

■ 31st START Program (New Zealand)

For a little over two weeks from March 11th to the 28th of 2016, 30 first year students participated in the 31st START Program (*). Led by Aiko Morita (Associate Professor at the Graduate School of Education) and two other supervising faculty members, the students spent this time living and studying at the University of Auckland in New Zealand.

At University of Auckland's Faculty of Education, the students were split into three groups, each overseen by a faculty member, and had ESL (English as a Second Language) classes almost every morning. They studied everything from vocabulary, pronunciation, grammar, and conversational expressions to how to collect data, draft a report, and present their findings for the final presentation at the end of the program. During the afternoons, the students had lectures on New Zealand's history, education, and culture from professors in the Faculty of Education and also participated in regular classes with the local students. Although the students found it difficult to understand the English being used in a classroom environment at first, those who once seemed reluctant to voice their opinions learned about the importance of asking questions; soon enough, the classes became much more lively.

As a culmination of the program, the students gave group presentations on topics related to New Zealand, which they had begun working on while still in Japan. Each group came up with a brilliant presentation; having surveyed the local students and their host families and having made short videos about their time in New Zealand, the presentations received much praise from the local professors.

When the students visited a local elementary school to teach about Japanese culture, they were met with great success in the activities they had prepared. Thanks to their efforts pre-departure, and to the feedback from their professors while at University of Auckland, the students and the children were able to share a valuable, cross-cultural experience together.

As for extracurricular activities, the students traveled around various parts of Auckland, getting to see the magnificent natural beauty peculiar to New Zealand. Just to name a few places, they visited a museum, an inactive volcano, and an interactive facility that reproduces what it was like to live during the settlement period. What they had learned about New Zealand pre-departure cannot be

compared to what they experienced first-hand, exploring the history and culture of the country from various angles.

As in the previous two START Programs held in New Zealand, each student was placed with a host family. For many, this was their first time living with a host family, and thus some of the students had expressed anxiety before commencing their stays.

Although it took some time to adapt to English conversation, the students made an active effort to open up and fit in upon meeting their host families, and these two weeks were spent in a way that was both meaningful and enjoyable. When exchanging farewells upon their departure back to Japan, many of the students welled up in tears due to feeling reluctant to say goodbye but were thankful for all that was graciously provided to them by their host families in this new and unfamiliar environment. This was an experience of incredible value to the students, who were not only able to improve in their English speaking skills and learn about another culture, but also gained an understanding of what it is like to share a connection with and a fondness of another person in a way that transcends country and race.

After returning to Japan, the students each shared three minute presentations. Reflecting on their time in New Zealand, the students expressed the following: “I am interested in working abroad in the future”; “I have returned to Japan, and now my life as a university student will resume, but I will not forget my experiences in the START Program”; and “I will do whatever it takes to study abroad again—this time for even longer.” As one of the results of the program, the students have developed a determination to move forward in their student lives and toward their future goals, which have become more concrete after their experiences abroad.



English class



Talking with the local students



Introducing Japanese culture to elementary school children



During a trip in the outskirts of Auckland