

Cultural Insights in New Zealand

In 2015, I participated in the Cultural and Language Immersion Scheme (CALIS) in Auckland, New Zealand (NZ), a summer study tour organized by the College of Business. The program includes learning and practice in a classroom setting with other international students, interaction with homestay families, engagement in volunteer work in the local community and participation in social-cultural site visits. Here, I would like to share some interesting findings from the tour.

Maori Culture

The Maori are the indigenous people of NZ, and their story is both long and intriguing. The Maori originated with settlers from eastern Polynesia, who arrived in NZ in several waves of canoe voyages at some time between 1250 and 1300 CE. They have their own art, legends, tattoos, performances (notably Kapa haka), customs, hospitality and community. The boy in the middle of the first photo, one of our students, used the Hongi greeting, the traditional Maori greeting in NZ, in which two people press their noses and foreheads together. It is used at traditional meetings among Maori people and at major ceremonies, and serves a similar purpose to a formal handshake in modern Western culture. Over the years, the Government of NZ has been working to preserve Maori culture; for instance, Maori has been one of NZ's official languages since 1987.



A traditional Maori greeting: Hongi



Performance through song and dance: Kapa haka

Caring Culture of the Local Charity

The charity I volunteered for was the Salvation Army Family Store, which collects goods donated by the public and resells them to the needy at a low price. Apart from the permanent paid staff, the unemployed and mentally disabled also work in the store to build their confidence and keep a connection with the society. It was such a warm place that everyone working there treated each other as a family member. I interviewed the staff members of the store, and they believed that volunteering could foster empathy and caring about others' feelings and strengthen the sense of social belonging.

Some schools require students to do voluntary work to build up a sense of social responsibility. It can not only teach us to be more patient, but also enhance our communication and teamwork skills by cooperating with others. For the general public, the presence of a family store plays a role as an educator. It promotes the message of waste recovery, raises the awareness of poverty and encourages the public to lend a hand to the needy. Therefore, the charity provides direct help to the needy and serves as an educator to benefit the whole community.



Staff and student volunteers at the Salvation Army Family Store



Love and caring are the distinctive features of the store.

Interactive and Fun Classroom

There were lots of interactive activities in class to help us get to know the other students. For example, we played scrabble competitions and card games to help master the new vocabulary we had just learned. In addition to the dynamic teaching style, classes were full of fun and excitement because we usually worked in pairs or groups to have discussions. Very often, brilliant ideas were generated by the students rather than the teachers. The teachers acted as facilitators and gave some guidelines only when we met a bottleneck.

Their teaching methods were completely different to Hong Kong's, where education tends to be a one-way process and with tight schedules so that students can receive as much as information possible within a short time. On the contrary, the pace of learning in NZ was relatively slow and put more focus on students' own opinions and ideas. I think both teaching styles have their merits. The former emphasizes class efficiency whereas the latter focuses on student involvement. I prefer the latter, as it fosters innovation and critical thinking.



Group photo of CityU students



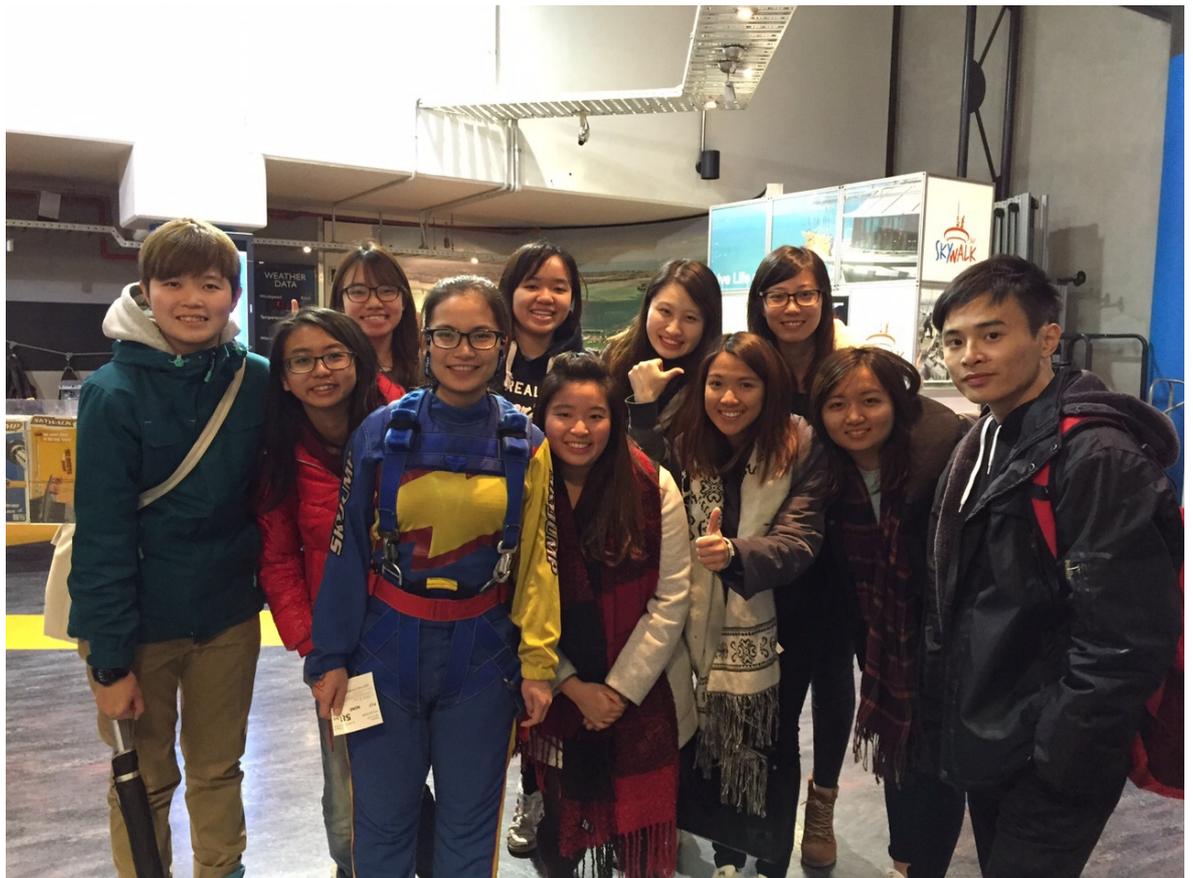
Teacher and overseas student at English Language Academy

Sky Jump in Auckland

This was my first sky jump from Auckland's sky tower, which is New Zealand's highest jump (192 meters). It was not as easy as I had thought. Still, I made it!



The last moment before the jump



Great support from friends