



This week is Art Week in Auckland. Galleries and Museums have opened special exhibits all over the city, so I went to a couple. New Zealand has some great artists doing some incredible things. Most notably, I saw large black panels of paper folded and carved, like 9-foot paper snowflakes. Instead of geometric patterns though, these panels contained intricate designs of vines, trees and some hidden animals.

Art Galleries were a good indoor choice for this week because it has been raining pretty constantly. On arriving in Auckland, I expected some rain before getting into the summer months, but the weather here is definitely different than in California. It has rained at least half of the days since I arrived. The weather often switches between sunshine and strong down pours many times in one day. The crazy rain patterns are only one of the many differences between Auckland and Oakland.

Of course there are the little things. Like the big warehouse store here is called Cosco, not Costco. And the thick wavy chips are called Sunbites, instead of Sun Chips.

Another thing that actually throws me off a little is the way kiwis greet each other. Where I would say, "How are you doing" or "How's it going," people here ask, "How are you going?" At first I didn't really know how to answer the question because I wasn't exactly sure what they were asking. I later realized that most of the time they don't actually expect an answer, and may not even stick around to hear it anyway.

Then there are some bigger structural differences. Lacking states, the definitions of "area," "city," and "suburb" are different here. Particularly, providing a city name generally isn't specific enough. Suburbs, therefore, divide cities into smaller increments so that people can keep better track of locations within these comparatively large cities.

I've also noticed, that in order to find the good shops, malls and restaurants, you have to wander away from the streets. Each block is two or three times as long and wide as the ones at home, which leaves a lot of room in the middle of a block. In the city and more commercial areas, the space is filled with alleys and walking paths off the streets which hold seating areas and more storefronts. It took me a couple weeks to realize how much I was missing by staying on the roads.

The large blocks also affect the architecture in the more residential areas. The houses and buildings are often three or four deep toward the middle of the block, and accessed via long

driveways. This means that a lot of the buildings don't sit along the street, and can't be seen very easily from the outside. So lots of homes are very boring looking on the outside, and don't really have a front, which leaves room for making the insides of buildings more interesting. Most homes in Auckland have very modern interiors with fancy appliances. Though there aren't as many streets here, they have made good use of the space that is available.

In a lot of ways, Auckland is just a small scale Bay Area, and I haven't experienced much culture shock. But I have definitely also done a bit of getting used to in the last month.