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In July I was fortunate enough to travel to the south island of New Zealand for two weeks in exchange for a student from Otago University's Rural Medical Immersion Program (RMIP). It was a short but busy trip which I thoroughly enjoyed. A 3 hour flight from Melbourne to Christchurch was followed by a bumpy 40 minute flight on a 19 seat plane to Blenheim. There I was met by two RMIP students I would be living with, as well as Dr Buzz

Burrell, an iconic rural GP in the South Island who put together my itinerary. We wasted no time, heading straight for the pub and sampling some local kiwi beers which were surprisingly drinkable!

The RMIP is for 5th year medical students and is similar to our year long placement in East Gippsland. Their time is split between a range of isolated rural GP practises, as well as Paediatrics, Obstetrics, Gynaecology, Emergency medicine and Orthopaedics.

During the first week I learnt a lot about how the New Zealand health system operates, spending 2 days on orthopaedics and 3 days in the emergency department. The real advantage of this hospital is that there are only 4 students and no registrars. This allows the students and residents to gain fantastic experience and teaching from consultants.

On the first night I was told to go to a nearby pub with one of the other students and await a call from Buzz, who in collaboration with the local fire brigade had orchestrated a simulated car crash scenario, where we were to employ first responder emergency medicine. It was bitterly cold, and pitch black, requiring us to triage patients based on severity of injury in difficult conditions. It was an invaluable experience.



The most striking difference that the healthcare system in NZ has compared with ours is the Accident Compensation Corporation (ACC). This is essentially a no fault compensation scheme for accident and injury to anybody hurt on New Zealand soil, regardless of the mechanism of injury, excluding natural aging. I had no choice but to learn how this system worked, as a large proportion of patients presenting to emergency required ACC forms to be filled in (absolutely the student's job!)

I spent the rest of the week on orthopaedics, great experience as I was the only assistant. This meant I was frequently able to suture, and in one case perform a procedure myself, cutting, popping and draining an elbow cyst, which although disgusting was great fun!



Blenheim residents are very proud of the fact that their town of 30,000 people is the most sunny place in New Zealand. The downside of clear days is clear (and freezing) mornings! The coldest was negative 3, so cold. However the upside to ever present sunshine is perfect conditions for wine making. Blenheim is right in the middle of the Marlborough region, which most

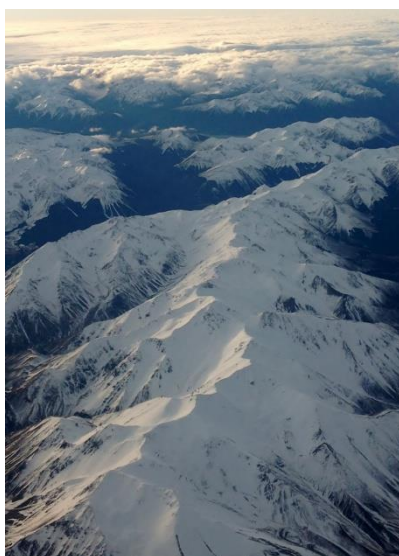
Australians will have heard of for their famously delicious Sauvignon Blanc.

On the weekend I got my tourist on and went on a winery tour. We visited 6 in total, the most famous of which was Giesen. It was a great day, and after about 40 samples we were in good spirits to continue the Trans-Tasman cultural experience and watch some AFL. On the weekend we also visited some surrounding towns. Nelson is a town of 60,000 people about 100ks from Blenheim. It is surrounded by national parks and nice beaches. Picton is a small town half an hour from Blenheim that offers stunning views of the Marlborough Sounds, an extensive network of sea-drowned valleys at the top of the south island.



Week 2 was road trip time, heading 130ks south to a beachside town of 3,000 people called Kaikoura. With the ocean on one side of the road and snow capped mountains on the other, it was a highly enjoyable and picturesque drive to work! In Kaikoura the medical students stay in the house of one of the town GPs. Not sure what to expect, this only heightened the overall experience, with delicious home cooked meals, table tennis games, as well as ocean and mountain views from the kitchen.

The practise is attached to a small 20 bed hospital run by the GPs, all highly skilled generalists, as the nearest tertiary hospital is more than two hours away. This, coupled with a volunteer ambulance service, means the GPs are called to many 111 (000) calls, including car crashes, heart attacks, births etc. and as the student you are called as well. I saw some interesting chest pain and seizure presentations throughout the week. During the days at clinic I saw every second patient by myself, which the GP would then wave consult. It was a very flexible, laid back set up, allowing student consultations to run for as long as required; 5 minutes in the case of a common cold, up to in one case 40 minutes with an interesting Type 1 diabetic patient. I saw a number of Maori patients in Kaikoura and was able to learn a bit about their culture as well.



Kaikoura is also a tourist hub, so I took an afternoon off to do a whale watch, which as an industry keeps the town going. We saw two sperm whales in what was a very unique and enjoyable experience. There was also a waterfall just out of town with 40-50 baby seals swimming around in the pool of water at the bottom.

I returned to Blenheim and flew home amidst scenic views of snowy mountain ranges and clear blue ocean. Overall it was a wonderful two weeks, both for my education, being able to learn about another health care system and to gain such hands on experience, and also to have some time to be a tourist. I'd like to thank the East Gippsland Clinical School for the opportunity, as well as everyone in Blenheim and Kaikoura who made the trip so memorable. The exchange is a fantastic initiative between the two universities and I hope it continues into the future.