Approaching my 4\textsuperscript{th} year of my Linguistics degree (although still nowhere near graduation), I was feeling antsy and ready to do something different with my schooling. I’ve also always had a hearty dose of wanderlust, but recently I’d been looking for something more in my travels than just clichéd tourist trails. So suddenly it hit me: the challenges and experiences of being an independent student in a foreign land was the perfect outlet for both frustrations! And thus I began planning my exchange immediately.

I chose Auckland because I’d always been fascinated by the South Pacific, both its environment and its peoples, but the University of the South Pacific in Fiji did not offer the courses I wanted. New Zealand was the next best thing, and I think in the end it turned out far better than I could have imagined. I was able to choose classes that were an excellent introduction to the South Pacific and New Zealand, especially from a linguistic point of view, such as Polynesian Comparative Linguistics, a course on English accents, Intro to Māori studies, and Intro Samoan. Auckland is centrally located for weekend trips, and New Zealand’s compactness enables you to see most of the country relatively easily. Trips further afield, to Pacific Islands or Australia, are also very easy and NZ is serviced by multiple budget airlines.

**Pre-Departure:**

**Tickets**
As soon as I was confirmed on exchange, I bought my tickets to New Zealand to take advantage of fare deals. As university started in mid-July, I decided to work for as long as I could, flying into Auckland just a few days before the beginning of the international orientation session (which I cannot recommend enough - it was an excellent (and free) introduction to the university, life in Auckland, activities to do in New Zealand, and an invaluable tool for making new friends - if you miss it you are really handicapping yourself). I decided to do my travelling on weekends throughout the semester, during the two-week mid-semester break and exam break, and after the completion of my exams, so I booked a return flight from Auckland, with a three day stopover in Sydney, for a few days before Christmas. Of course it’s also possible to just buy a one-way and then, once in New Zealand, buy your return ticket. Depending on your post-exam plans this may be a better option, but I found it cheaper and easier to have a set departure date and then plan around it, and flying back out of Auckland allowed me to keep my extra luggage with friends while I went travelling through the South Island. My ticket cost $1400 after taxes, which is about as good as it gets.

**Visas**
I sent my passport, $160 and the NZ student visa application (which is easily found on the NZ High Commission website) to the High Commission in Ottawa by express post, and I received it back in about a month. Make sure you do this as soon as
you are accepted, and also make sure your passport does not expire before at least six months after your intended return to Vancouver, or they may not grant it. Also, because this really confused me, the student visa is what you apply for here; the student permit is what you receive upon arrival at NZ customs (a stamp in your passport).

**Accommodation**

There are lots of different options for accommodation in Auckland, ranging from student residences with meal plans, self-catered residences, and townhouse-style shared flats, to independent budget hostels and flats. I did not want the hassle of finding a place when I got there (which is very possible and some international students did do this), so I opted for student residences. Make sure you apply as soon as you can, because most were full (it was also for second semester, so places were scarce to begin with), so I ended up in one of the only available residences, Huia, which is self-catered with an optional meal plan. It may not be the most beautiful residence in the world (we affectionately referred to it as Cell-block H), but I can highly recommend it for its close proximity to campus, groceries, and the Auckland Domain (big park), and for its large population of exchange students. Huia cost NZ$744 (CAD$600) per month, which included internet, and all rooms come with bedding, towels and kitchen accessories (pot, pan, utensils, plates and bowls).

**Application Process**

The UofA sent me a very detailed acceptance package with easy-to-follow directions for choosing my classes, getting my university email account, applying for orientation, navigating the website and applying to residence, and they offer a free transport pick-up from the airport to your accommodation (in fact I even met one of my best exchange friends on this transport, so always be ready to meet people!). The UofA has a huge inbound exchange and international student population, whom they treat very well, and the whole process was very straight-forward. No need to stress!

**Arrival:**

**The Country**

New Zealand is a stunningly beautiful country, with ample amounts of sweeping vistas, picturesque beaches, prehistoric tree-fern forests, emerald green farmland, surreal volcanic hotspots and snow-capped peaks. The enormous amount of tramping trails, camping areas, national parks and pest-free islands covered in native plants and birds is enough to make even the most hardened of city-slickers into a granola-munching, tree-hugging, freedom-camping tramper. That said, if you are coming to New Zealand to see cities and culture, you will be disappointed, unless you devote time to learning about the fascinating Maori culture. Auckland is a great city to live in, but those expecting a world city rich in culture like Rome, London or Tokyo are definitely on the wrong exchange. Winter in NZ is like our spring, or autumn, so bring warm and waterproof clothes, especially if you plan on visiting the South Island. Besides that, pack according to what you want to do while in NZ: bring your 110% waterproof winter jacket if you plan on doing lots of camping and tramping, bring your skis if you want to check out the Southern Hemisphere’s best snow, or whatever. I’m sure you’ll figure it out.
New Zealanders themselves are an infinitely likable lot. Their great sense of self-deprecating humour, love of rugby and quiet patriotism are immediately endearing. If I have any advice, though you would do this anyway, it is to live like a Kiwi: paint your face black and go to an All Blacks game, drink L&P, NZ wine and NZ beer, read the NZ Herald, go “op-shop” shopping on K-road, visit a Maori marae, do a wine-tasting on Waiheke Island, go surfing at Raglan, play some touch rugby in the Domain, watch Bro’Town, catch a live band at Danny Doolan’s, or whatever else you’ll discover. Oh man, I’m suddenly feeling all nostalgic writing these things down!

As for things to know, these are some of the most important:
1. NZ is pronounced “enzed”, not “enzee”.
2. Never refer to “North Island” or “South Island” without the definite article.
3. DOC (Department of Conservation) is pronounced “doc” not D-O-C
4. In Maori names, all letters are pronounced (there are no silent letters), ‘wh’ is pronounced with an ‘f’ sound, and ‘ng’ is pronounced like the ‘ng’ in ‘sing’, not ‘finger’.
5. They will try to persuade you to purchase a HANZ 18+ card to buy alcohol and get into bars, but it is overpriced and unnecessary; most places never even checked my ID. They often accepted my BC driver’s licence, and taking your passport with you on the odd occasion is fine unless you lose things really easily.

Finance
The National Bank of New Zealand, with a branch right on campus, offers a free short-term international student account, which enables you access to EFTPOS (debit), allowing you to pay with your bank card almost everywhere. I found it the simplest solution, as I never had to worry about ATM fees, transaction fees, or fluxes in currency, and the EFTPOS card meant I never had to carry large amounts of cash around. However, if you do decide to open an account, make sure you bring the amount of money you want as an International Money Order. Do not try to wire your money to NZ. I did this and I had a dickens of a time with TD bank because they wanted to see me in person at my Canadian branch to do the wire transfer, in contrast to what they had told me before I left. Only after much trouble and angry emails did they allow the transaction to go through. If you have any money left in your account at the end it’s super easy to wire transfer the money back to your Canadian account. Credit cards are accepted everywhere, but some establishments require you to pay an excess 2% on transactions. I spent a lot of money on my exchange, perhaps not as much as I thought I would, but after factoring in accommodation, food, and plane tickets, the whole cost was close to $8500 for five months. Obviously you can sit in your room every day and save, but that is not what exchange is about. Going out and doing things will cost money, but if you’re smart and look for discounts and cheap rates the dent in the bank account won’t weaken the knees too much. Don’t forget that everyone you’ll meet is a penny-pinching student too, so group trips are always budget affairs. NZ also happily includes the GST in the listed price, and has no tipping, so although prices may seem more, they work out to about the same as in Canada. Let’s see if I can remember the cost of some everyday things:
Budget meal (Kebab, Subway, take-away Indian, sushi): NZ$9-11
Meal in a restaurant: NZ$15-20
Meat Pie (The tastiest easy carb-load I’ve ever had the pleasure of eating): NZ$2-5
Movie ticket: NZ$13
Vodafone Cell Phone (cheapest): NZ$100
Prepay SIM Card per month: NZ ~ $20
Drinks at a downtown bar: NZ$5-9 pints of beer
Drinks at the campus Shadows Pub: NZ$8 litre of beer
Drinks bought at the supermarket: NZ$7-20 bottle of wine
Club Cover: $0! I happily never once paid a cover charge
Admission to most art galleries and museums: $0!
Bus Fares: 50c - NZ$5.00 depending on distance (also possible to get a student fare card)
Rental Cars: NZ$40 a day for weekend trips, can go as low as NZ$19 for long rentals.
Gas: NZ$50-60 for a full tank.
Walking: absolutely free, and downtown Auckland is compact and easy to walk around.

**Academics**

I found my university experience very similar to that of SFU. Marking schemes were much the same, based on a mix of participation, assignments, essays, mid-semester exams and the final exam. Most finals were worth 30-50% of the final grade. The university itself, a full 100 years older than SFU, is a beautiful mix of old brick and flashy new glass and steel buildings (with some ugly 60’s era concrete thrown in for those nostalgic for SFU). Its main self-contained campus is just a few minutes walk from downtown. There are ample amounts of green spaces and on a sunny day you can sit, rest and enjoy the varieties of birdlife and human-life on display. The information commons has many computers, the library is huge, and there are several food, convenience and outlet shops in the vibrant student commons.

**Social and Extra-curricular**

The UofA has many clubs, each one suited to a particular purpose, with the Tramping Club one of the most joined by international students. Clubs are also a good way to meet real Kiwis, as most of your friends will be other exchange students. I didn’t join any clubs, but many of my friends met each other in clubs and on tramping trips. The university fitness centre is excellent, with cardio, weights, gymnasium, a whole host of classes, a climbing wall and squash courts. Membership must be paid for, but if you live in a university residence you get free access to everything, including classes.

Almost every weekend I went away on a road-trip to different places in NZ, loading up an insanely cheap rental car (21 is the age to rent cars in NZ, although some places do rent to 18 year olds for an extra fee and there is so much competition that budget rates are very low) with four new friends, or soon-to-be friends, and hitting the motorway out of Auckland. Driving in NZ was brilliant, with hardly any cars on the well-signposted roads and dealing with fun things like driving on the left(!), roundabouts(!),
one-lane bridges(!), and possum road kill(!). Hostels are quite cheap, usually $20 - $30 a night, and all offer linen and excellent cooking facilities. I think, in a nutshell, NZ is the land of the road-trip, with its complete freedom of movement the best and cheapest way to see the country.

**Conclusion**

My exchange to New Zealand has easily been the best time of my life. I saw so many beautiful sights (such as the Tongariro Crossing) and I did many once-in-a-lifetime activities (like cheap skydiving). I expanded my education far beyond what I could learn at SFU and forged lasting friendships with people from all over Europe and the world. I lived as a Kiwi for 5 months, plunging myself completely into the NZ culture and environment. As such I’ve experienced life in another city, another country, another hemisphere, and I can now see and appreciate Vancouver and Canada from a new, worldly perspective. It’s tough to come back to my “real” life but I will always cherish my memories, and the exchange will live on with the new friends I shared it with. I wish you the best of luck on your own exchange, and congratulations on choosing New Zealand!
Native Bush - Coromandel Peninsula
The Clock Tower - University of Auckland
Mt. Ngauruhoe - Tongariro Crossing
A Silver Fern and me - Tiritiri Matangi

Maori Marae - Rotorua
Sunset with Friends on the West Coast - Karamea