

The Educational and Personal Impact of a Study Abroad Course

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## ***Dedication***

*This thesis is dedicated to Aidan, Ariel, Chloe, Jenene, Jorge, Josiah, Keena, Kimmie, Kyleigh, Sav, Spencer, and Yaseen without all of whom this trip would have resulted in a very different experience. Thank you for the friendships and adventures and most of all thank you for the memories.*

*Thank you to Ray whose passion and love for the amazing country of New Zealand inspired me to take the leap and fly halfway around the world.*

*Finally, thank you to Wayne our New Zealand “dad”. Without your guidance we would have been lost.*

## *Abstract*

The topic of this thesis is not a new discussion point. Study abroad benefits have been investigated by many universities and programs. However, within this thesis, I aim to incorporate not only statistical proof of personal development but also my own experiences as a study abroad student in New Zealand. As a result of my trip, I strongly believe that study abroad is a phenomenal way for students to learn about other cultures, cultivate personal growth, and expand their knowledge of the world. The purpose of this thesis is to share the profound impact I experienced as a study abroad student and to explore if this experience is common across students who engage in study abroad courses. I will also seek to debunk the common misconception that all study abroad is expensive. Study abroad is financially available to anyone who is willing to work hard. I believe that this trip changed me as a person and that all students should make an effort to participate in a study abroad trip during their academic careers.

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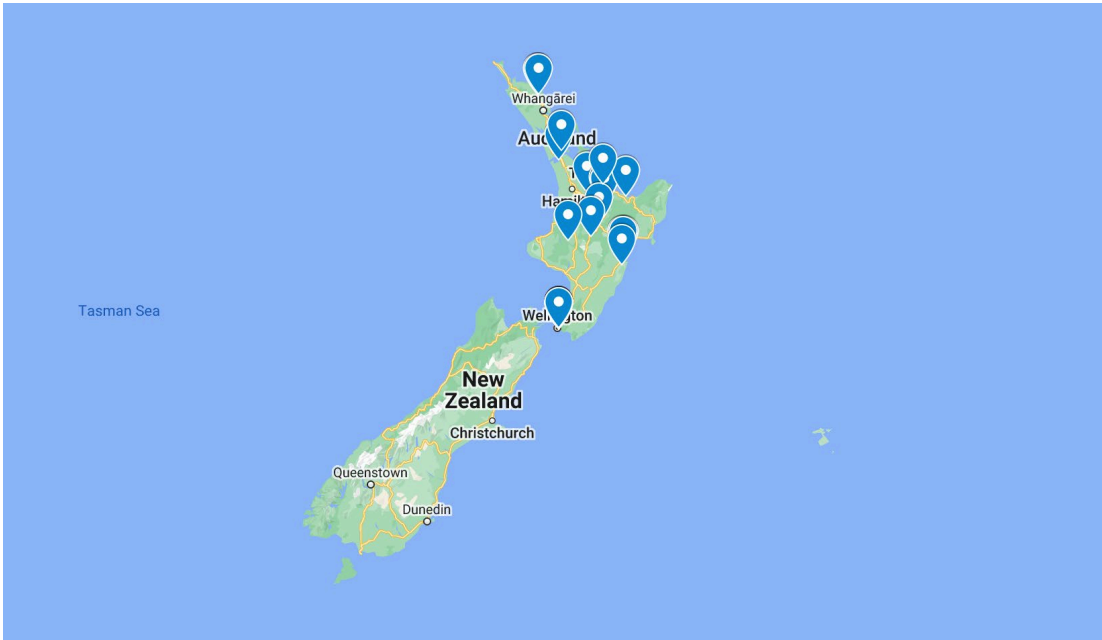
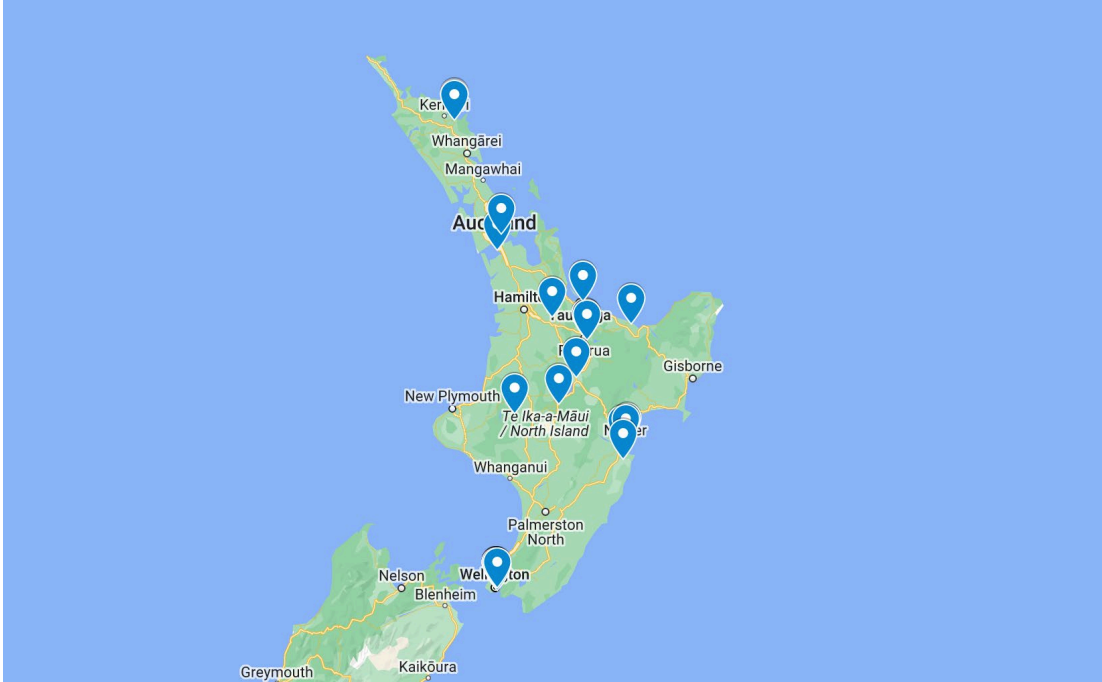
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## *Body of Thesis*

### *PART 1: THE POSITIVE IMPACT OF STUDY ABROAD TRIPS*

Mark Twain said, “Travel is fatal to prejudice, bigotry, and narrow-mindedness.” (NCTE). Study abroad is a phenomenal way for students to learn about other cultures, cultivate personal growth, and expand their knowledge of the world. Without these skills and experiences, students forfeit the opportunity to become more open-minded and caring individuals who understand so much more of the world than if they never left their own country.

“International educational experience develops several important versatile life skills. It expands cognitive skills like flexibility, creativity, and complex problem solving, and it also has a positive effect on social skills like empathy and tolerance.” (NCTE). There are few experiences that can create profound growth in such a relatively short amount of time. Traveling to another country and experiencing their culture is an irreproducible opportunity to expand understanding of the world. Many studies have been conducted and have found that students who study abroad experience greater academic development.

An IES Abroad Graduate Survey highlighted some impressive statistics regarding the benefits of participating in a study abroad program.

The study found the following:

- 84% of alumni claimed that study abroad helped them build job skills

- 65% of alumni found a career-related position within a reasonable amount of time or more quickly than expected
- 90% of alumni got into their first or second choice graduate/professional school
- 79% of alumni found study abroad effective for developing job-related skills. (McMillan)

These statistics are impressive when compared to statistics of students who have not studied abroad. Academia Insider states in an article that, “Grad schools typically have an acceptance rate of around 15%, so there is a chance that even with impressive qualifications, an applicant will still get rejected.” This is a massive difference from the 90% of study abroad students who get in to their first choice. If study abroad is truly so beneficial the question should be raised why do more students not participate? This quote lends some insight. "The conventional wisdom is that students who are at risk should be discouraged from studying abroad altogether," Rubin said. "But this suggests that study abroad can actually be an intervention to enhance the success for college students who are at-risk. Rather than derailing them, rather than diverting them, it actually focuses them." Study abroad should be encouraged and supported. Its benefits are profound.

Study abroad also better prepares students to enter the workforce and be more effective managers and leaders. The study Study Abroad Programs and American Student Worldmindedness states “Not only must managers be prepared for the diversification of the workforce created by increasing numbers of women and minorities, but also foreign workers and global operations.” (Douglas). Another study found that study abroad experience directly correlates with post graduate employability. “The findings of this

research suggest that from a stakeholder perspective there are clear associations made between perceived outcomes of international experience and graduate employability.” (Crossman). Diversity is a growing issue in the US, and study abroad better prepares students to integrate into a diverse workforce.

## *PART 2: AN OVERVIEW OF MY TIME IN NEW ZEALAND*

In the early summer of 2023, I went on a study-abroad trip to New Zealand. While I was there, I learned about their indigenous people called the Māori. This trip was my first direct encounter with a culture that is different than the United States. This experience sparked a passion within me to pursue an understanding of all cultures, not just New Zealand's culture. It taught me that cultural foundations impact so much of our world today, and it opened my eyes to the beauty of differing beliefs. I believe that this trip changed me as a person and that all students should go on a study abroad trip during their academic careers. The personal development I experienced was unparalleled by anything I have experienced in the United States.

As an entrepreneur, understanding and connecting to people is vital to success. This study abroad trip enabled me to experience a new culture and helped me learn to build important relationships. Put simply, I learned to care about people that differ from myself. Study abroad trips are unique ways to engage with new people and grow an understanding of new cultures. While everyone is vastly different, we all care about the same things, such as family, home, culture, and beliefs. It also helped me see the beauty of differing opinions and lifestyles.

Learning about other places and cultures is starkly different from witnessing them in person. For example... before we left, my professor provided articles and reading assignments for us to study New Zealand's culture. The articles discussed the cultural rituals and songs the people of New Zealand still perform today. I read about them and took some notes, but I was far more interested in the articles discussing conservation and the environment. However, after experiencing the cultural reenactments, they are my

most distinguished memories. Yes, the island was beautiful, but seeing and understanding the love these people have for their land was so amazing. Had I simply read about their culture, I would not even begin to have an understanding. I still, of course, have a very minimal understanding of their culture as my time there was so short, but meeting them and hearing their story brought all the facts I had learned to life in a way no article could. The experiences travelers have are irreplaceable and have a lasting impact on them as individuals.

I believe that the trip also improved my interpersonal skills, which are vital to relationship building. Looking beyond my interactions with the New Zealand people, the impact of the other students on my trip becomes apparent. The friendships I built in those short two weeks are far more intimate and meaningful than any other friendships I have found at MTSU. The diversity of backgrounds within our group forced me to see the world differently just as much as the new country. We had a wide range of majors including chemistry, political science, business, photography, horse science, music, agriculture and more. During long bus rides and late nights, we shared about our passions and career goals. It gave me such a profound appreciation for the uniqueness of all human beings. We are all so different with different loves and passions, and no matter how different we are, we all love and appreciate people different than ourselves.

The time spent with my classmates also reminded me that we all have something small in common no matter how obscure. Aiden and I bonded over riding horses and our love for witty comebacks. Ariel and I connected over her genuineness. Chloe and I found commonality regarding adventure specifically in the outdoors; hiking is one of our favorite pastimes. Jenene and I enjoyed discussing political differences. Jorge and I

enjoyed telling jokes. Josiah and I were both business majors and enjoyed helping Wayne prepare our dinners. Keena and I were always a couple of the first people asleep whenever the opportunity arose. It became a bit of a running joke within the group. Kimmie and I shared a passion for photography and were constantly bouncing ideas off each other. Kyleigh and I both thrived when there was structure and a schedule, so basically we bonded over how stressed we were when structure did not exist; even though when we signed up we both understood that was how the trip would be. Sav is honestly one of the most endearing human beings who is an absolute light and inspires everyone she meets; I hope she enjoyed my presence as much as I enjoyed hers. Spencer and I were friends prior to going on the trip, but we definitely grew closer through the memories we made. Yaseen was one of my favorite people on the trip to simply pass time with; we would talk about anything and everything and he is one of the best listeners I have ever met. The beauty and uniqueness of every person was made obvious on this trip in so many ways but primarily in my group. I was blessed by an absolutely wonderful New Zealand family.

*PART 4: HOW IS STUDY ABROAD A FINANCIALLY SMART DECISION?*

The initial price tag shock of a study abroad trip often catches students off guard, but most are unaware of the ample scholarship opportunities available. These scholarships make it possible to get the majority of the trip covered. The pricing varies broadly due to the varying length of trips. Some only last two weeks while others are entire semesters. However, even the semester long trips are comparable to most US college tuition costs.

To help show the affordability, I have included my personal trip expenses. My trip to New Zealand was a \$4,500 trip, but I only paid \$725.00 plus domestic airfare and extras I chose to spend on during the trip.

Scholarships I received:

- Jones College of Business Study Abroad Scholarship: \$1,000.00
- Office of Education Abroad Scholarship: \$1,600.00
- Referring a Friend to the Trip: \$100.00
- Commitment Scholarship: \$500.00

**Total: \$3,200.00**

I also received a refund after the trip due to a couple of canceled excursions and the addition of another student to the trip last minute. The refund was \$575.00

Total Trip Cost: \$4,500 – Scholarships: \$3,200.00 – Refund: \$575.00 = Total Trip cost of: \$725.00

Adding back in my domestic airfare (\$410.00) and adding my estimation of personal spending (\$200) comes out to only **\$1,335**. Taking a 16-day trip to another country that is full of experiences, completely planned, and conveniently affordable is amazing.

**Day 1- May 13<sup>th</sup>: The Flight**

The flight was not as bad as I expected it to be. We got to the airport around 4:30 pm and checked our bags. We then proceeded to our gate. On the way we got to use the fun speed walk conveyor belts. Josiah proceeded to race me and won. After we dropped our stuff at the gate, we went on a search for dinner. Along the way, Spencer wanted to go in the Gucci store in the airport. The guy working the cash register was super nice and proceeded to give us all the ins and outs of LA. I wish we would have met him about twelve hours earlier. :) After that, we found a little kiosk with some sandwiched. I ordered a chicken BLT, and it was AMAZING. I wasn't expecting much but it was so good. Then we all sat in a circle and talked until boarding.

Boarding started at 9:15 pm and was really fast for such a large flight. The plane had seats that (very) slightly reclined and little TVs in each one. Of course, the very first thing I did was go to the kid's category and look at the games. They had ANGRY BIRDS!!!! Saying I was excited would be a massive understatement. After I beat almost every level, I went to sleep for a bit. I woke to the dinner announcement. I was not bowled over by the dinner served, but I think I may have just been so tired that it wasn't very appetizing. After the food, I was pretty alert, so I started watching the Intern with Anne Hathaway. It was fantastic and I made it about twenty minutes before I was too tired to stay awake.

I then slept until about seven hours into the flight. I woke to some major turbulence and got up and walked around a bit. Then, I finished the Intern. I slept for the rest of the flight until about two hours before we landed. They served breakfast, and I finished the

flight with Jumanji. Customs was super straight forward and WAY less scary than regular BNA security. I declared my snacks and hiking boots and they said "Have a nice day!".

Basically, I stressed myself out for nothing.



Auckland

Then we met Wayne! Wayne is our in-country tour guide/bus driver/cook/and... (I don't even know what else he does yet!). We started out by visiting Mount Eden. It was an awesome place to view Auckland. It was a super short hike then off to breakfast at the beach! We stopped at a cute cafe called The Coffee Club, and I ordered a chai latte and

some avocado toast. It was all amazing. We then walked to the beach that was right across the street and took some pictures, pet lots of dogs (one was named Joe) and admired the beautiful fountain that featured four massive seahorses.



Then, we went to the hostel<sup>1</sup> we are staying at and dropped our luggage so we could walk to the Sky Tower. The sky tower was so much fun and the view of Auckland was amazing! We could see it all. We accidentally left Chloe on the lower floor when we all went up to the top, so now we are buddies lol. Next, we stopped at a market to pick up

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<sup>1</sup> Hostel - an establishment which provides inexpensive food and lodging for a specific group of people, such as students, workers, or travelers.

some snacks and more importantly water. While inside the market, I saw some solo cups... except they weren't called solo cups. They were and I quote "American Party Cups". The hike back to the hostel with two massive bottles of water in my backpack almost ended me, but I survived.

On the walk back there was a bit of a misunderstanding. Ray mentioned that we shouldn't walk past the white house near our hostel, and I was like "um... ok?". Well, he said it again later and this time I asked why not? I was thinking maybe it was dangerous or something. Turns out he meant it as a landmark. If you passed the white house, you had gone too far and missed the turn for the hostel. For a second, though, I was a bit concerned :)

After dinner at the hostel, I worked on my blog with Kimmie, Kyleigh, and Ariel. I sent a lot of time working on pictures, and we ended the night with sevens. Kyleigh and Yaseen had never played, so I was able to teach them.

## **Day 2 – May 14<sup>th</sup>: Rangitoto Island**

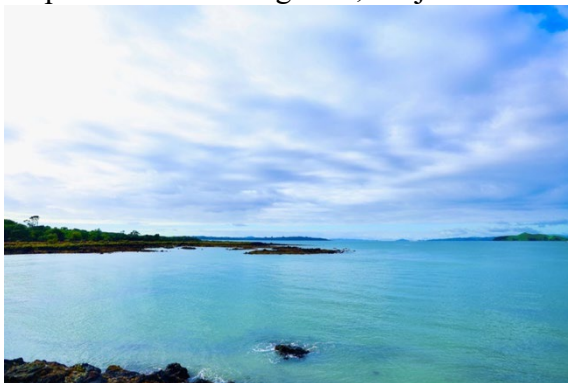
We woke up and had breakfast at 7:00 am. The jet lag has not been bad at all. I went to bed at 7:00 pm last night and felt great this morning. Watching the sunrise helped a lot, but it is still a little challenging because it was almost winter there. The sun was not high until almost 8:00 am and sets at 5:00 pm.

Wayne made breakfast, and I began the day with fresh kiwi and toast with every spread option you can imagine. He gave us two Māori words of the day: “whare (far-ee) kai” which means house of food or dining room and “whare paku” which means house of bath or bathroom.



At 8, we left the hostel and walked to the ferry for Rangitoto Island, which used to be an active volcano. We were required to clean all our shoes so as not to track in any seeds or dirt from anywhere else. They are extremely diligent regarding preserving the the island. We boarded the ferry at 9:15 am and landed on the island around 10. Rangitoto is the youngest volcano in New Zealand. The hike up the volcano was 1.8 miles each way with some detours. One detour was through a small cave tunnel that had formed from lava. At the summit, we ate lunch and took a LOT of pictures.

My buddy Chloe and I bonded over our love for taking pictures, and we stopped a lot. The purpose of the buddy system is to help keep everyone together... It turns out when you put Chloe and I together, we just have twice the amount of photo ideas. Needless to



say we spent a lot of time speed-hiking to catch up with everyone. We finished the hike about an hour before the ferry returned, so we sat in the sunshine and enjoyed the view. The ferry arrived at

2:20 pm and we boarded to return to Auckland.

For dinner, we tried a New Zealand staple: BurgerFuel. I ordered a barbecue bacon burger and fries. It was pretty good for a fast food place. After, we walked around for a bit and picked up some things at the convenience store and stopped for some desert. Now after a lot of walking (approximately 21,085 steps and 95 flights of stairs), we are back at the hostel and about to go to bed.

### **Day 3 – May 15<sup>th</sup>: Waitangi Treaty Grounds**

I began my morning bright and early. I actually woke up before my alarm at 5:30 am and spent some time messaging everyone back home as it was already 12:30 pm there. It was a nice way to begin the morning slowly. Around 6:00 am, I finished up and snuck out of the room to go to the bathroom to get ready because Sav and Aiden weren't awake yet. When I got back, they were both up, and we all packed up and headed down to breakfast at 7:00 am. I made some toast with peanut butter and whipped honey again, ate an apple, and drank some green tea.

At 7:45 am, we loaded everything onto the bus and headed out of Auckland. It was cloudy and a bit rainy, but I thought it was so pretty. We drove primarily on backroads, and it reminded me of driving through North Carolina. The land was constantly rolling, and everything was lush and green. We passed tons of cattle and sheep farms, and everything was very spread out. About halfway to our destination, we noticed a HUGE rainbow! It was the most vibrant rainbow I have ever seen.

Soon after we saw the rainbow around 11:30 am, we stopped for lunch, and I found the COOLEST sushi place!!! It was similar to a frozen yogurt place where you start with your container, add what you want, and pay for what you picked up. It was so delicious

and fresh, and I REALLY wish we had something like it in Murfreesboro. Then, we were back on the road and this time I took a nap. We finally arrived at the Watangi Treaty Grounds at approximately 1:00.

The tour and museum were so educational, and our guide was so kind. During the cultural demonstration, they asked for a volunteer to be the "chief." Spencer stepped right up and became a part of the show. His official name now is Chief.

We left for our next hostel, Centabay Lodge, in Paihia around 4:30. Once we all moved in and rested for about 30 minutes, we all walked to dinner. After wandering around for a bit, we all settled on CBK Craft Bar Kitchen. It was right on the water and had a beautiful view of the sunset.

Then, we went back to the hostel and took turns showering and talked about our day and how excited we were for Hobbiton the next day. My roomies that night were Aiden, Chloe, and Keena.

#### **Day 4 - May 16<sup>th</sup>: Hobbiton**

We woke bright and early at 5:30, packed up to leave Centabay, ate a quick breakfast of toast and crumpets, and left at 6:45. We stopped for snacks at the Local Fresh Grocer before driving the rest of the way to

Hobbiton. Along the way, Wayne gave us our

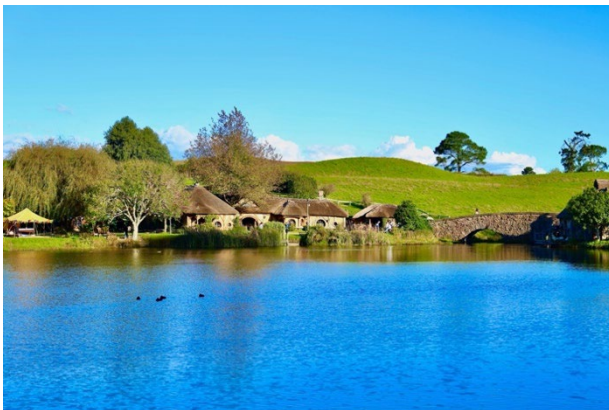


Māori words of the day: “tane” meaning man, “wahine” meaning woman, and “tama”

meaning boy. We finally arrived at 12:30 pm and ate lunch at the Shire Café; It was ok. I suppose they don't have to try very hard as most people only visit once.

After lunch, we began our tour at around 2:15 pm. We hopped on a bus and took a short drive over to where the tour began, and we met our tour guide. The scenery was so beautiful! The Hobbit movies did not even come close to what it looks like in real life. I took SO many photos. I lagged behind a bit, but thankfully, Spencer was my photo buddy, so it wasn't a big deal. At the end of the tour, we got to drink ginger beer just like a Hobbit.

After Hobbiton, we drove another hour or so to our accommodations for the night. That night, we stayed at a cute little campground named Kiwi Holiday Parks in Rotorua. My only two roommates that night were Kimmie and Chloe, and we stayed in a tiny little cabin. After we dropped our things and settled for about half an hour, we left for dinner and the Polynesian spa! For dinner, everyone went to get Italian, but Chloe and I got Thai. It was super good! Afterward, we went to the spa where there were multiple outdoor pools to sit in that slowly advanced in warmth. They eased our sore muscles and offered much-needed rest.



While I was there, I wanted to interview at least one person for our assignment. I found a gentleman named Steve and asked if he minded chatting for a bit. He told me about his career, travels, and family. I am a bit disappointed because I don't think I will be able to use him

for the assignment because about half way through our interview, another student came over to the pool and began questioning him; I wasn't able to finish our conversation.

### **Day 5 – May 17<sup>th</sup>: Rotorua**

The next morning, we (Chloe, Kimmie, and I) woke up a bit later at 7:30 am, and were able to roll out of bed and head to breakfast because we are staying in the same place. Due to the later start, Ray made us a hot breakfast of bacon and eggs. I toasted a bagel and added bacon, eggs, and a bit of cheese and, of course, rounded it out with a kiwi. It was delicious! We left the campground at 9:30 and headed for the Te Puia Geothermal Park home of the Pohutu Geyser.

Our guide was a Māori man named Paul. It was very cold last night, so Te Puia was very steamy today. The cold night air was causing the hot springs and geysers to steam creating a cloud like atmosphere in the park. Paul explained the history of his people and how, about 400 years ago, they inhabited the area that is now the park. They chose this area for a few different reasons including access to both hot and cold water and fertile ground. They would utilize the hot water and mud to defend themselves against enemies trying to invade by luring them into "hot pockets." This was very effective as only the tribe that inhabited that area knew where all the springs were.

We were able to see the geysers spew, warm up on some geothermal rocks, and see boiling mud. We did not have to wait long at all to see the geysers explode because they did so about every twenty minutes. Then, about halfway through our tour we were given the opportunity to warm up on some geothermal rocks, which was much appreciated because it was very chilly out. I expected them to be hot, but they did not feel much different from a rock that sits out in the sun on a warm summer day. After we warmed up for a bit, we took a small trolley through the park to a Kiwi bird sanctuary. They currently have three Kiwis - two males and one female. They are currently trying to get two to mate. Kiwi birds mate for life, so if the female rejects the male, they will have to try another male. For this reason, the introduction process is very slow.

We left around 12:00 pm to go get lunch before mountain biking through the redwood forest. We stopped at a small food mall, and I got sushi... again. It is so fresh here, and I could eat it every day! We arrived at Planet bike and were given some quick instructions about how to work the bikes, and we were given helmets. Then, we were off! The guides split us into two groups after watching us ride for a bit. The less-experienced bikers went one way and those of us who were more comfortable went another. I have biked the Appalachian trail before, but it was nothing like what we did today. Most of the ride was uphill, and it was pretty steep. I think it might be the most physically challenging thing I have ever done.



Needless to say, I was both mentally and physically unprepared for the ride, but we all

made it through (somehow) and it was an amazing experience. Next time, I will rent an electric bike because we were getting passed by those things the whole ride. While on the ride, I was able to talk to one of the guides, Tom. He was super nice and competes in bike races.

After biking, we returned to the cabins and got back around 4:00 pm. I didn't even shower but climbed in bed and took a twenty-minute nap. Once I woke up, I took a quick shower and got ready to go. We were headed to a hangi feast, which is a traditional Māori meal. The feast included a live performance and storytelling by Māori descendants. They told of their war songs, love stories, tattoos, and instruments. It was an absolutely amazing experience that greatly helped me to understand their culture. Then, we went back to the cabins, and it was almost 11:00 pm, so I went to sleep.

### **Day 6 - May 18<sup>th</sup> : Tongariro River**

We woke bright and early at 6:00 am and packed up before we headed to breakfast at 7:00 am. The campground had a public use kitchen that was so cool! However, it was not heated, so breakfast was a little chilly. After breakfast, I helped Wayne clean up and pack everything for our next destination. I really liked cleaning and working in the kitchen with him because he is so quiet. It gives me time to mentally check-out and work with my hands. We loaded all our luggage onto the bus and headed out at 7:45 am.

For some reason, I was really tired that morning and dozed off and on during the drive. (By dozed I mean I crashed so hard I woke up drooling, but for only about 10 minutes at a time.) We made a few stops along the way, including Huku Falls, the

opening of Aratiatia Dam, and a hot mud pool. I was so tired I did not take photos, so you will all have to use your imagination. Our final stop was lunch in Taupo at 11:30 am.

After lunch, we headed to Tongariro river rafting! I was super worried about freezing, but we were given wetsuits, and I stayed comfortable the whole time. I also didn't fall out, so that helped. My raft included Yaseen, Chloe, Ariel, and Ray. Our guide was Garth Oakden, and he owned the rafting business. He shared that he started leading rafting trips when he was seventeen years old and started the rafting business at twenty-two. He also told us about how he spent some time in the states traveling around and installing bungee jumps. He is definitely an adventurer and cares a lot for the environment. He and his staff actively eradicate mammals that threaten the blue ducks as there are less than 50 blue ducks left. He believes in leaving the world a better place than he found it and has committed his life to exploring the beauty of the earth.



We got back to the raft shop at 4:30, changed into warm clothes, and loaded onto the bus again. We drove to our new accommodation - National Backpackers a YHA hostel. We dropped our stuff, and I headed downstairs to help Wayne

with dinner. We made nachos with chili, and I was responsible for dicing veggies and helping Josiah make salsa. It was super good if I do say so myself.

### **Day 7 – May 19<sup>th</sup> : Blue Duck Station**

Breakfast was at 8:00 am in the hostel kitchen/dining area. Wayne made poached eggs and let me fry my own! We all ate together then packed our things up to leave. We were originally scheduled to go on a hike, but due to pouring rain and strong winds, we decided to spend the morning at the hostel then leave for Blue Duck Station around 10:00 am. Wayne gave us four Maori words of the day to figure out. They were “kaumatua” which is an elder of the Māori tribe, “awa” which means river, “ika” which means fish, and “kai moana” which means food of the sea or seafood. We stopped on the way at Whakapapa Mountain for some quick pics and to see some snow.

We arrived at Blue Duck Station after a few hours of driving and gravel road mudding in the bus. The last 25 minutes of the drive consisted of a graveled curving road (if you could even call it a road). Wayne was fantastic and handled it like an expert. The only issue was that we rode for approximately three hours and Aiden, and I had been hydrating diligently all morning. Needless to say, when we finally got to the lodge, we sprinted to the bathrooms. Next, we unloaded our things and grabbed the lunches we had packed earlier in the morning before we left the hostel. We all walked up to the lodge from our cabins and ate there.

The lodge ,where meals were served, was the meeting place for all tours and was also open for anyone to sit in during their stay. It was a simple, one room building with a few tables, an open kitchen, and a small sitting area with a couch. They lead hunting trips on the station, so the lodge resembled a hunting lodge – old, rustic, and mounted animals everywhere. The station has a few different tourist services, including guided goat and deer hunting, cabin rental, safaris through the station's rainforest, and a new restaurant.

After lunch, the fun began! We split into three groups and all rode "bikes" as they called them (they were side-by-sides). We stopped along the way so they could explain a bit about the station, and our first main stop was a short hike to a waterfall. Half of us went down to the falls and the other half went up "to the top of the world." I was in the group that went to the waterfall first. We were given kayaks and paddled around in front of the falls and downstream a bit. The river flowed between a massive rock formation that narrowed as it rose. Kayaking through it was so beautiful. I was so disappointed that I couldn't take my camera.

Next, we switched groups and I got to go mudding on the bikes to the highest point on the station, which is saying a lot because the station is 7,000 acres. They recently installed a restaurant that is only open four days per week, has a private chef, is only accessible by bike or helicopter, and only seats 10 guests. There are also three cabins there for people who want to spend the night after their meal. The experience was utterly amazing, and I really wanted to live there.

After the safari, we cleaned up and went to dinner at the lodge. It was very cozy, had great food, and there were only about 30 people there. The owner made a point to come talk to everyone and was a nice, down to earth guy. After dinner, we went back to our cabins, showered, and went to bed. The beds were comfortable, but for some reason, it was the worst I slept the entire trip.



## **Day 8 – May 20<sup>th</sup> : Wellington**

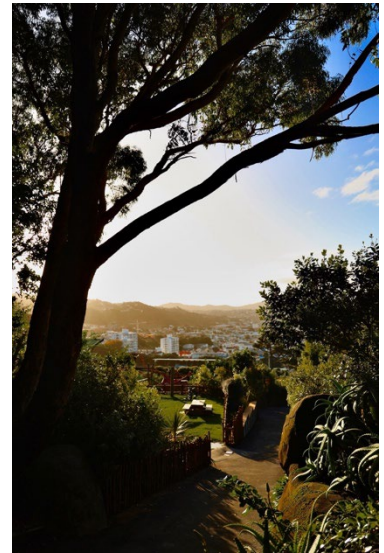
We woke up at the farm bright and early, at 6:30 am, so we could all pack up and load before breakfast. Breakfast at Blue Duck was fantastic! Scrambled eggs, bacon, toast, and fresh feijoa fruit. After breakfast, we went out into the rain to help check traps. We checked fifteen traps total over a distance of about two miles; almost all of them had either a stoat or rat in them. After our trap check, we hiked back and changed into dry clothes for the bus ride to Wellington.

We left around 11:00 am, and the bus ride was uneventful. I was next to Aidan the whole time. We pretty much always sat next together because we had a napping plan, earbud understanding, and snack sharing routine. It worked great. We stopped somewhere for lunch; I don't remember where. Finally, we arrived in Wellington at 6:00 pm. After checking in to the Willis Hotel, we hastily dropped our things to go get dinner. We split into a few different groups because we wanted different things.

My dinner group included Kyleigh, Keena, Jorge, and Jenene. Our original plan to get Mexican was destroyed when we walked in and they asked what our reservation was. Apparently, this area is ridiculously busy on Saturday nights (not that that information would have helped as none of us actually knew what day it was). Long story short, we ended up at a Pierre's Sushi.

After dinner, we found an adorable ice cream shop called Duck Island with tons of vegan ice cream flavors (yay!). I got the coconut passionfruit, and it was the best vegan ice cream I have ever had! The pricing was strange because two scoops cost \$7.00 but a whole pint was only \$12.00. So obviously, I bought the whole pint.

Back at the hotel, I had to do laundry. Unfortunately, so did a few other people. We all went together, so it was ok. It started out as Spencer and I and soon Josiah and Sav joined us and eventually, Yaseen. It was a whole party. We had a bluetooth speaker, chips, and the rest of my ice cream. It was great. The only downside is that we didn't finish up until like 11:00 pm. After that, it was off to bed.



### **Day 9 – May 21<sup>st</sup> : Church and Wellington Zoo**

We got up early at 6:30 am and got ready for church. Breakfast was at 7:30 am, but we didn't have to leave for church until 9:45 am so I went back to my room and worked on my blog for a bit. The church we went to was Pentecostal, so the worship and sermon were loud and very exciting, but I didn't mind. It reminded me of worship at Coldstream (a summer camp I worked at). The sermon was scripturally backed and biblically accurate. We talked about hearing God and what heart conditions can prevent us from hearing clearly. After service, the church bought us all pizza and we were able to mingle with some of the congregation. Aidan and I met three girls named Fuzzy (short for a name given to her in Zimbabwe), Lilly, and Emily. Lilly and Emily were both from New Zealand. Lilly was homeschooled like Aidan and me, so we talked about that for a bit. They were all so nice, and we really enjoyed getting to know them.

At about 2:30 pm, we headed to the Wellington Zoo! It was super pretty and had tons of animals. We saw blue penguins, giraffes, lions, otters, lemurs, meerkats, and so many

other animals. Kimmie, Aidan and I split off into our own little group, and Kimmie navigated us around the zoo; she's great at stuff like that. We had a great time and goofed off a lot while taking some fun pictures.

We got back to the hotel at 5:00 pm and had some down time to change and rest before dinner. I was starving, so I ate some leftover sushi from the night before. We left for dinner at 6:00 pm and went to a Mexican restaurant named "Mexico." Pretty straightforward huh? Because I had already eaten a bit, I only ordered guacamole, and it was fantastic. It was very lemony but not too sour. After dinner, we split into two groups. One went down to the wharf, and the other went to get ice cream again. This is probably obvious to anyone who knows me, but I opted to go get ice cream. It was pretty windy and rather chilly and walking all the way to the wharf didn't sound very appealing. Chloe, Kimmie, Yaseen, Kyleigh, and I all went back to Duck Island then back to the hotel. Back at the hotel, I packed everything up and folded all the laundry I washed the previous night. When I got done, Spencer called me and said he was bored because his roomie, Josiah, was doing homework, so I took my speaker over and worked on editing pictures while he packed until we decided to go to sleep. Then, I went back to my room and passed out.

### **Day 10 – May 22<sup>nd</sup> : Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongawera**

Breakfast was at the hotel again, but it wasn't until 8:30. I FaceTimed Hope for a bit, so I didn't make it downstairs until 8:45. I had toast, bacon, sausage, green tea, and tater tots (I had yet to see any hash browns here, but I mean, same difference). We loaded up

and left for the museum at 9:30. I honestly didn't know what to expect from the museum, but it was phenomenal.

The museum had so many exhibits! One of my favorites was the war exhibit that features larger than life sculptures of soldiers. They were so realistic; it was almost creepy. Even though they were eight feet tall, I felt like they would reach out and shake my hand.

My second favorite was the exhibit of the Māori people's canoes. They had many canoes in the exhibit, but the most impressive part was all the photographs from a 2020 sailing event that the Māori held. The photos were full of raw emotion; they were amazing. You could feel the passion and connection these people have both to their history and one another.

My third favorite was the art exhibit upstairs. It was abstract that embodied the elements and deities that the Māori people value. The pieces were so simplistic but held much meaning. Most of them were interpretations of elements such as fire and light. My favorite was a massive weaving of ratchet straps that were a light grey, almost silver color. It was suspended about 12 feet in the air, and you could view it from both above and below. It represented the womb and how intricately humans are woven.

We left the museum at noon and drove for a while before stopping for lunch. Along the way, Wayne stopped on top of a mountain lookout, so we stretched for a bit and

enjoyed the view. Then, we loaded back up and drove until 2:00 pm when we stopped for lunch. We all ate at a cute little café, and I ordered a burger. We finally arrived at our hostel at 6:30 pm, and I roomed with Kimmie, Ariel, and Jenene. We quickly dropped our stuff and went to dinner. I went with a small group to get Thai. After we got back to the hostel (Kennedy Park), Kimmie, Spence and I played a few rounds of spicy uno. Kimmie had a deck of uno cards and every time you win, you get to sign the card you won with. Its such a fun idea, and I will definitely be using it in the future. I won twice, so now I'm in her deck. YAY! Then, I showered in the super nice showers and headed to bed.

### **Day 11 – May 23<sup>rd</sup> : Napier**

We had a late morning and didn't wake up until 8:00 am and had breakfast at 8:30 am. We loaded up around 9:00 am and left Kennedy Park at 9:15 am. Thankfully, we stayed there two nights, so all we had to do was get on the bus and not load everything again. We stopped at the beach for a bit and took pics. The beach was a fine rock beach that was black; it was so cool. At 10:00 am, we rented bikes and biked around the city. I initially thought we were biking IN the vineyard, but turned out that we biked TO the



vineyard. It was a bit stressful because we were biking on the street, but the weather was perfect! It was a mild sunny day with a good breeze.

We arrived at the vineyard a little before noon for a scheduled wine tasting at Mission Estate Winery in Napier. It was an experience for sure. I can confirm that I still hate the taste of alcohol. The vineyard was beautiful, and we took lots of pictures. After the tasting, we biked back to the bike shop and returned our bikes. Next, we headed to lunch. We landed on a small Italian restaurant in downtown Napier called Portofino around 2:00 pm. All the food was amazing!

After lunch we got some much-needed free time back at Kennedy Park. I spent the whole three hours in my bed. I called my parents, because it was my mom's birthday, and a few friends, too. Everyone I was rooming with wasn't there, so it was a nice bit of quiet time. Kimmie had gone to get a tattoo, and Ariel went with her and Jenene went to the (heated) pool. I considered going for a swim, but I decided to just rest.

Dinner was at 6:00 pm, and Wayne cooked for all of us. My favorite part was at the end when he told us he got donuts! After dinner, most of us did homework and a few played cards, but I went for a swim since I didn't earlier. At first, I couldn't get into the pool because the fob on our cabin key wasn't working, but I went back and stole someone else's fob and got in. I originally considered jumping the fence, but the running joke is that if we do something dumb they're going to deport us. I don't think they would over jumping a fence, but it was low-key in the back of my mind haha. At the pool, I met two guys who were in Napier to help the community clean up from a devastating flood that had occurred recently. They were from Auckland and worked in civil infrastructure. They normally worked in neighborhood construction, but their company had equipment in Napier that could be used to help clean up; they volunteered to come down to help. They were both super down to earth, and we talked for like two hours. We talked about guns,

insurance, credit (this one was funny), how big sports are in America, how big our military is, how we call things different names, the South Island, and how everything in New Zealand is smaller, such as, serving sizes, trash (rubbish) bins, and cars.

After the pool, I showered and went back to our cabin. Spencer and Aidan came over because everyone else was in the kitchen hanging out. We worked on our blogs a bit and just talked. We were all tired, so it was quite entertaining. After that, I crashed.



### **Day 12 – May 24<sup>th</sup> : Napier → Taupo → Whakatane**

We had another late morning and didn't have to be up until 8:30 am, but for some reason my whole cabin was up at 7:00 am. I fought it until 8:00 am but just got up. Breakfast was at 9:00 am then we were back on the bus at 9:45 am. We stopped at a cute little sweet shop, duck pond, sculpture garden, cafe, restaurant, sheep farm on the way named Birdwoods at 11:00 am. There was a cute tree swing and lots of big trees. Then we were back on the bus until we stopped for lunch in Taupo. I ate with Chloe, Yaseen, and Aidan at a restaurant named Waterside. It was a beautiful lunch that overlooked the bay. I had loaded fries and a chicken quesadilla with pineapple juice, and it was fantastic. I think it was my favorite meal there.

After lunch, we drove until we arrived in Whakatane around 4:30. We stopped at the beach before continuing to our accommodation and took some sunset pics. We also met a couple golden retriever's named Reums and Willow. Willow was Remus' mom, and she was four; Remus was only fifteen months and still acted like a pup. Their owner, Janene, let me take pictures of them! She was super nice. On our way to Whakatane Holiday Park where we were staying, we stopped and placed an order for fish and chips at a local restaurant called Gibb's on the Wharf. Once we got roomie assignments (I was with Kimmie and Aidan), we dropped our things, around 5:30, we headed back to Gibb's and ate at 6:30. After dinner, we tried to come back and do homework, but the Wi-Fi was so bad nothing would load, so we just went to sleep at 9:30.

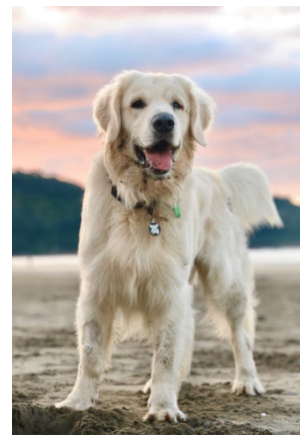
### **Day 13 – May 25<sup>th</sup> : Whakatane → Mount Mangnui**



We were up early at 7:00 am, but the Italian food I ate the day before wasn't sitting very well, so I skipped breakfast and had a slow morning getting ready and packing up.

We loaded up at 8:30, and

our guide arrived around 9:00 am. He took us all around Whakatane and told us stories of the history of the Māori people. We wrapped up around 10:30 am and hit the road. We stopped for lunch around 12:00 pm in a mall, and I got Thai; it was very good. Yaseen and I discovered flat escalators, and after riding up and down them, we observed everyone else walking up and down while we stood still.



We felt a bit ridiculous, but it was funny. On our way out we passed a cute little café with pastries, so we bought a delicious slice of lemon blueberry cake.

Next, it was onto Mount Manganui! The mountain was mostly in the ocean, so as you hiked around it, the view was constantly beach and ocean. It was a beautiful sunny day, and the ocean sparkled like diamonds. Spencer, Yaseen, and I stopped often to take pictures; it was so beautiful we wanted to capture it all. After our long hike we went to the hot pools in Wanganui. It was perfect for soothing our sore muscles after the long hike. We stayed for about an hour then headed back to the bus to drive to our accommodation for the evening. We arrived at Wunderlust backpackers around 4:00 pm and were given a couple hours to settle, shower, and unpack before we went to dinner. Because we were near Wayne's home, his wife joined us for dinner. We all ate at a Chinese buffet close to the hostel.

After dinner, we headed back to the hostel for the night. When we got back, we all ended up in one room hanging out, talking, and having a good time. We bought a T-shirt for Wayne that said "the greatest" then we added the word "dad" with golden glitter glue under it. We all signed the back and gave it to him the next morning after breakfast. We were all pretty tired from the long day in the hike, so we went to bed pretty early.



**Day 14 – May 26<sup>th</sup> : Second Friday**

We slept in a bit and ate breakfast in the hostel at 9:00 am. It was my last morning eating crumpets and tea in New Zealand. After breakfast, we gave Wayne the t-shirt we all made and played him song that Sav wrote. Around 9:45, we loaded up and left the hostel. We stopped at a playground and beach because we were a bit ahead of schedule. The playground was huge, and Sav and I played on the see-saw. After a short stop, we headed to a primary school for a tour.

The primary school was very different from what we were all accustomed to. Instead of having one large building that had classrooms, there were many smaller buildings that served as one or two classrooms. They were arranged in a kind of circle pattern around an outdoor play area. The day we were there, the weather was sunny and mild, so all the buildings had the doors and windows wide open. It created a light and airy environment inside the classrooms. It was mind boggling that they did not have to worry about security issues with everything being so open. The principle said that they do not have to worry about things like that in New Zealand.

After the tour, we drove to Wayne's for lunch. His home was so charming! We ate outside on his patio, and it was so beautiful. They had made sandwiches, quiches, sausage rolls, cakes, and a delicious punch. It was so yummy and looked so cute. It was a sweet time to sit and eat with everyone before we began the long travel home.

We left for the airport at 1:15 pm and arrived at 4:30 pm due to some traffic on the freeway. After we went through security and dropped our stuff, we set out to find some dinner. Aidan and I settled on splitting some dumplings and ramen, and Yaseen got some amazing avocado toast that he shared. Our flight was a bit delayed, and we ended up

taking off around 9pm. The flight back was pretty hard. I think I was just so ready to be home.

## ***Conclusion***

There are some common arguments regarding the driving forces of these statistics. Do study abroad students truly benefit from the trip that much? Do the students who are achievers already choose to go on study abroad? Was it cause and effect or were those students destined for success anyway?

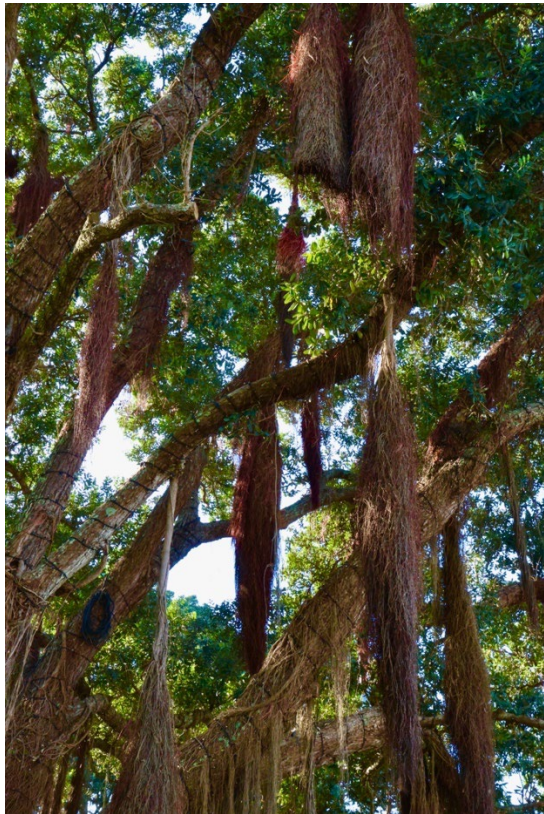
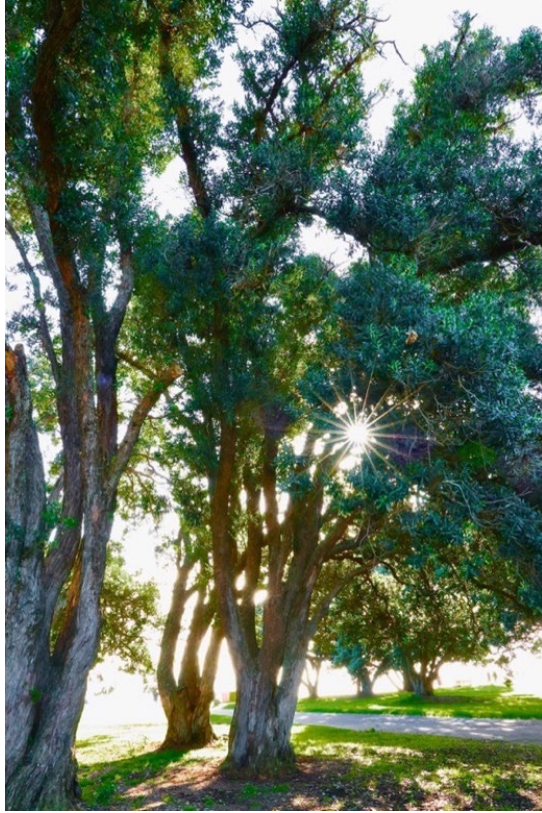
I attempted to only source studies who made effort to decrease the likelihood that these questions would impact their studies. One example is the USA Today article written by Rubin. He states, "Study abroad students, in other words, aren't representative of all students in the Georgia system. So, rather than merely compare the study abroad students' graduation rates with system-wide rates for first-time, full-time freshmen, who drop out for any number of reasons, the researchers compared study abroad students to a control group of students who had already persisted to the same point in college. They also constructed the control group to closely represent the institutions the study abroad students were coming from (the University of Georgia sends more students abroad than, say, Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College, and the control group was created with a goal of reflecting that). "Our goal," said Rubin, "was to isolate the effect of study abroad and to make our groups as comparable in every respect except that one group studied abroad and the other did not."

The compelling evidence from many studies conducted by organizations such as the IES, countless university study abroad programs, and my own personal experiences all provide a compelling argument for study abroad. The impact that cultural immersion has on students aids in equipping them to lead successful careers. It cannot be replicated and, in my opinion, is one of the most priceless experiences students can engage in.

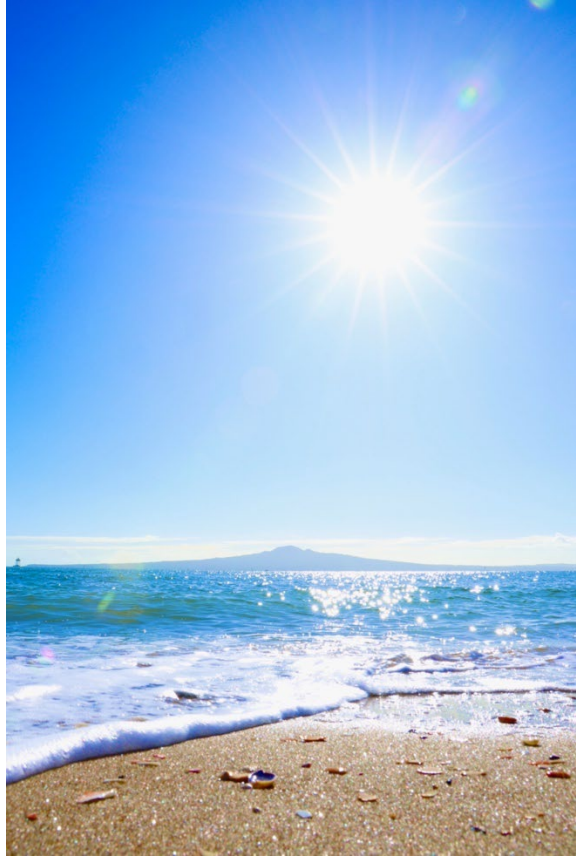
*Appendices: Photos from my trip*

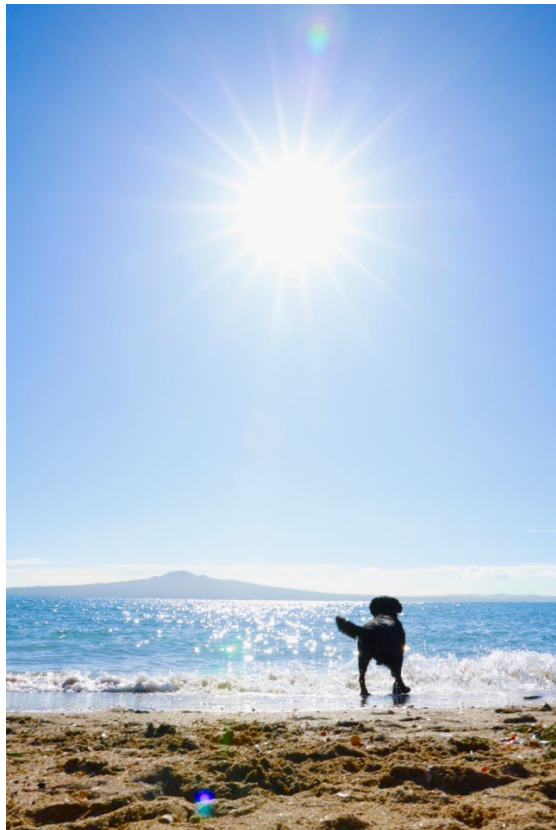
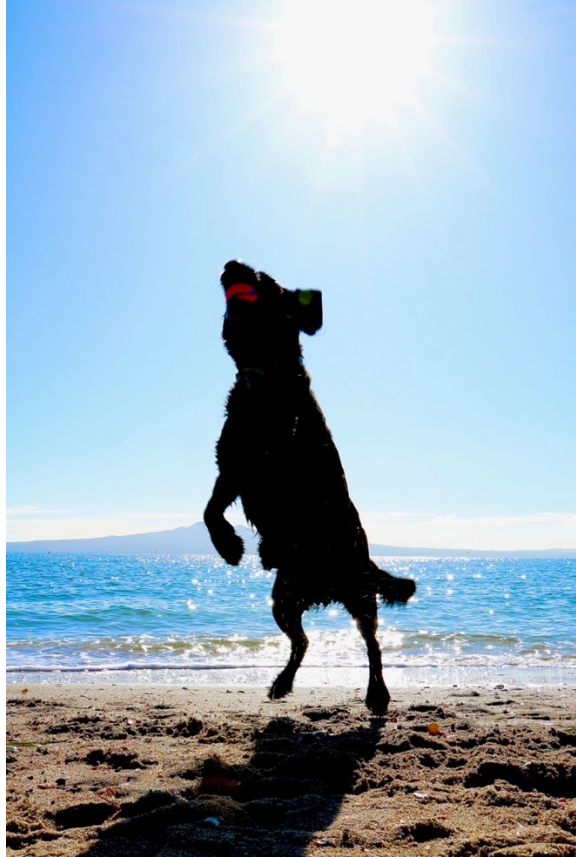
Day 1 – Auckland

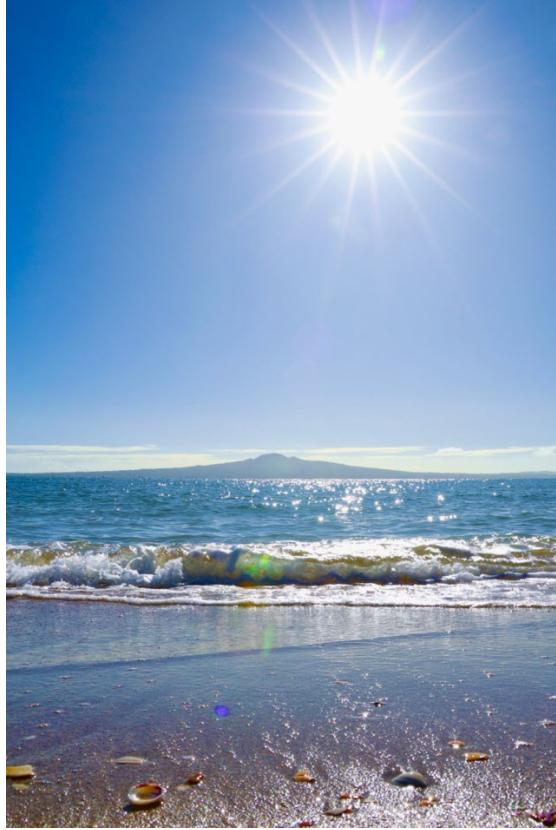














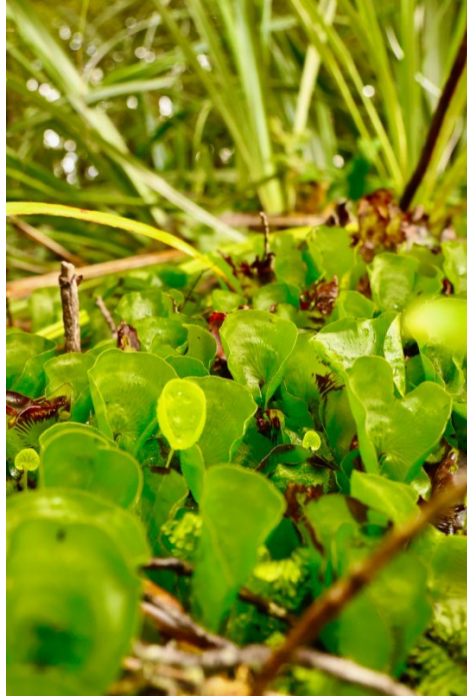
Day 2 – Rangitoto Island

























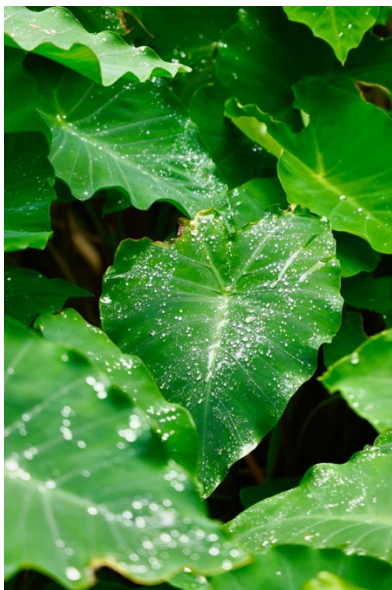




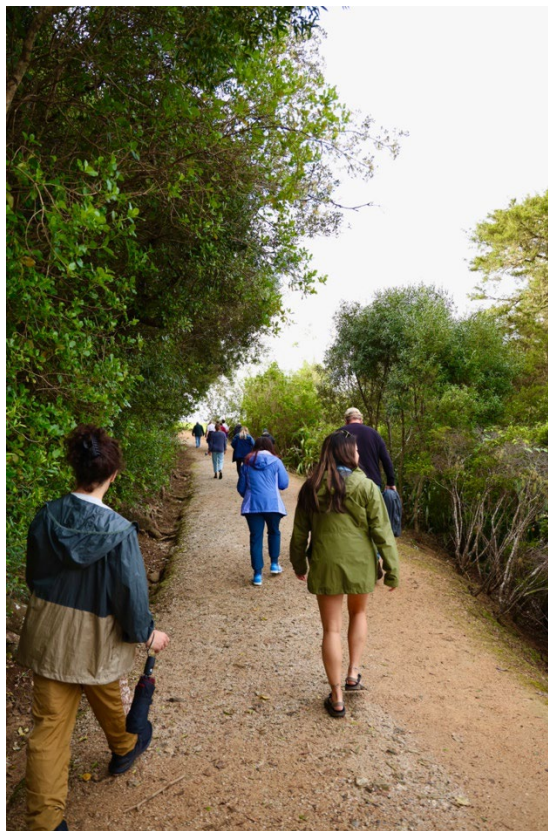
Day 3 - Waitangi Treaty Grounds











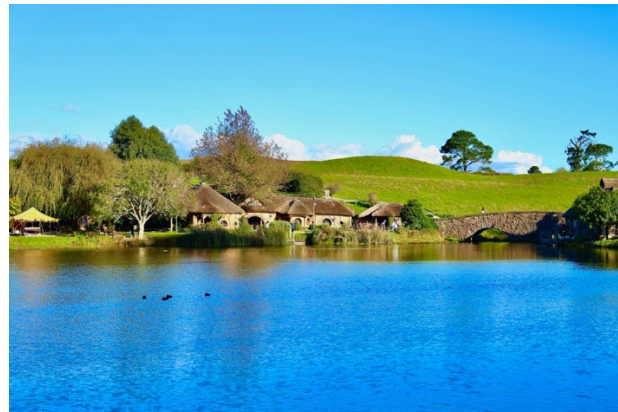








Day 4 – Hobbiton

















Day 5 – Rotorua





Day 6 – Tongariro River





Day 7 - Blue Duck Station

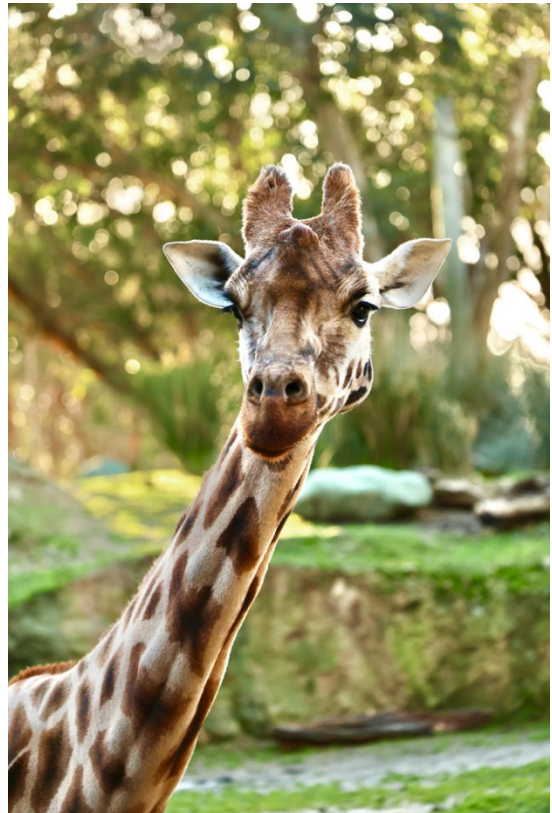
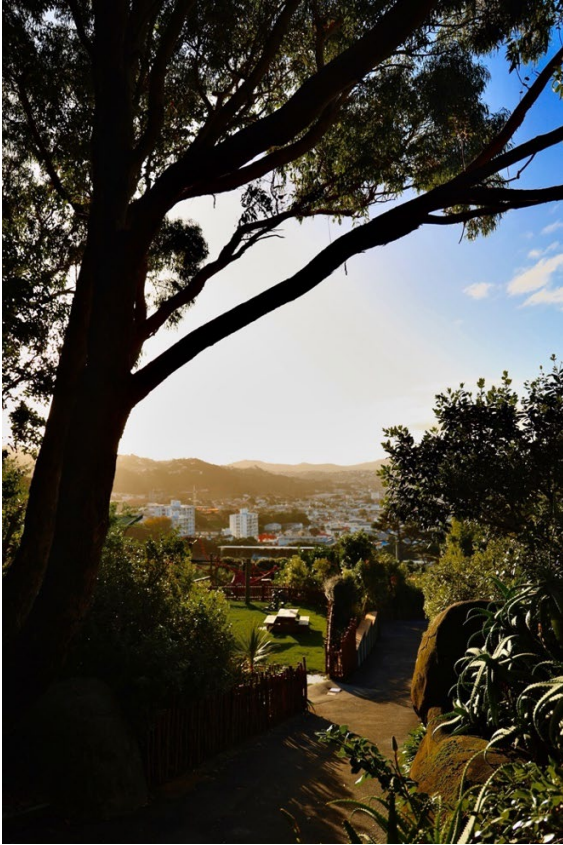


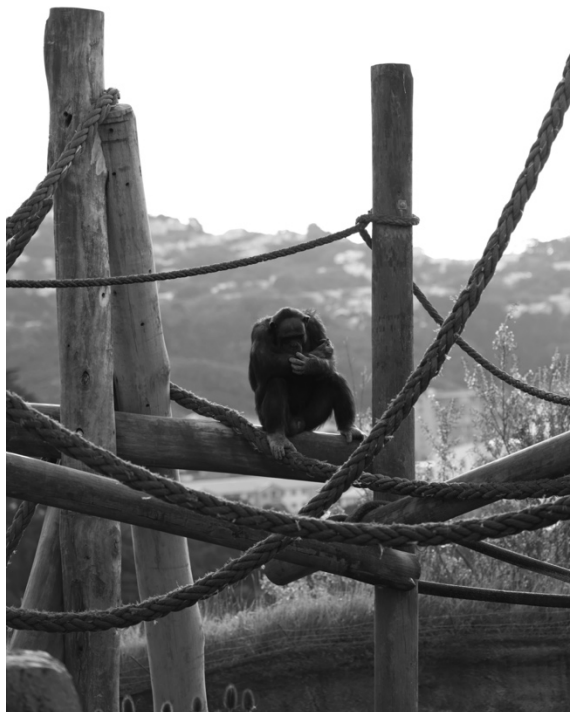




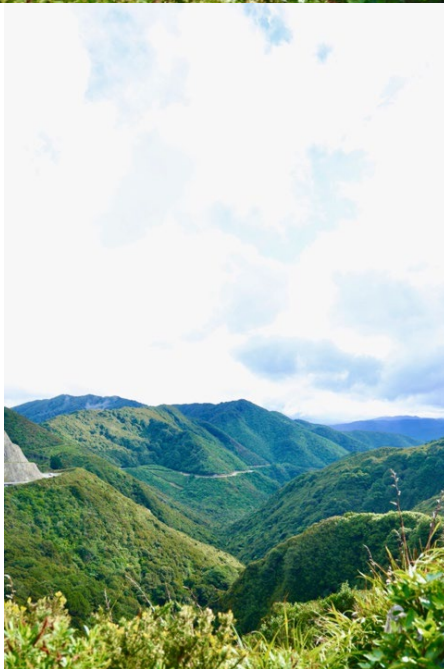


Day 9 – Wellington





Day 10 -







Day 11 – Napier





Day 12 – Birdwoods and Whakatane







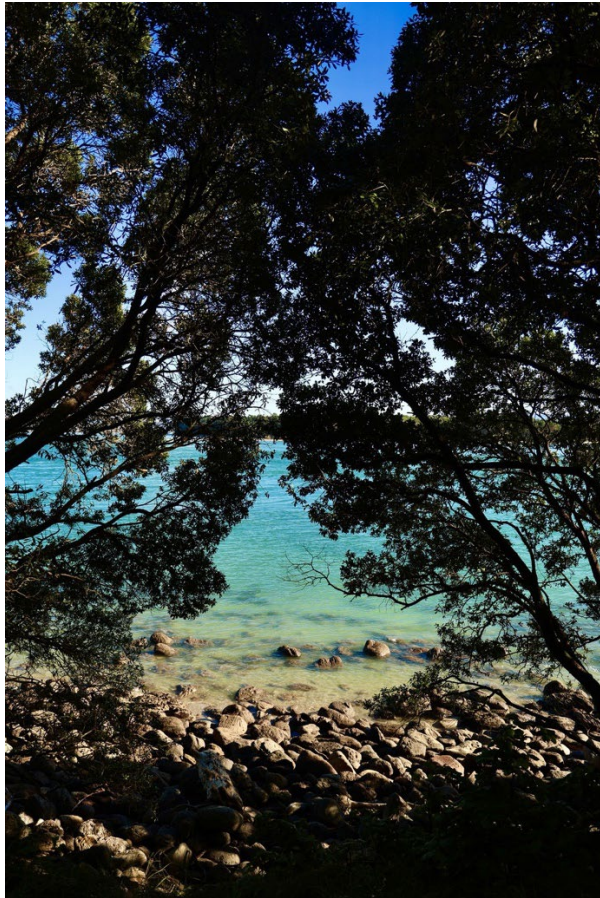


Day 13 –

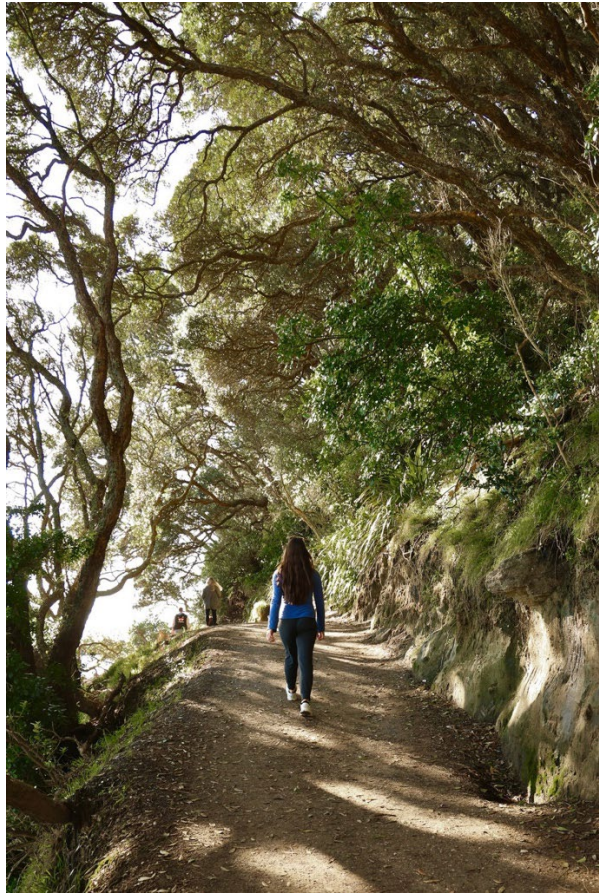














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