

# Wellington, New Zealand



The cable car is one of the most well known sites in Wellington. It begins in the center of the city and makes the 1-in-5 gradient to Kelburn, to the entrance to the Botanic Gardens and Carter Observatory.

## *Special adventures in New Zealand*

- *Geol/Biol 242 field trip to Nelson Lakes National Park*
- *Geol 223 field trip to the Kapiti Coast and Otaki Region*
- *New Zealand University Games*
- *North Island traveling to Waitomo and Rotorua*
- *South Island traveling along the west coast*

## City Life in the Capital

In addition to the benefits of living and studying in another country, this semester has given me the opportunity to live in the amazing city of Wellington. My hostel where I stayed for the semester was located just outside the center of the city, within walking distance of Victoria University, the harbor, Mt. Victoria, shops, stores, and more. In addition to being the capital city of New Zealand, Wellington is also known for its cultural events. The New Zealand Symphony

Orchestra, the Royal New Zealand Ballet Company, and Te Papa Tongarewa (the Museum of New Zealand) are all located within city limits. There are also a number of sporting events and other sites to keep anyone busy and entertained!



*I would tell anyone contemplating studying or traveling abroad to consider New Zealand.*

## Nelson Lakes National Park

One of the most unique experiences I was able to have in my time in New Zealand was through a field studies course in Nelson Lakes National Park. Geology/Biology 242 is a class that is offered each trimester 1 to students interested in the biological and environmental sciences. This course is offered one of the two weeks over the mid-trimester break.

During this course, I was able to learn more about the soils and landscape of New Zealand and the processes that

helped to shape it. I also learned about the animals of NZ and the pressures they are facing. Specifically, each student was asked to undertake a research project to develop into a final report for the class. I decided to do stream sampling and conducted a report on water quality in agricultural catchments versus forested catchments. This research allowed me to learn more about the processes occurring in New Zealand, which I will later be able to apply in other applications.



Soil Sampling in Nelson Lakes National Park.

## North Island Travels



Zorbing and Geothermal Activity in Rotorua.



In the week before the beginning of the semester I had the opportunity to travel around North Island. Four other Penn Staters and I traveled past the National Park and Lake Taupo. Known for its geothermal activity and pungent sulfur smell, we spent two nights in Rotorua. Here, we had the opportunity to visit some of the boiling mud and mineral pools. We also took a day trip to the Agrodome. The Agrodome is known for its daily sheep shows with 19 different breeds and for the 130-hectare farm tours it offers. There are also orchards and opportunities for visitors to hand feed some of the animals. Also nearby, there are other unique experiences. One I was able to try out was Zorbing. In the Hydro Zorb, the large ball of plastic has water inside and goes tumbling down the 200 meter hill. It

was such a refreshing experience.

After Rotorua, we traveled to Nearby Waitomo. This region of New Zealand is known for its extensive underground cave system and glow worms. During this four hour tour, we abseiled into the caves, rafted through them, looked at the glowworm tunnels and rock climbed back out at the end of the day. This adventure was one I will never forget!

To complete the trip, our group took the trans-scenic train through the New Zealand Countryside. It was great to see the rolling hills and the tectonic influences of the area. The ride home was like one giant scene out of *The Lord of the Rings*!

## New Zealand University Games

In addition to the normal lectures and laboratories at Victoria University of Wellington, I had the opportunity to join some special clubs and teams. Throughout the semester I tried out for and made it on to the UteamVic women's basketball team. After a month of practice the women's team and two men's teams traveled to Auckland for the New Zealand "Uni Games".

The New Zealand University Games are the Flagship University Sporting event in New Zealand. The 2005 games were held at the Auckland University of Technology campus with venues over the North Shore area. The games hosted 21 different sporting events from 11 different universities. It was the largest games to date with over 2000 competitors.

It was a great opportunity to meet people with similar interests outside of classes. I had such a great time playing basketball and getting to know all the new people I met. I was also very enthusiastic about representing my university at the games.

The women's team took third place in the tournament. The men's A team took second. Overall, Victoria University took third of all the New Zealand Universities. I am thankful that I had the opportunity to participate in the games and will always have the memories and friends gained through this experience!



The men's and women's teams following the awards ceremony.





Franz Joesf Glacier



Christchurch Cathedral



Lake Matheson (Mirror Lakes)



Maori group performs a traditional dance during orientation.

## The Maori

The Maori are the indigenous Polynesian people of New Zealand. They make up 15 percent of the New Zealand population. While in New Zealand, I took a course about the Maori culture and their involvement within science. It gave me a unique insight into the culture, its traditions, as well as alternatives to western science. Through this course, I was able to visit a traditional healing center, travel to Otari-Wilton's Bush, where many traditional plant medicines are collected, visit the Carter Observatory to learn about Maori starlore and use in navigation, and learn about other culture first-hand. The Maori culture is a unique population and I now know more about it and the history of New Zealand through my experiences within and out of the course.



## The Otaki Region- North Island

In addition to the Geology/Biology 242 course, I also participated in Geography 223- a field studies course about landscape evolution and coastal processes. A requirement for this course was a weekend field trip to the Otaki region along the Kapiti Coast. This area is a dynamic landscape that is under the river's influence as well as the marine influence. It also is a great area for showing past climate change and glacial periods. Through soil sampling of sand dunes and beach sampling of large clasts, we were able to develop an overview of the landscape and the geography of the area.



Dune fields in the Otaki Region.

## South Island Memories

The second week of my mid-trimester break I had the opportunity to travel around the South Island. I began in Nelson and made my way down the west coast. In addition to seeing some of the most fabulous sites I have ever seen, I was able to cram a lot into my week. I began with a brewery tour of Monteith's Brewery in Greymouth, saw the mirror lakes of Lake Matheson, climbed Franz Joesf Glacier, went jet boating on Lake Wilkin (and saw many Lord of the Rings filming sites), experienced the adventures of Queenstown, and toured the chapels of Christchurch.

As I traveled on my own, I was able to meet

a number of people from around the world! I also did some things I never thought I could, including bungee jumping and river surfing (although I am not sure I have to do it again anytime soon!).

The South Island offered some sights that cannot be seen elsewhere. Its natural beauty is unsurpassable. My only regret is that I did not have more time to explore this area. In the future, I hope to return to New Zealand and further explore what it has to offer.



## Reflection on Experience

Through this trip, I learned a lot about myself. I learned to be more independent than I thought I could be and I learned how to deal with some of the tough situations in life. Living in New Zealand has given me a new outlook and has made me more appreciative of what I have. I have learned more from this experience than any classroom could ever teach me and it has encouraged me to continue traveling in the future. I would encourage all who are able to undertake a similar experience.

