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Learning New Zealand

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November 28, 2018

Learning New Zealand

I interviewed one of my flatmates, Libby. She grew up in the city of Napier on the coast of the Northern Island. She recalled growing up in the suburbs, with the freedom to roam around, even as a child. She told me a story of one summer when all the children on her street barricaded the road and held races all day. This, from my own observations and from more of her stories, seems a common theme throughout most of New Zealand. I have seen many children riding buses alone, people often walk around the city barefoot, by choice, and people are encouraged to dress however they please. This was a bit of a surprise when I first arrived, as I was always told not to wander around on my own when I was growing up, and shoes were vital when going anywhere. Even the idea of children riding the bus alone surprised me, despite the bus drivers checking in with the child, and ensuring they got off at the right stop.

Other differences seemed to stem from the isolation of New Zealand; as Libby described it, “New Zealand is ten years behind in advances in most things, but we understand relations with other countries and keep up with new technology.” Television shows from overseas don’t arrive here until after they are aired in Australia, and the development of cities, and rural areas takes longer than it would in America. The schooling system is vastly different here than back in the U.S., tracked in years rather than grades, and requiring five years for what I know to be high school, and only three years required at university to graduate with a standard undergraduate degree. Something I admire about the schooling system in New Zealand is that all students are required to learn some Maori, the language of the native peoples of New Zealand. While in

elementary school I had to take a few years of Spanish, but I know many people who did not have that same requirement. As a nation New Zealand is much more connected to the history of their country, the people who lived here before it became New Zealand, and keeping their history and culture alive than we are in the U.S.

On a whole New Zealand seems to be much more laid back than other countries I have visited. Students show up to class in similar dress to what you might find in any university in the U.S., but often speak up in class without waiting for the professor to ask for questions. The students are encouraged to do so, and it is unusual for students to raise a hand before speaking. Another thing I noticed in the classrooms was that students and professors alike arrive right on time for the class to start; it is common for one or two students to be in the room alone until one minute before the scheduled start time, yet every class I attended started on time. This laid back attitude seems to permeate every other aspect of Kiwi culture, from bus times to meeting up with friends. One main difference in New Zealand from the U.S. is found in a more widespread sense of togetherness, the national camaraderie shared by most New Zealanders. My interviewee noted this in the pride felt to be from New Zealand, and in the strong dislike of being mistaken for an Australian when she had been abroad. Most New Zealanders seem to feel the same, as this motif can be seen in many commercials and comes up in conversation often. Being known by New Zealand identity is highly important. This is similar in some ways to the pride Americans have for their country, although we do not get mistaken for a different nationality when abroad.