



# Kirsten

## From Kitchener-Waterloo to New Zealand

*"....got ridiculously sea sick and jumped in the ocean every morning at 6:00am"*

Kia Ora from a hot and sunny New Zealand! It feels so strange to be wearing shorts and a T-shirt at the same time Christmas decorations are being put up. Although the heat is stifling now, the same can not be said for when I arrived in Auckland five months ago...

After being greeted by about 15 Rotarians, and in the blur and jet lag of it all, not remembering any of their names, I was eager to leave the airport and get a first glance at my new home. Unfortunately, it was 5:30 in the morning and pitch black outside. It was also pouring rain. But on the ride home, once I'd gotten over driving on the wrong side of the road, I was able to see the mountainous and oceanic landscapes looked exactly like what I'd Googled.

I'm living just outside of Auckland in a suburb called Pakuranga. People in Pakuranga will tell you they live in Auckland; this is like somebody from Mississauga saying they live in Toronto. Auckland is the skinniest part of the country in the sense that the ocean encroaches on both sides. Because of this, no matter where you look you can always see the ocean. This is one of my favourite things about living here, second only to it being socially acceptable to walk everywhere barefoot!

Despite already speaking English, I'm embarrassed to admit that in the beginning I often struggled to understand the Kiwi accent! School presented an even bigger challenge as New Zealanders are a big fan of slang. I was fortunate that my accent quickly made me friends who were happy to explain the word 'biffing' (throw with force) and that 'sweet as' was not an unfinished simile. Another interesting aspect of school was the uniform. Despite being really unflattering, I loved the time it saved me in the morning. The only major difference between my school here and back home, besides the uniform, is the building itself. Instead of one large building (like back home) there are heaps of different buildings, which all look the same, that make up my school. This made for a very confusing first couple days...

My Host Club, Host Families and friends have been amazing about showing me different things and taking me to try new things. I've been to a Kiwi farm, to every beach in the nearby radius (there are heaps!), walking up mountains that used to be volcanos, out to watch rugby

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and any musical, play or ballet that comes to town. I've also enjoyed sharing some of Canada with the Kiwis; back in October I made a full Thanksgiving dinner for my friends, many of whom who've never eaten turkey! All of these things have been so much fun, but the one that takes the cake is a sailing training voyage I attended back in September called Spirit of New Zealand. 'Spirit' takes place over 10 days on an enormous sailing ship (think Pirates of the Carribean). We climbed the mast, hoisted sails, scrubbed the deck, got ridiculously sea sick and jumped in the ocean every morning at 6:00am!

I can't believe this is only the beginning when so much has happened already! It is truly amazing the opportunities that are presented to you as a Rotary Exchange Student and I can't thank District 7080 and my Host Club of Kitchener enough for making this incredible experience possible!

Kua haere au,

*Kirsten*

**New Zealand**