organising a place to live (an amazing - if haunted - house overlooking the ocean, with two of my best friends), liaising with a new clinical school (the staff are so so lovely), and stress-buying 17 pairs of socks from H&M (I don't know why. I panicked).

Since moving up, I have really settled and made Coffs home. The hospital is a 15 minute drive away, and in Coffs, a 15 minute drive takes 15 minutes - no traffic, plenty of free parking. The doctors are so lovely and really happy to teach - the hospital is a bit quieter - fewer doctors, and less of the hustle and bustle I experienced in metro hospitals. I've been asked to scrub in on almost every surgery I've attended, and there's plenty of opportunity to practice clinical skills like cannulation and venipuncture. As a bonus, our group of 17 really gets along - we have group dinners and hangs often.



Mostly, I have noticed that it is so easy to be calm. Even with big exams looming, the lifestyle is so relaxed and you have so much time for leisure and study that it's difficult to be stressed, which is saying something for me. What I'm getting at is that this has really been a blessing in disguise. As they say, some are born in Coffs, some choose Coffs, and others have Coffs thrust upon them. Or something. The main difficulties for me have been financial ones. Moving out of home can be pretty expensive, and the cost of travelling back to Sydney can add up. That said, there are loads of opportunities for work, and the relaxed, traffic-free rural lifestyle means that you have loads of time to kill. My main source of distress has been missing concerts by my favourite bands who, for some unknown reason, don't come up and play in Coffs. I have been travelling down to Sydney for some and up to Brisbane for others. There are also some great live music nights at the various Coffs bars. Mostly, I have been trying my best to make sure that I don't miss out on the things that make me happy. Friends, music, and nature. Luckily, these can be found aplenty in Coffs.

*Lucy Yang, Coffs Harbour, Year 6 (2019)*

You're probably not going to believe me when I say everything is going to work out just fine, I know I didn't believe anyone who told me that when I first got my allocation. In a year's time you'll actually look back and feel glad you came to Coffs, I promise. I remember that exact moment of finding out - I was nervous wondering whether I'd get POW or Livo, but rural had not crossed my mind at all. When I saw Coffs Harbour I was in shock, and then went through the five stages of grief the following weeks. I remember the 5th years at that time posted up a pic saying "have Coffs, want less fun" in response to all our swapping posts, and I didn't believe them, or anyone who tried to tell me that going to Coffs was gonna be fine. But it really is lemme break down the fears that I had:

*#1 I'm going to lose all my friends and not have enough time with my family.*

This was my no. 1 fear, that all my friends were going to be hanging out together all the time in Sydney and forget about me in Coffs. Thankfully, this hasn't been the case.

Friendships take maintenance, but with messages and snapchats (and tagging each other in lots of memes) I've been able to keep close with my friends in Sydney. And when I do go back to Sydney it's like no time has passed. Plus you get a bonus of making new friends/getting closer to those in Coffs. Because you're a small cohort that is always stuck together you become close real fast, and I've definitely made some friends I'll keep for life. I've been living at home my whole life so this was a big change, but I honestly think moving out of home has been a good change, and I appreciate my family more when I do spend time with them. Side note for y'all with relationships, this semi-long distance thing is also very doable, me and a few other people all have made it through (at least one year so far)!

### #2 I'm going to miss out on so many things in Sydney Concerts, events, uni life, extracurriculars.

Sydney just seemed like the place I had to be in for these. But there's so much to do in Coffs as well if you're open to trying new things. Plus you save so much time on commute that you'll have the time to do these things and take time for self development. So far I've done multisports, started learning to surf, took up aerials, took some salsa classes, went to the beach a lot more, had a student society role, went to some great events hosted by CHUMS, went to Coffs Cup, hosted and went to multiple dinner parties, got much better at cooking and adulting in general.

### #3 Studying at a small hospital is not going to be as great as studying in a big hospital in Sydney.

This is definitely not true. I can't speak for what it's like in big hospitals, but in Coffs so far the experience has been great. The exposure to cases is more than enough at a medical student level, we only need to know the most common cases, but you see some pretty rare things in Coffs too. The staff are so happy to teach, and you don't have to compete for learning opportunities as much, scrubbing in for surgeries is common, and so is helping to take notes during rounds. Many doctors are also keen to give tutorials, and spend time listening to your presentations. Hope this helps in some way, and if you have other questions feel free to get in touch!

(z5014964@student.unsw.edu.au)



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# RURAL RESEARCH: TIPS & TRICKS

Like the sound of completing your research at a rural campus? Here are some tips to get you started!

*Speak to the rural clinical school about finding a supervisor and project that's right for you.*

It is important to be open and honest about your expectations and what you want to get out of a project. Some people want their ILP year to be flexible to allow for other commitments including increased hours at a part-time job, or trips away some weekends. If you want a publication and to present at a conference, you should also make this clear from the start. Your clinical school will help you find an appropriate supervisor and a project you are interested in.

*Be organised!*

It is easy to forget deadlines, particularly when you're at a rural campus. Fourth year is less formal, with fewer classes and less contact with other student than any of the other years. Relying on classmates for due dates doesn't work as well! You really need to be on top of when things are due and ask for help early. Equally, don't forget about your gen ed - when you're studying online it can be easy to forget you have a quiz or submission due!

*Finding a support network is particularly important in a year that can be isolating.*

ILP at a rural location is a very different experience to Sydney. It can be lonely, so take that into account when choosing, especially if you're likely to end up being the only ILP student at your RCS. Even though there are students in other years, you can feel a bit isolated from them.

*Consider how much of your project you would like to negotiate yourself.*

Many of us think that you have to negotiate a project if you do a rural ILP, and if you do a research project in Sydney you can just slot into an existing project. Whilst this can be the case, you can slot into an existing idea or project. Equally, it is not as daunting to negotiate a project as you might think! "My supervisor mocked up an imaginary one in 7 minutes just to show me how simple it can be. I had thought it would take me months!" (Naomi Clements, ILP in Wagga Wagga)







## RURAL RESEARCH: PERSONAL STORIES

*Laura Bawden, ILP in Griffith, Year 5 (2019)*

I did a fantastic ILP with a paediatrician, looking at allergies in local children. And it was that simple, I kept the study broad and looked retrospectively at data from the local ED. By keeping it simple and broad I was able to find significant results which made the whole year exciting and valuable. Finding the right supervisor is key, so definitely negotiate their exceptions of you before you begin. Try and stay sane, do some clinical time and enjoy a year of being a little less under the pump.

ILP at Griffith is an independent year. There are 3 doctors who have experience in ILP research (paeds, cardio and GP/hospital/obstetrics) and another handful that would love the opportunity to assist with your research. You will have to negotiate the topic and do most of the ethics, however Griffith does guide you along the way. The hospital is very supportive, and any data from their records is easily accessed. You will need to be motivated and be able to do most admin things yourself (organise meetings, submit doco's, hunt down people you need signatures from).

Make sure if you want to do clinical work on the side you have made that clear from the start. If you are in Griffith, you are welcome throughout the entire year, just don't get in the way of the third years! I did many shifts in the ED to keep my practise up!

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*Drishya Krishnan, ILP in Albury-Wodonga, Year 6 (2019)*

I definitely enjoyed my ILP year in Albury - it was the most relaxing and rejuvenating year of med school. However, ILP at a rural campus has the potential to be isolating, so I would definitely recommend roping at least one other person with you to the campus! I lucked out as I had 3 other ILP students with me in Albury, one of whom was also my housemate. Chocolate and wine and murder mystery shows featured prominently that year, as did cuddles with my housemate's puppy - none of which I had any complaints about!

On to the actual ILP side of things, I was pleasantly surprised by the range of projects available for us and it has grown much more in the last 2 years! Many of the local doctors are passionate about research, and there is a considerable range of topics, from ophthalmology to emergency medicine to refugee health (and much more).

However, probably the biggest downside of the year was the ethics approval, which we had to do ourselves. The Albury Wodonga ethics committee meets every 2 months, so in order to have the ILP ready to go by February, I would highly recommend sending in the request by the end of November (for the committee's December meeting).

Throughout the year, we were very well supported, with fortnightly check-in meetings between the ILP students and our campus head to make sure we were keeping on track and to clear any doubts. Although my project was entirely based on clinical records and therefore required no interaction with patients, my supervisor was very happy to have me at her clinic 2-3 days a week (negotiate with your supervisor!), which meant I hadn't completely forgotten how to talk to patients when starting 5th year! I had a few different opportunities to present my project and I was also able to create an educational slideshow video for a training workshop for local registrars.



# INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

It is possible, if difficult, for international students to go rural. For both Phase 2 and 3, international students can only submit preferences for metropolitan clinical schools.

International Students are also ineligible to complete their ILP in Year 4 with the Rural Clinical School, and are exempt from the compulsory minimum 4 week rural placement in Phase 3 that local students must fulfil. This means local students are given priority over international students in completing rural placements. If you do go rural, you also are not able to receive any transport or accommodation subsidie. All of this comes down to the fact that requirements and funding for rural clinical placement come from the government, not the faculty.

There have been international students who've gone rural for Phase 3 or ILP with an application to the Head of the RCS and to Faculty, so it doesn't hurt to try (these placements were in Wagga Wagga and Albury).

If you would like more information on rural placements and how you can get onto one as an international student, have a look at the Clinical Allocation Guidelines (see 'Clinical Allocation Policy' section above) or contact the Kensington RCS office (see 'Contacts' section at the end of this guide.)

Wagga Wagga



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# WELLBEING

The wellbeing of students at each RCS is entrusted to the Head of School at each campus, therefore we encourage students at rural sites to approach their Head of School for confidential advice and counselling, contacts for appropriate GPs and psychologists in the area, and special consideration for assessments. The broad experience of students at rural sites has been that their Head of School and associated campus staff are approachable and all too willing to help their students through any problem they may be having.

## *When the cowpat hits the windmill*

The National Rural Health Student Network (NRHSN) has produced a guide to staying mentally well whilst on rural placements. This is an excellent resource for students experiencing challenges unique to rural placements. To read the guide please click [here](#)

## *Keeping your grass greener*

The Australian Medical Students' Association (AMSA) has produced a guide for all medical students. The guide encourages students to reflect on their own mental health and de-stigmatise the mental health issues that can affect anyone. To read the guide please click [here](#)



# RURAL HEALTH ORGANISATIONS

## *Rural Allied Health and Medical Society (RAHMS)*

UNSW's very own rural health club, comprising of students from all health degrees at UNSW. They are here to advocate for rural and Indigenous health, as well as be a voice for rural students - every rural campus has a representative in RAHMS! The RAHMS representatives organise fun and meaningful events every year, and are always happy to receive feedback about what they can do to help EWE!

FB: <https://www.facebook.com/rahmsunsw/>

W: <https://www.nrhsn.org.au/rahms/home/>

## *National Rural Health Student Network (NRHSN)*

A multidisciplinary student network comprising 28 university health clubs (including RAHMS) from every state. It advocates for improving health outcomes for rural and remote Australians and promotes rural health careers to students. They run some great social, career information and professional development events!

W: <https://www.nrhsn.org.au/home/>

FB: <https://www.facebook.com/nrhsn/>

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### *AMSA Rural Health*

A representative body for rural background students, students on rural placements and all other rural health interests across Australia. They run the annual Rural Health Summit discussing all things rural health!

W: <https://www.amsa.org.au/amsa-rural-health>

FB: <https://www.facebook.com/yourAMSArural/>

### *NSW Rural Doctors Network*

RDN is a not-for-profit, non-government organisation committed to ensuring that the highest possible standard of healthcare is provided to rural and remote communities. They offer a whole bunch of great opportunities and support for rural medical students and doctors!

W: <https://www.nswrdn.com.au/>

FB: <https://www.facebook.com/NSWRuralDoctorsNetwork/>

### *National Rural Health Alliance*

The National Rural Health Alliance represents 37 national organisations working to improve the health and wellbeing of people in rural and remote Australia. Their members include the Country Women's Association of Australia and the Australian Indigenous Doctors Association.

W: <https://www.ruralhealth.org.au/>

FB: <https://www.facebook.com/NRHALliance/>





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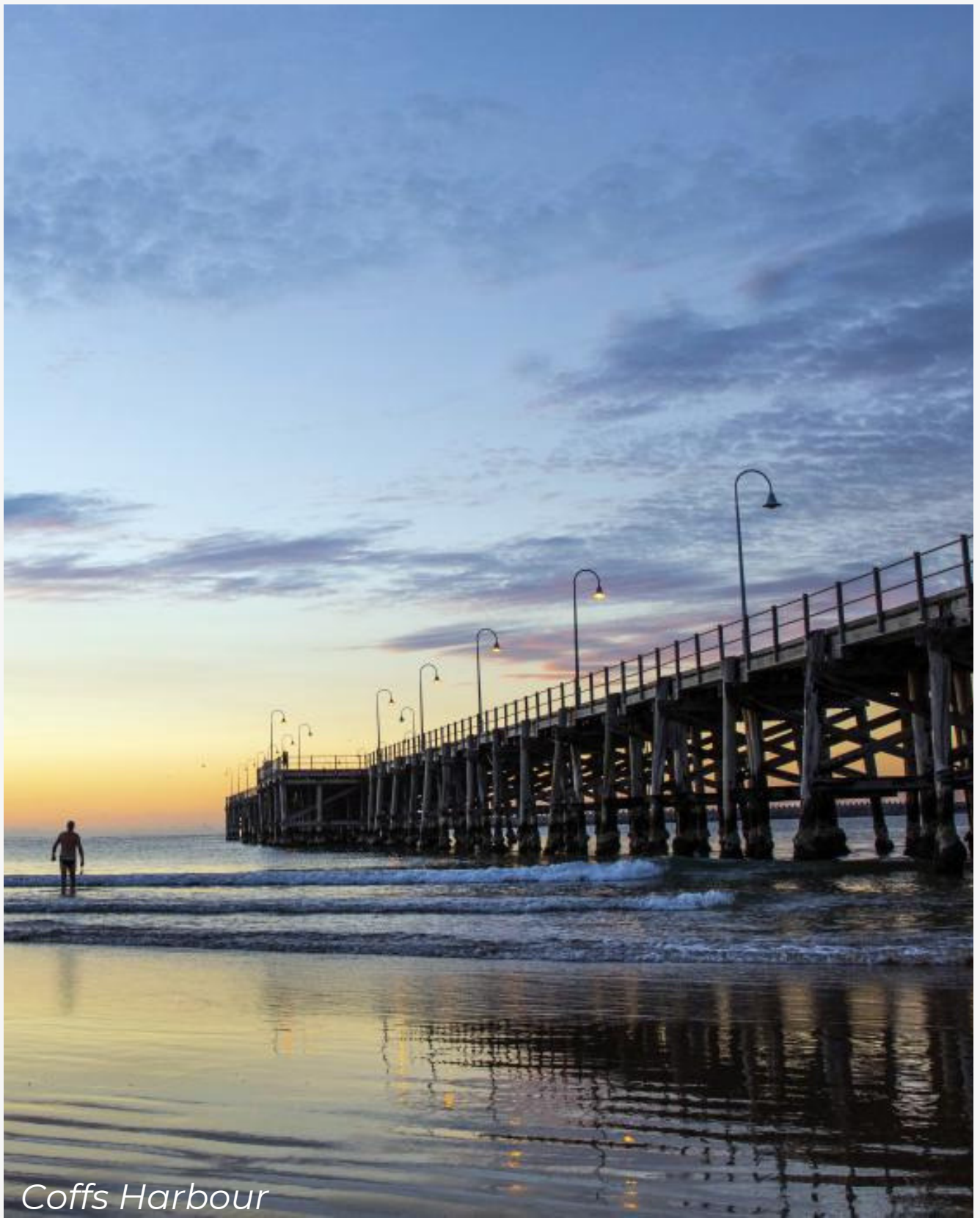
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