

First impressions, experiences and stories by Marek Eichhorn who has spent half a year in New Zealand

When I applied for a scholarship offered by the Lions Club Blomberg last year, I attended Year 10. I got the scholarship and chose a school in New Zealand where I would like to go to. I decided to go to Central Southland College in Winton. Winton is a small city (3000 inhabitants) about 30km north of Invercargill. Invercargill is almost the most southern city of New Zealand, apparently on the South Island. I registered myself at Central Southland College, booked the flights and arranged my journey and stuff like Visa, insurance etc. On the 9th of July this year the day of farewell came and I headed off for Frankfurt in the car. I flew from Frankfurt via Singapore and Christchurch to Invercargill.

When I arrived at the airport in Invercargill in July I was very warmly welcomed by my host family and the teacher of my school, who is responsible for the international students. There was one funny situation I'll never forget. When we were ready to leave the airport I was supposed to sit in the front seat of the car. When I opened the right front door, my host father started smiling at me and asked whether I intended to drive the car home. I declined and went to the other side. I thought that I should have known that.

New country, new habits. That is a good indication of how excited I was when I arrived, I didn't think about the drivers seat being on the right side in NZ. It was quite hard to understand the people in the first days because they speak different and faster English in comparison to what I was accustomed to from my English lessons in Germany. Never mind, after a few weeks I noticed that I had really improved my English and I got used to the kiwi slang.

I arrived on a Wednesday and school started back for the third term on the following Monday. So I had a few days to recover from the long journey and to adjust to my host family and the new environment. My first week of school started and I got involved in the school and community life fairly quickly. I have to say that I was positively impressed by how things worked and were organized for the international students and I felt quite comfortable in my new school. The teachers as well as the students were very friendly and interested in me. I was introduced to a lot of people who started conversations with me in which they showed interest in talking to a foreigner and my home country Germany. I didn't expect things turning out so positive.

I was surprised by the close relationship between the teachers and the students. The teachers treat their students in a more personal manner than the teachers do in Germany. The reason for that might be that in most cases the number of students in one class is smaller than at home. I noticed that most of the teachers are very engaged and take their job seriously. My new form teacher knew that I am a climber and he invited me, on the first day when I saw him, to a trip up Single Cone (Remarkables, the highest mountain around Queenstown). Another teacher took a couple of students including me on a tramp through the bush in Fiordland.

The school offers a wide range of activities. So far, I have been on a rock climbing camp, a canoe polo tournament and on several ski trips which I really enjoyed.

The school selected a very nice host family for me. We live on a farm and I find the real NZ farm life experience quite interesting. I definitely enjoy staying with my family and I get along with them very well. Living with a NZ family I experience what the everyday life in NZ is like and I have got to know a lot of nice people through them. I have had a very good opportunity to talk to several locals and get to know the country, the people and the culture much better than a tourist. My host family took me to various different places like Queenstown, Cardrona(skiing), Wanaka, Dunedin and South Canterbury so that I got a good look around the southern part of the South Island including a lot of scenic routes in the beautiful landscape of NZ. To be located in Southland has the advantage of having a good and quick access to famous and important places like Queenstown, Fiordland, Invercargill, the south coast and Dunedin.

During my stay in NZ I have had a lot of chances to try different sports that were new to me. For example: I played canoe polo, golf, squash and tennis for the first time here in NZ and had a go with a snowboard on one of the ski trips. In addition I have helped my host father with the farm work which is a new and enjoyable experience.

One thing that I am particularly happy about is that I had the opportunity to join the gliding club in Five Rivers and met many local glider pilots. For me as a glider pilot it is a great thing to fly in NZ and to make use of the very good weather as well as geographical conditions for gliding. I made some good acquaintances through the club and was welcomed to go gliding with them. So far I have had some terrific flights and spent beautiful days in Five Rivers on the airstrip.

There are only a couple of weeks left for me in NZ. Before I go home, my mum comes over and we'll drive around the South Island for three weeks in a camper van to see the whole Island. I am really looking forward to that, it'll be a nice highlight for me before I go back to Germany.

Coming to the end of my brief report I want to recommend students to come to CSC and spend some time in NZ. It was definitely the right decision to come to NZ. It has been a good experience for me that has widened my horizon and inspired me to travel more, see other countries of the world and get to know other cultures, in the future. Additionally I met a lot of new people and saw a beautiful country with an impressive landscape.

During my time in NZ I have learnt how important it is for me to explore other countries and that it has made my life more exciting.

As a conclusive sentence I have to say that it has been worthwhile to come to NZ and that I'll definitely come back one day.

Thanks.

Marek Eichhorn

If you have any inquiries and question or would like to know more about my trip to New Zealand, don't hesitate to contact me.

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