

## “Looking Back Before Graduation: What I Gained in New Zealand”

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In the spring of my second year of high school, I studied abroad in New Zealand (NZ) as an exchange student for seven months, from March to November. On the day of my departure, I felt a little anxious, but my sense of excitement was even stronger.

When I arrived at the airport in New Zealand, I still clearly remember how warmly and kindly I was welcomed. At first, conversations with my host family and at school felt extremely fast, and I could hardly understand anything. So, to improve my English, I decided to study on my own. In addition to daily conversations, I set aside time once a day to study English with my host mother. I especially focused on being able to express things I did not understand, asked about different ways of saying things and what sounded natural, and challenged myself to try many new things.

Later, international students from other countries began living with us, which deepened our interactions. By actively talking to local Kiwi students as well, I was able to become close friends with them naturally.

Through my study abroad experience, what I felt most strongly was that things I had thought were normal in Japan were not always the same overseas. For example, Japanese consideration and politeness can sometimes be felt as unnecessary or even bothersome. In contrast to that, I found the direct way of speaking, without being vague or giving false expectations, and the sense of freedom

