



Tips on Studying Abroad at Victoria University Wellington in New Zealand

Want to know what it's like to study abroad? Want to know what your peers think? Your fellow Georgia Tech students who have previously gone on this exchange program gave their opinions so that future participants have the inside scoop on their host institution and host country.



Preparation & Getting Started

- NZ is an English-speaking country, so the culture shock isn't terrible, and it is quite easy to get around in both countries, making this program one of the easiest to adapt to. New Zealand is also one of the most beautiful places on earth, and the people are incredibly friendly and willing to help you out. It is especially good if you are interested in adventurous outdoor activities, such as skydiving, caving, surfing, and bungee jumping.

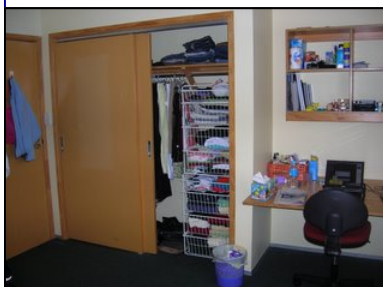
Classes

- Classes ranged from roughly 30 for an upper level course to 150 for a lower level lecture (much like GT). The difficulty and amount of work was less than that demanded by GT but still challenging. The professors were friendly and helpful. The format of the courses is much like an course you would have at GT. Labs have lab reports and projects and lab finals, INTA courses have readings and papers, math courses have homework problems in the book. The grading system is different because it is a British system, but that's not hard to get used to. Your fellow students are very helpful in making sure you understand what is going on and what you need to be doing.
- I applied for five or six history classes, all of which were happily approved by the History Department at Tech. In fact, the professor that approved my courses was not only very helpful, but very excited for me as well.
- Registration was a little different than what we are used to at Tech. Instead of doing it online, you must do it all in person, with other Americans who are studying abroad. Victoria does have more students than Tech, but getting into classes was still not a problem. I entered four first-year-level history classes, and from what I could see, there was next to no crowding. 6 "points" at Victoria corresponds to a credit hour at Tech, so a Tech student would NEED 72 points to study abroad, which the Kiwi students saw as a fairly tough load. Just make sure you meet that minimum!

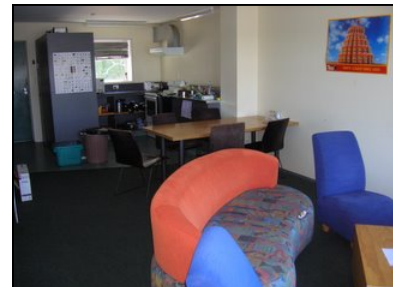


Housing

- VUW has several dormitories available to students. I would recommend staying out of freshman housing and looking for international student housing that is furnished (particularly Wai-te-Ata). Definitely sign up for roommates because that is the best way to meet people and get involved. Depending on your situation, you may need to bring sheets, towels, and blankets, but you will find that out when your housing is assigned.



- Weir House is GREAT if you want a dining hall and wish to mix quite a lot with other students. Kiwi students apply to Weir House knowing that the House primarily accepts first-year, highly capable, sociable students. The five or six Americans that were there were two or three years older than the Kiwi students, so some leadership and role-modeling was somewhat expected.



Transportation & Travel

- Be very careful about the weight of your luggage.
- Definitely try to get to Waitomo caves, Taupo, the south island in general (including Queenstown and fjordland), and Rotorua.
- Local transportation is good, but it is better to rent cars for the weekend if you have a big group going out of town. You can walk everywhere in Wellington (and everyone does) so bring good walking shoes.
- Local transportation: Walk. The Cable Car goes up to campus, but its relatively expensive, and if you get used to walking a little bit more, its incredibly economical, not to mention good for you.
- Regional travel: Trains go north to any urban area. Some airfares may save money for going to South Island as opposed to taking the ferry and trains. I rented a car for road-trips, which is legal from anyone 21 and up. I think in the U.S. one must be 25. I also did a 300-mile bicycle trip, which was incredible, but draining in the summer.



Lifestyle

- Kiwis are very friendly and easy to get along with. I would recommend that exchange students try to find ways to meet local students, whether it be through roommates or classmates. Never pass up an opportunity to meet people or do something fun. It's worth more in the long run to create strong bonds with locals. The language is English, but a variation of British English, so some pronunciations will throw you for a loop.

Food

- The food in the dining halls is pretty poor, so you may go out a lot. The food in Wellington is pretty good with a lot of Asian and Indian influences. Restaurants range from super cheap to super expensive. If you are living there for a long time and have a furnished kitchen, I would recommend cooking for yourself.
- Meals were only offered during specific meal times (three times a day). They would also only permit seconds during the last five or ten minutes of every meal period, so some meals were limited to one plateful. This does sound a bit gluttonous, but if you're used to eating more than three times a day exclusively, you may need to look into getting food elsewhere, or change your diet.

Communication

- Phone cards aren't incredibly practical. A better solution would be to use Skype computer-to-computer because it is free. Also, keep an online blog rather than send out weekly emails. This way you can post pictures without cluttering email inboxes, and people can check on what you're doing at their leisure, not yours. Also, the 18 hour time difference can make talking awkward.
- I got a WONDERFUL deal on a phone card at a bookstore on Lambton Quay (street), where I could call the U.S. from a landline for an amazing price. I paid twenty New Zealand dollars (15 U.S.) and called my parents for 600 minutes. It was a great deal. Next to no one in NZ talks on cell phones; they text.

Packing

- It rains a lot in Wellington. Bring a slicker and umbrella, or plan on buying them there.
- Bring sturdy walking shoes as well.
- Don't over pack.
- Bring two weeks worth of clothes, a nice outfit, and some going out clothes. You can shop there if you don't have enough stuff, and it's not worth the extra charges on your luggage on the way there. Save your money for getting all of your souvenirs home!
- Wellington is very windy and wet. Also, the ozone hole over Antarctica is very close, so sunscreen is a must. I went two days without it and got one of the worst burns I've had.



Finances

- I studied abroad for a full year on a \$25,000 scholarship from Rotary International called the Ambassadorial Scholarship. Definitely look into that and any other scholarships. The cost of living is less than in the US, but you'll end up spending more money because of weekend trips. Check into your policies to see if your credit cards or debit cards will charge huge rates on international purchases. If so, pay cash for everything (take out a certain amount every two weeks or so). If not, credit is the way to go in NZ.
- Outside of housing, meals, plane fare, and tuition, I probably spent about \$1500 U.S.D. This was while doing three or four substantial road trips, and getting quite a lot of food and alcohol outside of the dining hall. Not too bad, really.
- DO NOT use an American credit card. You will incur a 1% fee every time you use it. This is costly. I opened a free student account with The National Bank, which has a location on the Kelburn Campus. I just pulled relatively large cash amounts from my U.S. account at ATMs (small fees) and deposited them into my National Bank account.



Cultural Differences

- It is not difficult to get acclimated to NZ. Everyone is really laid back and friendly, the accents are cool, and all people want to do is have fun. You'll love it.

Participant Profiles

Please see information of contributing students below. If a blog or website is listed, feel free to take a look! Also, if an e-mail address is listed, you may contact that student if you have any questions about their study abroad experience.

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*These comments do not reflect the views of GT's Office of International Education. They are based on students' individual opinions and are, therefore, not necessarily representative of all student experiences.