

Exchange to New Zealand, fall 2017

Hi!

My name is Ragnhild Følling-Volden and I was lucky enough to be the first HiØ (NTA) student to exchange to Toi Whakaari School of Dance and Drama in New Zealand.

Toi Whakaari is the oldest drama school in New Zealand with almost 50 years on its back. The school is located in Wellington, the capital of NZ, one of the most beautiful and generous cities I have ever experienced!



Normally, in Norway, I study Scenography at the Norwegian Theatre Academy, and I wanted to find something similar to study abroad to help me get a new look at the field. Pure luck made me get in touch with Toi, where they have a course called Design. This course lets its students explore different types of design, like stage, costume and film. I was placed with the graduating students and was lucky enough to follow them all the way until grad day! This meant a very hectic, interesting and challenging time, as they were all deep in their final projects, making movies and designing a show. I was put in charge of designing props for their final show, *Once On This Island*, and together with two of my peers we designed props, stage and costume.

I didn't get a lot of introduction to how the school year was going to be as they were all deep in it when I arrived (They graduate in November, I arrived in July) but it was easy enough to learn the schedules and to get around the school. Where I am used to having 5-20 people around me, this school had almost 200 students divided into Design, Costume, Management, Tech and Acting. (From January of, Tech will also be exchanged with a props-course!) The students were all extremely helpful, and throughout the semester I made a lot of new friends!



Traveling down to New Zealand took approx. 24 hours, including some waiting time in Dubai. I chose to land in Auckland, a town North in New Zealand, and then travel down to Wellington with train. I had about a week before school started and wanted to take some time to look around before school began. I highly recommend that train ride, which took 7 hours. There is so much amazing nature in this country!

When I finally arrived in Wellington, I was picked up by my flatmate Sophie. The school doesn't have its own student housing and I had to look for my own flat, which I found through a facebook page called Vic Deals. (I recommend anyone going to Wellington to be a part of this group! You can find anything from flats, furniture, experiences and friends there!) I did struggle a little to find a place to stay, but luckily Sophie contacted me and said I could sleep on their couch until I found a place. Luck had it that their other flatmates were moving while I was staying there and I could take over their room and stay in this flat for the rest of the semester! Even though it was a 45 minute walk to school, I am happy I stayed! Rent was fairly cheap, around 1000 NOK/week and as I was told, the housing situation in Wellington is «Shit», so I was very lucky!

Wellington is a city with an amazing culture, and in the main street, Cuba Street, you will always experience something new! The street is like a shopping street, but with food instead of clothes, plus some hidden gems like shops with handmade decorations and a lot of second hand shops. The city center is big, but also condensed at the same time, with a 5 min walk to an amazing beach and the same to the Te Papa museum where Peter Jackson's Weta Workshop often participate in the exhibitions. (I think I went to that museum ten times...)

If you want to go out to drink one night, there is a whole street filled with all kinds of bars, crossing into Cuba street. Or you could stroll through the Saturday markets with food vendors and booths of handmade jewellery! You can walk through New Town to explore the multicultural environment, and since Wellington is basically nothing but hills, there are a lot of amazing hikes!

Including museums like Te Papa and the Space Observatory, they also have a beautiful zoo where you can experience the exciting wildlife, see the in-house animal hospital and even feed some of the animals! I got to feed a giraffe, my favourite animal!

When you are in New Zealand, I highly recommend to set some time off to travel to the South Island, where you will be able to see glaciers! If you want to see some newer history, you can go to Christchurch, which still carries deep traces from the devastating 2011 earthquake. They also have some amazing museums, and is a lot flatter than Wellington.. They even have their own Wizard, walking around in the streets!

At the end of my stay, I had a week of traveling. I was planning on spending that week hiking through the national Park, but I ended up staying at an Island outside of Auckland, called Waihiki. This was really paradise on earth, with (finally) hot climate and beautiful nature. Everywhere you go in New Zealand the nature will astound you!

After having spent two years at NTA it felt good to get away for a bit. My class is fairly small, with only five students, and I felt like I needed to get some new input from other people and I really got that from Toi! This was my first time ever going on exchange and I genuinely recommend everyone to try it out at one point, even just for some months! Getting to experience a new culture, getting new friends and realise that there are other ways to learn things in my field than how we do it at NTA is something I would never be without! And coming to Wellington is definitely the right choice as there are many young and friendly people there, so many students! (There are two other Unis there as well, Massey and Vic.)

I have gotten a new network of people I can learn from and hopefully collaborate with later, and stories for life!

If you are curious to know more, please don't hesitate to contact me:
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Ragnhild





