

Letitia Stenberg's Seattle Experience

On the 19th of September 2006, Ben Spink, Gabby Petherham and I left from Christchurch airport heading for our destination, Seattle, which was to be an amazing adventure and trip of a life time.

I applied for the Christchurch/Seattle Sister City Exchange Programme just before the term 2 holidays. The process was simple: I just had to fill out an application, send a reference and write a 300 word essay about why I wanted to go to Seattle and how I would promote my school, Christchurch and New Zealand. Having been short listed, I was then interviewed and informed of my acceptance on the same night. I had expected an interview in a board room with a panel of judges wearing black and white suits, but my preconceptions were proven wrong as the interview was relatively casual and certainly not something to fret over.

Seattle, Washington is located in the north-west of the United States of America and is about a two hour drive south of Vancouver, Canada.

Attending an American high school had been a dream which I have had for many years, as I was inspired by chic-flick movies such as "Bring It On". Having been exposed to high school life in the USA, I now realize that they are not entirely realistic, but what we see on television on a regular basis certainly does demonstrate some aspects typical of the high school we attended, University Prep. For example, we experienced the lunch room where students carry around trays at recess, and the 'Club Fair' where students promote their club (e.g. Tailgate Club where you go to high school sports games and cheer on the school team) in the school hall, however to my dismay...University Prep High School did not have cheer leaders.

All of the senior students and teachers were very welcoming to the visiting Kiwis, frequently taking us out to experience American food such as 'Caribbean Combo' flavoured fruit smoothies at 'Jamba Juice', a fresh fruit smoothy chain store. While I'm on the subject of food, I would like to share briefly with you my love for Starbucks apple fritters (it is like a glazed donut with apple pieces in it) which I took much delight in purchasing...every day! In addition to Starbucks donuts, I also adopted an admiration for Krispey Kremes donuts which by no means can compare to those we have in New Zealand. And...American pizza was absolutely mouth-watering with a thin base, a thick, puffy crust, scrumptious toppings and not to mention their largeness i.e. a regular size pizza was at least twice the size of New Zealand's large pizzas!

Seattle, the "Emerald City", is indeed another location which boasts nature at its finest as it shares many features of its environment and scenery with Christchurch itself. Seattle is truly a beautiful city which made our stay even more enjoyable. Its physical beauties such as Lake Union and Lake Washington indeed complemented our overall impression of Seattle. We visited many of the tourist attractions such as the Pike Place Market, the original Starbucks, the Experience Music Project museum (dedicated to Jimmy Hendrix), the University of Washington and the Boeing Airline Factory (just to name a few).

The most interesting thing I thought about Seattle's culture is how knowledgeable and public people are about politics. I had many discussions with my host family and people who we met about whether or not he or she was a liberal, republican, conservative or democratic.

There are so many opportunities by going on this exchange which you wouldn't get if you were just visiting as a regular tourist; for example, we attended a meeting with the Mayor of Seattle as the main speaker and a few Congressmen at the Mayor's Budget Speech, going to an All-American high school and of course living with an All-American family. I stayed in an area called 'Arroyo Beach' in West Seattle on the beach front with an All-American family; Marcie (my host mom), Gerry (my host dad), Kerry (their daughter), and their Portuguese Water dog, Porscha. They were truly lovely towards me and were very generous in the time they gave and the places they took me to, for example the Snow Patrol concert, a Gospel Church, the Space Needle (a rotating restaurant, Seattle's main attraction) and they very kindly organized for us to go and see one of Gerry's court cases. I intend to keep in touch with all of them.

And...the best part about the trip is that it was almost expense free, apart from personal spending money, as organizations were more than happy to provide financial assistance in such a rewarding venture. I am very grateful for the financial assistance Riccarton Rotary Club, the Christchurch City Council and Christchurch Lions Chinese provided as it made this trip possible for me.

Our trip to Seattle in 2006 was indeed an unforgettable experience, and I'm sure both Ben and Gabby would agree that it was an eye opener to the world outside of New Zealand as we encountered a different culture and lifestyle. Seattle is definitely a destination at the top of my 'to go to' list when I have the chance to explore the world.

Letitia Stenberg
2006 Seattle Scholar