

1. What was your first day in your host country like? What about your first day at the internship site? Did your pre-departure expectations match reality?

Before arriving in Christchurch, New Zealand I was finishing up a previous internship in Sydney, Australia. Due to this, many of the previous concerns regarding traveling to a new country weren't as elevated as it was for my arrival in Australia. I believe this made for an interesting experience going from one country straight to another. The flight was fairly easy and only took about 3 hours. Fortunately for me, my host site manager volunteered to pick me up from the airport. I was originally going to take an uber, but her picking me up saved me a lot of stress and some money. From the airport, she did a quick drive around the city showing me an overview of general places and things that would be beneficial for me to know. We went to a grocery store near my housing site and to the library (that is also a post office) to buy a metrocard that I would use for the bus. In Christchurch, I was staying with a host family and found them through an organization that works with New Zealand Internships. The program is, funnily enough, called "Host Families" and I filled out an application that they would use to match me up with a proper family. It was a bit difficult due to my dietary restrictions and with Christchurch being a smaller city. They were able to pair me with a lovely couple in their 30's that could work with my dietary restrictions and were in a good location near a shopping center and bus stop. I got dropped off at their house near dinner time and was able to have my first meal with them.

The timing of the start of my internship was interesting. I had purposely arrived a couple days earlier (on a Wednesday), so I would have some time to get settled in and explore the city a little bit. Due to the Queen's death however, the following Monday became a public holiday and I didn't start my internship until the day after. Before my first day, both my supervisor and host family helped set me up with the public transportation here. They told me that it may be a little difficult to navigate since Christchurch is a smaller city which causes the buses to run less frequently. I come from a small city and had just been in Sydney, so I didn't expect this to be a big issue at all. As it turns out, I somehow missed the second bus I was supposed to transfer to because of a delay on the first bus. This meant that I would have to wait an entire hour before catching the next bus. I rerouted my map and caught the next bus that would take me as close to my internship as possible. From there, I contacted my manager as she told me to let her know if I had any issues. Graciously, she picked me up and I finally arrived at my internship! It was a humbling experience, but it allowed me to see what the others were referring to in terms of transportation.

Like most first days, I received a ton of information and met quite a few people. The work atmosphere is friendly and not as big as I would expect. I got trained on health & safety for working on the wildlife reserve and got a tour of the animal enclosures I would be working in. This is when I found out that I get to work with the amazing kiwi bird! I learned how to clean their enclosures and feed them. I also got introduced to Operation Nest Egg which is a breeding program that Willowbank works on with the New Zealand Department of Conservation. Kiwi eggs are brought in from the wild and the chicks are raised until they can safely return to their habitat. There were a couple of eggs in at the moment, as it is breeding season. I overall communicated about the plans for this day with the wildlife reserve manager the week prior. I would say that my pre-departure expectations exceeded reality as everyone I encountered was extremely helpful and enthusiastic to show me around.

2. How did your impressions of the host culture and internship site change over time? What are some of the biggest differences you encountered?

The workplace culture at my host organization is very collective. Everyone has each other's backs and is willing to help in different situations even if it does not benefit them or it's not their job to do. Everyone takes their breaks together and won't leave until everyone else is done with their work. This is different from what I am used to because at home, it is more individualistic. We don't take our breaks together and everyone mainly focuses on the work they are assigned to. That is not to say we will not help each other, but it is not to the extent that people help each other here. This is reflective of the host country culture as it is much more laidback and overall kinder. Due to the collective nature of my internship site, when I first started I found myself feeling a little bit out of place as it felt like everyone already had their own circles. As time went on however, I started to connect more with the others. I got invited to play board games with a group and would sometimes play board games with the others during our breaks.

In regards to the overall host culture, everyone in New Zealand seems to be very lenient with time. I've noticed this with work, public transportation and just in general when making plans with locals here. I am so used to the punctual and fast-paced lifestyle in the US that this appeared to be a shock to me. No one appeared to be in an obvious rush to get places or do things. I was also shocked by the work-life balance here. Being used to doing nothing after work due to being so tired, it was interesting when I would go out into town over the week and see places almost as busy as they would be over the weekends. Both of these things took me a while to get used to, but once I started to get the hang of it and understand what it entailed to live life in a different way that focused more on experiences rather than materialistic items, I was able to learn so much more about myself. Elements of this lifestyle I would also like to implement into my lifestyle when I arrive back in the US and get into the routine of things again.

Additionally, my top cross-cultural goal was to learn more about Māori culture during my time in New Zealand as this might have been one of the biggest cultural differences I encountered. Since then, I have managed to learn basic Māori, such as "hello" being "kia ora". I have also learned about the cultural significance of certain statues in Christchurch. While these statues represent aspects of New Zealand culture, they are oftentimes integrated into Māori culture in some formats. Again, I am able to recognize that New Zealand as a whole is moving more towards acknowledging the Native people of this land. For this reason and others, New Zealand is in the consideration of being called "Aotearoa", as a whole, since this is a Māori name. Some new goals I have now, to continue to expand my cross-cultural development, would be primarily through traveling. I find that this is a way where I can resonate the most with cultural differences. I acknowledge that travel may not always be a possibility, but even listening to other people talk about their cultures has proved to be educational. My journey through learning more about New Zealand culture has mainly been by asking and just talking with others. Most, if not all times, people are more than happy to share about their experiences and overall culture.

3. Considering the entire experience, what were the most important benefits of your internship -personally and professionally?

Overall, zoo keeping and working with animals in general appears to be glamorized in the media. It can lead to misconceptions of what these jobs really entail. From an outside perspective, it looks like working with animals is cuddly and fun, but in reality it involves tons of cleaning, enclosure maintenance and food preparation. I would say about 15% of the work involves actually interacting with the animals in the form of visual health checks. Personally, I was able to identify the parts that I enjoyed: connecting with the animals along with watching them interact with the forms of enrichment we set in their enclosures. It can

be quite satisfying seeing their curious faces as they explore new things in their area. Another part of the work I particularly enjoy is the medical aspect where we are able to see animals improve, healthwise. I also did some work at the wildlife animal hospital and had the chance of releasing birds back into the wild. Moments like those make the other 85% of the husbandry work worth it and makes it rather enjoyable work. On the other hand, some aspects of my work that I find particularly challenging would be the manual labor to maintain the enclosures. For example, there was a time when I had to unclog the running water enclosures for it to properly run through the park. It wasn't enjoyable work and oftentimes not what people consider as a part of zoo keeping. Despite this, I have been able to learn so much about myself. Due to it being such a demanding job, both the small and big tasks have been rewarding. I've learned how to push myself out of my comfort zone in a way as to not burn myself out. I've also learned how to maintain compassion both for myself and the animals I am working with. In the midst of it all, I think it can be easy to lose sight of why we do the work that we do. For example, working with the kiwi birds required many precautionary measures to be taken both when handling them and their materials. These measures involved changing into different coats/shoes, washing hands in-between birds, double cleansing dishes and strict handling protocols. At some points, it seemed a bit excessive and repetitive having to go through all the motions. I had to remember however, that New Zealand is the only country in the world where these flightless birds are native to and their survival is crucial in means far beyond the wildlife reserve. I learned to keep the broader picture in mind and realize that while my work may only seem small, it is still important to the grand scope of things. This type of mentality was also beneficial for me as I moved to the zoo section. Again, it seemed like a lot of routine work when feeding and doing animal husbandry, but day by day I could sense these animals building their trust in me. By the end of my internship, one of the capuchins got comfortable enough with me to sit on my lap as I fed him peanut butter (it was a distraction as we were trying to weigh them and he kept hogging the scale). The capybara also trusted me enough to take food out of my hand as he stood on the scale and was weighed for the first time. Both of these instances can be tied to being both the most challenging and rewarding aspect of the experience.

Furthermore, some important professional benefits would be the confidence I gained with handling animals. Ever since I started this internship, I identified how my confidence grew along with my abilities to work with a variety of animals. I used to be wary of hurting animals or not being able to do it adequately which would cause some shortcomings when it came to the handling aspect. This would then lead to not only myself, but the animal being stressed. Now I've learned how to just go for it and be open to learning from others with more experience. I have been able to translate components from my previous experiences over to handling certain animals. There was a time when I had to handle a kea bird as it was being banded, and the keeper said this particular individual could be hard to handle and asked if I was comfortable. I decided I would give it a try and even used some of the handling skills I learned from the wildlife hospital to do so. We were successful and I was also able to bring up a good point when handling kea to the keeper. Moments like this not only highlight my growth, but can be mutually beneficial for everyone involved. I have since also learned about the various elements that go into conservation work and how it may not be as glamorized or as straightforward as one would imagine. Having spent my Friday's at the wildlife hospital, where I was able to put together many of my skills, forming a bridge between Veterinary medicine and animal husbandry, was also extremely beneficial.

Three other significant things that I have learned about my field of interest from this experience would be: animal husbandry requires a lot of trial & error (there are still a lot of unknowns in regards to certain animals

in captivity), how to properly handle and crop feed a variety of birds, and the importance of enrichment and interaction with animals in captivity. Like many aspects of Veterinary Medicine, there is not much research that is able to be done due to many confounding variables and small sample sizes. This means that flexibility and a unique problem solving approach are necessary when working with animals. This is the same for animal husbandry as we move forward and learn new things. Furthermore, basic handling will always be essential to know, even as the veterinarian. This can decrease stress levels, but also allow procedures to move along more efficiently. I used to have mixed emotions when it came to zoos, especially animals in captivity, but after seeing how multifaceted it is and the amount of education that can come from physically seeing an animal, I have now gained a new view.

In terms of non-work-related things, a lot of this had to do with sorting out my emotions when it came with working with animals. While this can still seem work related, I found that a lot of the times I carried those emotions back home with me. Emotions of feeling tired or compassion fatigue. I had to learn how to disconnect myself from certain scenarios such as death or an animal harming me. Learning how to deal with these emotions however, then carried into my personal life as well. This also was a challenging part of this internship, but later it ended up bearing the fruit of reward; as most things that take hard work do. My personal goal was to get the most out of this internship by working hard and staying involved. Since then, I would say I have personally developed in ways that went beyond the internship. I made it a point of getting out of my comfort zone and making friends outside of the internship. I have been more self-assured in advocating for myself when I felt the need to do so. I think what allowed me to grow in these ways is being in a country far away from my usual support system. Here, I realized it has always been up to me to change the things I was unhappy with. I want to continue to work on these skills when I get home as to continue to expand this aspect of my personal development. I can also note that I am able to better manage my emotions when things don't go as planned, as I have also realized that there are some things that simply cannot be controlled. All of these skills will be useful in ways that expand from my personal life and can also reinforce my relationships with others. Going forward, I think some new goals that I may have would be to continue to get out of my comfort zone and do things alone, but also continuing to live in the present moment and adapt to possible changes.

4. Describe your daily routine for workdays and weekends

During my time at Willowbank, I worked in three different sections that all had different daily routines: the kiwi section, zoo section and at the South Island Wildlife Hospital. However, I spent the majority of my internship in the kiwi section where the work schedule would really only deviate if there is an emergency with the kiwi birds/eggs.

6:00 am-6:30am: Wake-up and get ready for the day

6:30-7:20 am: Eat breakfast, drink a cup of coffee, and pack my lunch

7:20 am-7:40 am: Walk to the bus stop and take the first bus to the shopping center

7:40 am-8:30am: Wait for the second bus

8:30am-8:50am: Transfer to second bus and walk to my section in the natives area

8:50 am-9:30 am: Food prep for all kiwi birds. Includes cutting/grating fruits and veggies, mixing raw meat and weighing different amounts for each bird.

9:30am-10:30am: Clean poop in the nocturnal house, refill/clean water bowls, conduct visual health checks of the kiwi, replace old food with new food and administer any necessary medications.

10:30am: Open nocturnal house for the public.

10:30-10:45am: *Smoko (morning tea break) with other keepers in the natives section*

10:45 am-12:00pm: Generally, finish all food preparation. Start husbandry tasks in kiwi pens/begin the cleaning process of all dishes used during food preparation.

12:00-12:30pm: *Lunch with all keepers from all sections*

12:30-1:00pm: Finish any outstanding morning tasks and aid with turning eggs.

1:00pm-3:00pm: Setting up enrichment activities for the kiwi birds, washing dishes and starting food prep for the next day

3:00pm-3:15pm: *Second smoko (afternoon tea break) with other keepers in the natives section*

3:15pm-3:45pm: Administer afternoon medications, feed all kiwi birds and clean whatever I can before leaving

3:50pm-5:00pm: Commute home involving two busses

Generally, days at Willowbank can be especially busy during kiwi breeding season as we had many eggs and wild kiwi chicks that would come in after working hours. There have been times where I have been at Willowbank past 9:00 pm. I've also had other scenarios where I could have stayed later to watch some other arrivals. I am finding my work/life balance by prioritizing the observations of new/interesting cases and keeping in mind that sometimes it may not be necessary for me to stay late. This has been hard for me to work on as my mindset has always been to work hard and get the most out of an experience as I can, but there comes a point where this can lead to burn out. Similar to most professions, it can be easy to be so deeply involved and dedicate hours on end to working. There were days where the tasks seemed endless and staying later seemed like the only solution, but for me personally, I know this will lead to burn out quicker and I won't be able to work as efficiently as I would if I gave myself breaks and time to take a step back. I'm still trying to figure out how to find this balance and oftentimes found myself worrying about whether I should be putting in all these extra hours as I came all the way across the world for this experience. That is why over the weekends, I make it a point to explore a new place and/or walk around after work. I think it's good practice and habit making now so that I can implement these skills later on in my career.

5. What were the biggest challenges you faced during your internship? How did you overcome these?

During my time in New Zealand, I was living with a host family that is close to the city, but far from Willowbank. I enjoyed aspects of being with a host family, as I don't have to worry about making dinner or grocery shopping for things other than lunch items and snacks. They are tremendously understanding of my dietary restrictions and cook hearty and delicious meals. Being a couple that also enjoys the outdoors, they also took me on some of their overnight trips. I've been able to go kiwi tramping (which is essentially extreme hiking/backpacking), camping and explored some of New Zealand's beautiful National Parks. However, they do have their own groups of friends and things they like to do as a couple, so I find myself spending a lot of time by myself and exploring things on my own.

I wouldn't necessarily call it a dislike, but one of the things I enjoyed the most about Sydney was that my living accommodation housed different interns/students/people from different places. It was a sort of a hostel situation which made it easy to meet new people and hang out at the end of the day with each other. In Christchurch, one of the challenges I faced was being the only intern with New Zealand Internships (NZI) and living with a host family made it hard to make new friends. I have compared where I was socially between here and Sydney in time (one month) and found that by this point, I had met tons of new people in Sydney. I do enjoy traveling on my own and getting out of my comfort zone by doing things independently,

but I would enjoy it if I could do these activities with others. It's the small things like having someone who can take pictures of me that I can send to my family or splitting a meal in order to try different things. I have realized that I like to be around people and that doing things on my own and getting out of my comfort zone every single day can be draining. I had to get out of my comfort zone and go more out of my own way to figure out a way to meet more friends. Keeping this in mind, some advice that I would give future interns at my site regarding housing is trying to pinpoint your priorities. If you're like me, and want to meet new people and explore new places with others who are in the same situation as you, then I would try to find somewhere with more students/international people. On the other hand, if you are quite happy with spending most of your time alone/want to focus primarily on your internship, then living on your own or with a host family can be beneficial.