



Laura

from

Burlington

to

New Zealand

“Kia Ora”

There are no words to perfectly describe the biggest adventure of my life that started about three months ago. Everything has truly been amazing. I arrived at the Auckland airport on July 29th. Nothing really sunk in until the moment I stepped off the plane and realized how far I was from Canada. There was both tears of sadness and joy...I couldn't believe it was really happening. I felt as if I was in a dream that I haven't woke up from.

My first challenge as an exchange student had suddenly occurred when I stepped out of the gate and looked around for my host families and counsellor. They were nowhere to be found. For a second, I freaked out a little but then I calmed down and looked for a quick solution. I went to customer service and explained to a lady my situation and asked if I could borrow the telephone to contact my counsellor. The first thing she asked me was if I was okay and I assured her I was but just a little confused and worried. She then responded that she would stay with me until someone came and would help me if I needed anything. Fortunately, this brought me a sense of comfort and peace. Initially, when I arrived it was 5am so I didn't



think my counsellor, Graham Rea, would pick up but luckily he did. As soon as I told him what happened, he came to pick me up. While he arrived, I got to know Andrea, the customer service lady and she got to know me. She was so lovely and very friendly. When Graham arrived, I gave her a hug and thanked her for all her help. Then, I showed him my flight details and saw that the time he had was 5pm instead of 5am. What a laugh we had.



Once leaving the airport we had to drive 20 minutes to his house in a suburb called Pakuranga. Although the drive was short, I took the time to appreciate Auckland's incredible landscape. You don't have to go far to see a change in land. I quickly understood that I was going to be living around a beach and a few extinct volcanoes which I thought was pretty cool. Once I got to my counsellors house I met his lovely wife, Sue and their dog, Ruby. They showed me around their beautiful home and took me to my room that I would have for a week before I moved to my first host family. As soon as I saw my king size bed, all I wanted to do was pull the sheets over me and lay my head on the pillow. I think Sue had a feeling that that's exactly what I wanted to do so she told me to sleep as much as I wanted. I reckon that

was one of the greatest things someone has ever told me. A few hours after, I woke up and Graham and Sue took me to see Whangerei which is a beautiful suburb near a beach and then we got lunch.

On my third day in New Zealand I started playing football for a club called Bucklands Beach. The girls were very kind and friendly. From the start, I felt really included and welcomed. Fortunately, there were two girls that went to my school so I got to know them better and they told me a little bit more about Pakuranga College like the teachers, students, classes, etc.



The following Monday I began school. Luckily, that Monday there was an early morning football training for school. Initially, I was so scared because I didn't know what the girls would think of me or if they would be upset that I'm just coming in without really trying out. But those feelings quickly went away. As soon as I walked in the change room I was introduced and several girls were really intrigued by that fact that I was from

Canada. They wanted to know more about me and the city aka Toronto. For that whole week, a couple of them would take me from class to class and I would hang out with them at lunch. They would continuously introduce me to people and before I knew it I was well known around the school that contained over 200 INTERNATIONAL students. People would make nicknames for me like "Maple Syrup" or "Canada". To be honest I didn't mind the center of

attention, it got my name around and I was meeting heaps of people who some I now call my friends.

School is great because it's pretty laid back and the students have a social life. Teachers are really easy going and chill and classes are very relaxed. It's quite different in terms of structure. Here, there are different buildings for different subjects and there isn't a cafeteria that everyone sits at to eat lunch. Furthermore, all grades eat lunch at the same time. My day usually starts off at 8:40am and ends at 3:15pm. Except on Fridays we begin school at 9:40 am so I get to sleep in. Throughout my day I usually have five periods. I have first, second, tutor, morning tea, third, fourth, lunch and fifth period. However, since we have shorter days on Fridays I only have four periods.

It is now my third month in New Zealand, and I'm absolutely in love with this country. My host families have been great and very helpful. I have made several kiwi and international friends and we've done so many cool things together. I'm currently on my summer break for three months and next Friday the 20th of November I'll be heading off on my South Island Trip for 3 weeks which is really exciting. I'm currently with my second host family whom I'll be spending Christmas and New Years with. They live close to school and the beach which is really convenient. My Rotary Club has meetings every Monday and every now and then I get to speak to them about the activities I've been up to. Several Rotarians have kindly taken me to different places and I've got to know a little more about each and every one of them. I haven't really felt homesick but I have cried a bit after talking to my parents and friends back home. However, I can honestly say that going on an exchange was the best decision I've ever made. Already, this opportunity has truly allowed me to find myself and grow as person in so many different ways.

I am having the best time of my life!

Cheers,

Laura

