

My life as a “Kiwi Volunteer”

Coming to New Zealand was always one of my dreams. After I passed my A-Levels in Germany last year (June 2006), I decided to come to New Zealand for ten months. It was really important for me not to visit New Zealand only as a tourist! I wanted to get to know the culture, the tradition and get really into the New Zealand way of life! At the same time I wanted to work in nature and improve my English.

I spent my first month on the other side of the world in a really nice host family in Lower Hutt and I did a “General English Course” at the Wellington Business School to refresh my English skills. I met so many nice people there and we had lots of fun together. After school we often had the possibility to watch a movie or we had an international lunch together with all the students of WBS. The school also organised great activities I took part in.

At the weekend I went hiking with my host family or explored Wellington and the surroundings with my friends.

After 4 weeks my time in Wellington was already over! Then the exciting part of my time in New Zealand started: the work in my first volunteer project in the Waipoua Forest Trust in Northland. The Waipoua forest is the biggest remaining Kauri forest in the world and they try to replant more Kauri trees to extend the native forest. My main work in the project was potting native trees like the Kauri, Rimu, and Kawaka. I worked close together with Maori people and it was so nice getting to know their culture and traditions.

During my time in Waipoua we raised a calf and fed her with the bottle, we often went to the beautiful beach or to a lake and we went into the forest at night to see some Kiwis. Unfortunately we weren't lucky.

With two of my friends from Lower Hutt I traveled back to Wellington and spent there a few more days. It was so nice to see them all again!

Just before Christmas I took the ferry to the South Island. My second volunteer project is at Cape Jackson, an isolated peninsula in the Marlborough Sounds! I've spent nearly 3 months here and I really had a great time in the wilderness. The Queen Charlotte Wilderness Park is a small tourist place and we get a limited number of guests. The place used to be a sheep farm but the whole cape is now growing back to native forest. My job is to look after the guests, help them if they have questions, clean the rooms and prepare the breakfast and the dinner...!

When we don't have any guests, we do track work to keep the tracks in a good condition. In my free time I have lots of opportunities: snorkelling, going for a walk, reading a book, sunbathing or just relaxing, enjoying the calm place, the nature and the amazing views. As the place is so isolated we only get the mail once a week with the mail boat and we have to order the grocery via Internet. I met so many great people, I had fantastic experiences and learnt a lot about myself and things which are really important in my life. One

highlight was swimming with dolphins in front of the marina. I enjoyed my time out here so much and I'm so glad that I had the opportunity to spend 3 months at such a beautiful place.

Now 6 months are already over. I really appreciate being in New Zealand and I've never regretted the decision to come here. After I've finished my volunteer project at the end of March I'll travel around the South Island and work for a few weeks on a horse riding farm. I'm sure I will enjoy the 3 months, which I have left in New Zealand, before I travel to Australia on my way back home.

Vera Bleicher, March 2007