



Laura

from

Burlington

to

New Zealand

"Kia Ora"



It's been seven months and two weeks since I left Canada and began my adventure here in New Zealand. It's been an incredible journey so far with many up's and downs. However, by living through these experiences I have grown as an individual in so many ways. It's scary to think that I'm more than half way done my exchange and I don't want it to end but no matter what I want I'm going to make the most of my time left here. These past holidays have been incredibly breathtaking...from my South Island Trip to spending a kiwi Christmas and New Years on the beach not to mention without snow. Not only have I been fortunate enough to explore the landscape and culture that this country has to offer but I have also been able to experience these adventures with one of a kind people...my families, Rotarians, friends and my fellow exchange student friends.

My journey began on November 20 as we headed to the Tirorangi Marae in Central North Island. Once we got there I unloaded my luggage to only find out that my duffle bag with my everyday clothes was nowhere to be found. My stomach dropped and my head was all over the place. I must've been really excited for the trip that I forgot to check everything was on the bus. I was able to contact my host parents and tell them my situation. We were able to sort out a solution and I'd get my bag a week from then which was a stress reliever. Luckily, I had a few extra t-shirts, shorts and shoes in my tramping bag and there was quite a few of my exchange student friends who offered to share their clothes with me which was very sweet. However, other than my early dilemma, I absolutely fell in love with the Marae. Although it's very small community, there is so much history behind its development. Not to mention, its spectacular location. When we got up for sunrise, it was breathtaking to see the sun's reflection on the snow on the tip of the mountains.

Our journey continued as we headed down south to Wellington which is a one of kind city. I fell in love with its mad nightlife and innovative dining. From there we took a three hour ferry to the South Island. I highly suggest everyone to take their motion sickness medication prior to getting on the ferry. I have never witnessed so many people running to a bathroom at once. As we reached the South Island, I was instantly blown away by the incredible scenery...not knowing I would be seeing this type of landscape throughout my whole trip. Once we got to Picton and Marlborough sounds the adventuring began as we kayaked to Mistletoe Bay Eco Village. It was a very challenging three hours however worth it, especially with the great weather. The following day we kayaked back to Picton for another three hours and saw some pretty cool sea species. From there we headed to the Nelson Lakes where we rafted the Buller Gorge. It was such an amazing and trilling ride. Then, the next day we headed for Shantytown which was quite cool and unique. That night we stayed in Fox Glacier which was absolutely spectacular.

The next day we got up bright and early to make our way to Queenstown, that day was the longest day on the bus. Entering Queenstown for me was like entering Disneyland for the first time. You're always told before you go to New Zealand that Queenstown is known internationally for its stunning natural beauty. I honestly couldn't have said it any better. Queenstown will get under your skin, and have you itching for your next visit. Once we unloaded the bus we quickly prepared our tramping bags for the Routeburn track. There was quite a mixture of vibes the next day, some excited and some scared. A 33 kilometre track for the next three days, carrying backpacks and unpredictable weather seemed like quite a different experience. Unfortunately, due to the weather the previous night several trees had fallen. We encountered several road closures and 4 hours of waiting only to find out that the track was closed for safety reasons. I was pretty gutted because I was quite looking forward to saying that I've done one of the Great Walks. Luckily Marie and Paul, coordinators, were able to come up with a 2 day track.

The next day we'd start from the end of the Routeburn and stay overnight at Mackenzie Fall Hut and come back the next day and so we did. The first day consisted of several slips into mud and crappy weather...rain and more rain.



When we got to the hut we met several international trampers which was very cool. The following day made everything worth it. We had spectacular weather and we could finally see the beautiful scenery. Once we finished our track we cruised on the Milford Wanderer. It was such a remarkable experience. Not to mention, we had hot showers, delicious food and comfortable beds. We did some kayaking, swimming in the Tasman's warm 14 degrees temperature, penguin viewing and looking at the stars at

night. The next three days we spent in Queenstown doing outdoor activities, bike riding and cruising around the streets trying different dining hotspots. As much I would have loved to say I've the bungee, I was too scared so instead I ended up jumping off a plane from 12000 feet...weird eh. One of the greatest experiences of my life.

From Queenstown we headed to the Moeraki Boulders which was absolutely fascinating because they were originally formed in ancient sea floor sediments around 60 million years ago. The next day we travelled to Aoraki/ Mount Cook. This was such a beautiful part of the South Island with spectacular coloured lakes. From there, we headed to Christchurch where we went to International Art Centre and walked around Christchurch where we witnessed the devastation of the earthquake. The next day we drove to Hammer Springs where we went to the famous Thermal pools and Spa and that was a nice relaxing day. As our trip was coming to an end the last few nights we cherished every moment together. We returned to Picton where we signed our flags. That night I was able to say a little speech to my brothers and sisters as it would be our last night all together...something I will never forget. The following day we caught the ferry back to Wellington and drove to Taupo and then home. All I can say is that the South Island Trip was an experience of a lifetime. The people I was fortunate to meet and the incredible places I was able to see blow my mind to this day. It's a trip that I will remember and carry with me forever.

Other than my awesome time in the South Island, I spent my first kiwi holidays (Christmas and New Year's) on the beach which was a little bit of a change for my typical holidays but very exciting. My host parents at the time had a big get together at their house in Auckland with the family. We had a barbecue that consisted of a barbecued chicken,

some delicious ham and barbecued pizza. I was initially confused of how a barbecued chicken would work but it ended up turning out to be such a mouth-watering meal. My host parents' grandchildren and I decided to build a gingerbread house which was a complete success. Although it was a long day of baking and decorating, I really valued the time I got to share with these wonderful kids. Furthermore, I got to spend New Years in a small town called Turangi with some of my host families close family friends. I got to drive a boat and I also went swimming, tubing and tramping. Luckily the weather was absolutely great.



After nearly a three month summer break from school, I started again two weeks ago. I never thought I'd say this but I've actually missed it. This year I'm in grade 13 which is really different and exciting. I get to wear mufti (civies) and I'm allowed to go out for lunch. Furthermore, it's been really good to catch up with some of my friends that I haven't seen all summer. This year I'm taking really cool subjects- history, art history, geography, hospitality and outdoor education. These courses have heaps of trips which I'm really looking forward to. In addition to all these upcoming adventures, I'm a Peer Support leader at my school. A peer support leader is someone who helps guide year 9s in their first year of high school and portrays a good role model for them. This role allows me to expose several qualities like leadership, communication, and problem solving and people skills. To top it all off at the end of this month, the Peer Support leaders go on overnight camp with the year 9s.

I'm now on my third host family and they are absolutely great. My host mum's name is Jackie and my host dad's name is Evan. They have two kids, Grace who is 17 and George who is 21. They also have a dog named Louie who is an absolute charming fella. They live near my school and beach which is really convenient. Fortunately, they are Christians so sometimes I go to church with them. Thus, it has really allowed me to stay connected to my faith. Furthermore, I love this family because they enjoy doing lots of outdoorsy activities just like me. Something else I really like is that one day out of every week I am in charge of cooking a meal so I've been trying new recipes and improving my cooking skills.

So long for now!

Cheers,

Laura