



Feet on Solid Ground

9/20/17

It's been seven days (not including the day I lost on the way here). I've been staying on the edge of the city where I have found some cute cafes for breakfast, done some shopping, and made good use of the free wifi at the library. I think I'm starting to blend in.

Apparently, I don't sound out of place. One of the realtors I spoke with this week and the desk clerk at the hostel were surprised when I said I am from California. They don't seem to think I have a very strong accent. The desk clerk even said he would have guessed I was from New Zealand. I'm still trying to figure out why Kiwis sound different to me if I don't sound different to them, but I'll take it.

The money system here is pretty easy to get used to. The paper money is gorgeous. It comes in multiple bright colors: orange, purple, blue, and green; and depicts the cute animals that are native to New Zealand as well as important historic and political figures. On each there is a small spot of transparent material so you can actually see right through the money. The coins range from 5 cents to 2 dollars. In other words, when the price tag says \$19.99, it really does mean \$20. But the best part about the way people buy and sell in New Zealand is that tax is included in the prices. It doesn't feel like being taxed at all.

I've learned that it's very expensive to live in Auckland. The population is rising rapidly, and most of the buildings are new or recently renovated. Not only is rent really high, but clothing, food, and entertainment are all more expensive in the center of the city than in more rural areas. I'll be staying in a boarding house in a quiet neighborhood with eight other flatmates about an hour from the city by bus. It's far enough that I can afford it for a while, but close enough that I can get to the city whenever I want to. Someone I spoke to at the library mentioned that the big suburb near the boarding house is considered the bad part of Auckland. I laughed when I saw the area. It looked beautiful, quiet, and friendly to me.

I've applied to so many jobs that all of Auckland must know I've arrived. A few employers have gotten back to me, and after sifting through the offers that didn't sound at all interesting or fun, I'll be taking a job decorating commercial areas for the holidays. It'll be low stress and entertaining. I can't wait to find out what holiday decorations look like in a country where the holidays happen in the summer.

The people in Auckland are so kind. It seems part of the language is to talk with a smile. Almost every person you pass on the street will say "heya," or "g'day." Conversation seems to still be more prominent here than the phone huddling that goes on at home. If they get a chance they'll tell you about whatever they're excited about at the moment.

The accent is cutest on the kids. At the library I heard a girl and her mother singing a version of The Itsy Bitsy Spider that I had never heard before. In the accent they sang, "The itsy bitsy spider went up the water spout, down came the snow and clogged up the top." I guess it really wouldn't make sense for those to be the lyrics in California. Aside from having more dramatic weather, New Zealand really is laid-back friendly little country.