



“KIWI”
(New Zealand)

NORTH ISLAND

I arrived at the North Island of New Zealand in late February and was looking forward to enjoying the end of summer there while it was freezing back home in Austria. Yes, everything in the southern hemisphere is different and so are the seasons.

New Zealand is famous for the kiwi although this fruit originally comes from China. One of the things I learned first was that “kiwi” can also mean the rather unattractive brown bird that can’t even fly but nevertheless is the mascot of New Zealand, or the word for a person who lives there or the country itself.

I had never met anyone from New Zealand before but had heard that their mentality was unique: kiwis are said to be the friendliest, most generous and open-minded people in the world. With that “prejudice” in mind I landed at the airport of Auckland and met two friendly elderly ladies who seemed to have waited just for me to serve free coffee and tea. And that was just the beginning!

In town I found backpackers that offered its guests the use of a climbing hall for free. All the staff were friendly, young and active people and my impression was that the second question after asking for one’s name was “And what sports do you do?”

I spent my first week meeting new people, buying an old dodgy but comfortable camper van, getting information about where to go and soon got invited to join a group of climbers who wanted to spend the weekend in a beautiful climbing area in the countryside. So I got an introduction into climbing and enjoyed first impressions of the countryside.

I fell in love with New Zealand immediately, its green hills, lush forests, sheep and cow herds, lakes, hot springs, volcanism. The feelings of never being far away from the sea made me feel totally free. Although the nights at the shores of the lakes were rather chilly I was warm and comfortable in my van and thought that the waves sounded like a lullaby. Being impressed by its natural beauty I caught myself from time to time trying to compare New Zealand to other countries I had been to. But I usually drew the conclusion that this country was unique and that whoever had created it had chosen the most special places from all over the world, put them together and formed New Zealand.

My plan was to discover both islands and as soon as my van was repaired and ready to go I left Auckland.

What I really regarded as charming and interesting was that the names of lakes, areas and mountains were mostly in Maori, the language of New Zealand’s native people. Some of the names are real tongue twisters and hard to pronounce, and



usually they tell mythological stories about gods, the creation of the world, love, passion and wars. The Maori history is very impressive; they used to be great carpenters and artists, were feared as warriors and had an impressive mythology. A lot of their culture is still alive or has become popular again for many reasons, be it the new self-consciousness of the young generation who call themselves proudly Maori or popular movies such as “Whale Rider” or “The Piano”. Along the breathtakingly beautiful east coast of New Zealand there are many Maori villages and that was where I headed first. For a few days I just followed the windy road along the sea, stopping now and then to take a picture, go for a walk, look at houses that were decorated with wood carvings, talk to the inhabitants, sit down and watch the most gorgeous sunsets which bathed everything in the area in a kind of golden light.



My next stop was Lake Taupo, Kiwi’s biggest lake. Around the area of Taupo there was much to do, again I went climbing, swam in the rather cold lake, warmed up in the most impressive hot springs, felt like arriving on another planet while visiting an area with geysers and felt the incredible kick of free falling when I dared a skydive.

One day I found a guide book that listed up the film sets of the “Lord of The Rings” movies and I had to think of Peter Jackson’s words when he said that New Zealand was Middle Earth. And I have to admit: sometimes when I strolled

through the somehow magical forests I almost expected to meet a little hobbit.

I was on my way to do the “Tongariro crossing” which is often referred to as “the most beautiful day hike in the world”.

And indeed, I was astonished by the multiplicity of natural wonders when I passed gigantic waterfalls, tropical vegetation, volcanoes, then alpine flora and the emerald lakes.

It was my last stop on the North Island before I took the ferry to Wellington, the capital of New Zealand and most important city of the South Island.



SOUTH ISLAND

Many tourists prefer the South Island because the scenery is more dramatic there than on the North Island. I personally can’t say which island I liked better, I was just surprised that there really was such a big difference. The landscape on the South Island with its Alps and glaciers and fjords is more rugged and rougher, the vegetation more diverse and even the mentality of the people seems slightly different.

My first destination after leaving Wellington was the fjords of the “Marlborough Sounds”, an area which is especially beautiful and quiet although it’s famous and visited by kiwis as well as by tourists. I was stunned by the picturesque little islands and fjords that were shining like gold in the sunset.

Travelling further down south I got many unforgettable impressions like snow-capped mountains and glaciers, the ice slowly moving down a valley, vanishing in a cold stream with floating icebergs.

Down the coast I sometimes spotted seal colonies - and also had to smell them when the wind was blowing from the right direction.

Finally I arrived at the southern-most top of New Zealand and thought about going on a hike again.

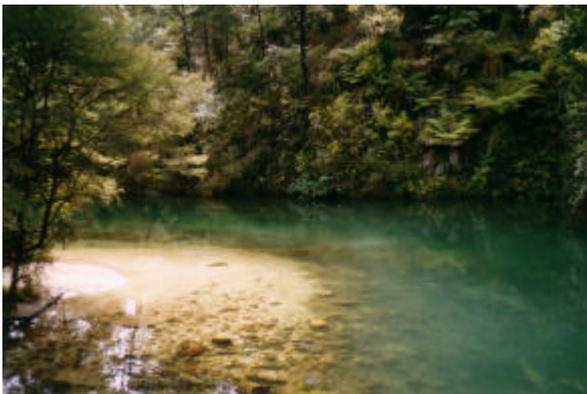
Unfortunately the kiwis have found out that they can make a fortune if they only offer guided tours and

ban any kind of independent tourism in certain areas. Therefore a lot of popular tracks can't be explored alone anymore unless you pay horrible sums of money which I wasn't willing to pay and didn't have either. The most famous of all these "high profile" tracks was in Milford, a tiny, hard accessible village that owes its existence only to the fact that it is the entrance to the magnificent "Milford Sound", arguably the most beautiful fjord in New Zealand. It is surrounded by mountains with manifold vegetation and hundreds of cascades that plunge into the fjord. It became quite obvious that the Milford track was out of my reach. But I was not yet ready to give up and tried to find alternative less famous routes. In addition to these problems the weather got worse and I was not sure if hiking would be safe at all. But lucky as I usually seem to be when travelling I met a guy who worked as a kayak-guide.



One rainy day when there weren't any tourists around who were willing to get wet he invited me to go on a kayak tour on Milford Sound. I was incredibly happy about this private tour and one moment later we were sitting in a kayak, gliding on the surface of the fjord of the fjords! We crossed the fjord and when we reached the opposite shore we left the kayaks and followed a path into the forest. There I was, entering the probably most expensive track of the southern hemisphere, feeling like one of the adventurer who first tried to discover New Zealand!

Leaving this cold area behind I found out that my van had obviously caught a cold – whenever I tried to start the engine I experienced difficulties. An addition to that I found out that the water pump was leaking and finally one of the front tires ran flat. Although I had learned a lot about cars since I started in Auckland I didn't have any clue what to do and didn't have a spare tire either. I was quite happy when a young man stopped and offered me his help. Like all the guys in New Zealand he seemed to be a hobby mechanic and towed my van to his house. And then I found all the positive prejudice about kiwis come true: his wife invited me to have coffee with her and while we were relaxing he was repairing my van. I ended up staying several days with them and enjoying their hospitality I felt "all sweet", as they say.



When I left again, both the van and I had new energies and were heading towards the "Abel Tasman track", a coastal track named after the famous explorer. This time I was lucky with the weather and experienced some marvellous views! On one side of the path was dense forest with huge ferns and trees, small creeks and ponds. It was very quiet, shady and cool, from time to time I saw small animals hiding in the bush and the place felt mystical. On the other side there were beaches and turquoise sea, insects, crabs, seagulls that made a lot of noise and tried to steal my food when I sat down to picnic.

It felt somehow unreal walking between two quite different types of nature, both magnificent, and yet they made an unforgettable combination which I thought couldn't be more impressive!

BACK TO THE NORTH

After travelling through kiwi for two months I went back to the North Island in order to sell my van and explore the very north. About three hours before I arrived in Auckland my van broke down and every try to bring it back to life failed. Again I was lucky to meet a helpful kiwi who towed me back to the city. Being confronted with the sad diagnosis that no mechanic was willing to repair my van unless I'd pay more than it was worth I had to think of a new idea how to get around. Again I was



lucky and one of the incredibly nice climbers who I knew from the beginning offered me to borrow his car. Off I went to be captured by the rough beauty of the North Cape, "Cape Reinga". Then I walked through the most impressive forest I'd seen in my life, a forest with so-called "kauri trees", giants with up to 50 meters in height and 15 meters in girth and an age of about 4000 years!



The north is also the place where the kiwis grow and I decided to stop and visit a plantation. I ended up spending 10 days of kiwi picking in the plantations and, not enough with that, doing nightshifts packing them in the pack house. Although the work was physically hard I really liked it. I had time to think about the trip and clear my mind. Also it was good fun as many Maori worked in the pack house and they seemed to be born entertainers. And there were many international travellers who were trying to make a little extra money. Finally I had earned a sum that would probably make me forget about the loss of my beloved van and I felt ready to move on!

Questions on the text

- What does "KIWI" mean?
- Where can you find a lot of Maori villages?
- Which famous movie-trilogy was shot in New Zealand?
- What's the name of the capital of New Zealand and on which of the two islands is it situated?
- What can you find out about the Maori culture by reading the text?

Discussion Topic

When you hear somebody talk about New Zealand – what comes to your mind and why? Do a brainstorming in class.

Internet Activity

Go to www.minedu.govt.nz and find out how the school system in New Zealand works.

Essay Writing

You are on a hike across New Zealand. You are walking through high grass when you suddenly fall over a sleeping hobbit. First you can hardly believe your eyes but then the hobbit introduces himself as "Merry" and invites you to visit his nearby village. The hobbit inhabitants there give you a warm welcome and are very curious to know where you come from. What is the village like? What are you going to tell them about your hometown?