



Kirsten

From Kitchener-Waterloo to New Zealand

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I can't believe it is Beaver Tale time already. My last 4 months have been jam packed with amazing experiences I would never have imagined when I first found out I was going to New Zealand. Now a new Outbound has just found out she'll be spending her exchange year in NZ and I have to admit, I'm not ready to be replaced!

I wish I didn't have to be repeat the other exchange students and reiterate how fast time flies on exchange, but I do. They say times flies when you're having fun. Well, I never have a dull week and I always have something to look forward to, so you can see why the months have flown by!

Just after my last Beaver Tale I went on an amazing 3 week trip through the South Island of NZ. The tour was organized by Rotary for the exchange students in my district and another nearby. The 17 of us spent 3 weeks in a bus, eating, sleeping and doing everything together. Naturally, we all quickly became really good mates.

We traveled to all the major cities in the South Island, with many pit stops along the way. Some of the cities we visited included: Wellington (technically North Island), Picton, Queenstown, Dunedin, the regions of Otago, the Catlins, the Milford Sound and of course, Christchurch. As you may be aware, Christchurch was just recently hit by a devastating earthquake that destroyed the central area of the city and killed nearly 200 people. All of NZ is devastated and having visited the city myself it's heartbreaking to see the beautiful buildings destroyed and to think of all the wonderful people I met there in such a terrible situation.

Visiting the different cities was good fun, but we were also able to go kayaking, cycling and tramping (hiking) trips. All three trips were so much fun and the scenery

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was beautiful. (They also tired us out, much the pleasure of our chaperones!) In Queenstown, known as 'The Adventure Capital of the World' we were able to choose between the NZ famous bungee jump or skydiving. Being a big baby, I opted for skydiving, as I found jumping out of a plane far less frightening than jumping off a cliff. That being said, I was still terrified before getting in the plane, but once I jumped I had no fear whatsoever. The feeling of a free fall is unlike any other and I would do it again in a heartbeat!

Shortly after the South Island trip, I experienced my first ever summer Christmas. To be honest, it did not feel like Christmas at all! I spent Christmas Eve on the beach eating fish and chips with my host family. Christmas day was spent eating lunch around the pool with my extended host family and then dinner with my counselor's family. Although it was really cool spending a Christmas in shorts, I think I still prefer the white Christmas's back home. New Year's however, is a different story.

Summer New Year's is just heaps of fun. I went to a mate's Bach (holiday house) in Mount Monganui with a group of girls. There were heaps of people there for New Year's and there was such a fun atmosphere. On New Year's Eve there were bands playing on the beach and people everywhere. At the stroke of midnight, we all jumped into the ocean. It was really unreal!

I spent the rest of the summer holidays in the Coromandel, a popular getaway spot for Aucklanders. My host family had rented a Bach and I was able to bring another exchange student along with me. We visited every beach in the surrounding area; it was a great way to relax before school started up again.

I'm in mufti (regular people clothes, as opposed to uniform) this year at school, as I'm in the last year of high school here. Starting school from the beginning of the year is so so much better than starting half way through, as I was able to be so much more involved. I joined the Dragon Boat Racing team and as a Canadian, I was surprised to learn many of the other team members had never held a paddle before! I was also chosen for the Peer Support Program, where Year 13s mentor the incoming Year 9s. Through this program I attended a school camp for my house where I made heaps of new mates and had so much fun running games for the year 9s.

Just recently I went on a weeklong trip to Samoa with my counselor. Samoa was unlike anything I'd ever seen before; the beaches were amazing, the seafood was fresh as, the fruit was fantastic and the people were so friendly. It was a very interesting trip for me, having never visited a country that could really be classified as a third world country. The people there have nothing, especially after being ravaged by a tsunami in 2009 and yet they are so willing to share with you all they can.

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I tried to keep my Beaver Tale short by only talking about the major things that have happened in the last few months, but there are so many more little things that happen all the time that keep life interesting whether it be feeding sheep, firing a gun for the first time (not at the sheep) or catching a stingray. I'm always reminded how charmed and surreal my life is as an exchange student. I can't thank my Host Club of Kitchener or District 7080 enough for making this dream life a reality for me!

Kua haere au,

Kirsten

New Zealand