

Komatsu University 2020 Four-Week Intensive English Study Tour to Auckland, New Zealand

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Six students from Komatsu University travelled to Auckland, New Zealand on February 15, 2020 to participate in an intensive four-week English language study program at the University of Auckland's English Language Academy. All six students had just completed two years of study at Komatsu University and were required to sit two rounds of placement testing, one conducted electronically in Komatsu in December prior to departure, the second conducted in Auckland on the first day of orientation. I accompanied them on their travel there and remained for one week to observe classroom teaching, liaise with the students to ensure that they were settling in to their study and homestay situations smoothly, and meeting with the English Language Academy administrative heads to discuss future study tour plans.

We arrived at Auckland International Airport in the early morning of February 16, where after purchasing New Zealand SIM cards and passing through New Zealand immigration and customs formalities, the six students were met in the arrival lobby by a representative of the English Language Academy and then taken away by shuttle van to their respective host families who resided in different parts of the city. The next morning we all met up again at the English Language Academy, where we discovered that Komatsu University was only one of a total of 15 Japanese universities that had sent students to participate in the same four-week program. The first order of business, after a warm welcome from the Academy, was the sitting of the second placement test in order to determine which of the five available levels of instruction was appropriate for each of the approximately 350 students, the vast majority of whom were Japanese. Three of our students placed into Intermediate (level three), while the other three placed into Pre-Intermediate (level two). Once placed into a particular level, students were then enrolled into two different courses, one course reinforcing grammar, the other reinforcing oral expression and presentation skills. Both courses met every day, Monday through Friday.

Because class sizes were strictly limited to a maximum of twenty students, each level had multiple parallel classrooms of fifteen to twenty students each, most, but not all of whom, were Japanese. Also, one of the strictly enforced rules in the classroom was that only English was ever allowed to be used. One way the Academy aimed to push Japanese students to break out of their comfort zone and only use English to communicate with other Japanese classmates was to make sure that no two students from the

same Japanese university would ever be in the same classroom together. This seemed to work very well in my visits to the classroom, where even pair work was lively and in English only.

Every other Saturday the Academy organize a day tour to a given tourist destination. Our students ended up participating on a day trip to Hobiton, one of the sites created for the filming of the movie series *Lord of the Rings*. Students also made full use of their weekends and other free in the Southern Hemisphere summer to explore Auckland together themselves or with their host families, visiting Auckland Zoo, different beaches, cafes and restaurants. Some of the student feedback I received included:

Student 1: “At the school, I had two classes. The first class was mainly grammar lessons. There were 15 students. I made pair or group and make some sentences and speak with group using the day’s grammar. The second class was a presentation lesson. There were 16 students. I did a presentation every Friday. I liked first class because the class was really active. There were 11 Japanese students and 4 students from another country. So, we talked a lot.”

Student 2: “I learned expressions and communication in the first class and learned presentation in the second class. I could speak English a lot in the classes and enjoyed communicating with the teacher and classmates. In my free time, I visited many places. I used public transportation and stayed with a host family, so I could experience the real life in Auckland that I couldn’t experience by just traveling. It was a very valuable experience for me.”

Student 3: “I could communicate with other countries people in that class. Especially it was very fun for me that we would make a group each and did a presentation as a reporter. I stayed at the host family house and enjoyed talking with the host family about the things that happened that day. I also ran around town a lot. It was very exciting to watch some different views from Japan every day.”

Student 4: “I was satisfied with this program because I experienced things that are irreplaceable and precious. When we were in school we were able to take a class with foreign students. That was good because all conversations in class could only use English. So we had so many opportunities to talk with classmates in English. On the other side, daily life was also enjoyable time. Hanging out with friends, visiting some sightseeing locations, shopping, just chilling out and more...Anyway, I thought everything was beyond my expectation. One month is short but you’ll find something that is important while enjoying New Zealand.”