THE EXCHANGE JOURNAL

The October Edition.

SETTLING IN



31/10/2025

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A message from the Editors...

Thank you to everyone who submitted articles and photos to the first 2025/6 Exchange Journal: Settling In.

It has been a joy editing and workshopping your pieces, and we can't wait to watch this project grow. Without the creativity, humour and insight that you bring to your submissions, we wouldn't be able to approach this editorial with all the dreams and ideas that we do, so thank you.

Most importantly, we hope our readers have as much fun as we did learning of all the wild and whimsical things you're getting up to on your year abroad schemes, and we look forward to seeing what you hand in next.

Until next time...

The Exchange Journal Team

JUST KEEP SWIMMING

ELLE LONGSTAFF

IN THE SPRING
my friends and I fell in love with wild swimming. We spent most of April in the water, from reservoirs in the pentlands to the Scottish sea. I have carried both the memory of this and the activity itself with me on my exchange to Australia, and have found comfort in the familiarity of the cold water and the waves. Different oceans elicit the same feelings: they are grounding, refreshing, simultaneously relaxing and exhilarating.

Attitudes towards the ocean have been one of my first experiences of "culture shock". My Australian friends were surprised that I chose to swim in the ocean during the winter months, stating that they would only swim once the water got warmer in the summer. But their "cold" ocean feels warmer than any time I have swum in the North Sea at home. I actually prefer to swim in cold water. It is energising; the way it makes you feel breathless is somehow calming. There is a greater sense of apprehension before going in and, subsequently, a greater sense of accomplishment for having done it.

The water seems rougher at Australian beaches - the currents are stronger and the waves are heavier. It feels like the ocean is attacking you, sweeping its way under your feet to unsteady you.

There is also more fear around what lurks within them, with stories of shark attacks and warnings not to swim up north due to saltwater crocodiles and stinging jellyfish. In Scotland, my biggest worry was how to approach the 45-minute bus ride home to my flat without freezing on the way.

A couple of my friends are also on exchange in Australia, and we met up in Sydney one weekend. A few months ago, we were swimming at Portobello in Edinburgh, talking excitedly about everything we would do abroad. Now, we have swum together at Bondi Beach in Sydney, gasping that "nothing about this feels real".

"IT HAS BEEN DIFFICULT TO UNSETTLE EVERYTHING AND START AGAIN"

"BUT WHEN I AM IN THE OCEAN, THAT IS THE ONLY PLACE I AM"

Having made a home in Edinburgh, it has been difficult to unsettle everything and start again. And since moving away, I have felt like I am constantly in two places at once - one half of me is here in Brisbane, but the other half of me is still in Edinburgh, thinking about all the people I am missing so much. But when I am in the ocean, that is the only place I am. The cold water washes away the anxiety and fear, leaving me only with a sense of freedom, and gratitude for the opportunity I have been given. When I feel homesick, it is easy to get wrapped up in the past and focus on all the hard parts of moving to the other side of the world. But being in the ocean keeps me in the present, providing me with a reminder of the excitement that surrounds an international exchange.

CULTURE SHOCKS IN CANADA: *similar isn't the same*

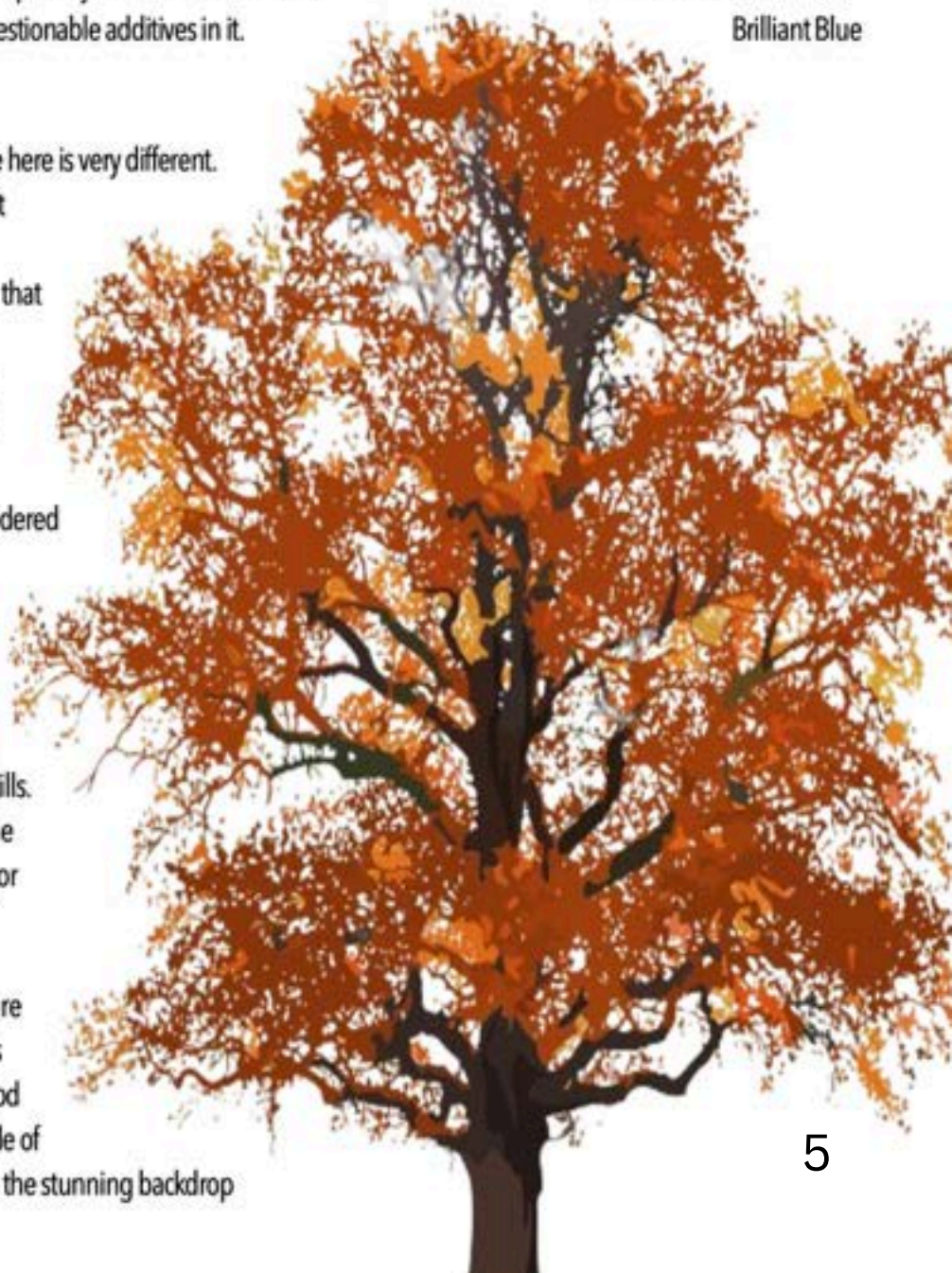
Freya Stewart

I have always lived in Edinburgh, and so the opportunity to continue my studies in Social Anthropology abroad at Carleton University in Ottawa, Canada was incredible. In preparation for my year abroad, there was a lot of discussion around culture shock, which I naively brushed off, thinking it wouldn't apply to me as Canada is similar enough to Edinburgh. I was wrong.

I first noticed that every street here looks like a movie set: yellow traffic lights, mega trucks, billboards, and chalk-scribed sidewalks - it is all very real! When my new friends, who are also on exchange from Edinburgh, and I went on a day trip to Pink Lake in Gatineau Park, Ottawa, the shuttle bus we rode in was the yellow school bus. We knew that we had to sit at the back of the bus with the windows down and pretend that we were in an indie movie. We were so pleased with ourselves when we returned, and our Canadian friends found our enthusiasm quite comedic. Yes, they have been getting yellow buses to school their whole lives, and yes, they are just buses painted yellow to be more visible and road-safe, but I've only ever seen them through the screen in my favourite movies (shout-out to Bridge to Terabithia and Forrest Gump)!

Simple moments like these have brought a lot of fun, but I have also been hit with culture shock in less fun ways. My first experience of this was with the food here. I have heard Europeans joke that there is no real bread in North America… This is not entirely true, but there are some questionable additives in it. Brilliant Blue and Red 40 are hiding in almost everything!

Elsewhere, I have found that the teaching style here is very different. Sometimes, lectures stray off topic, and it is not uncommon for there to be no PowerPoint. Professors here do not shy away from the idea that university education is a "scam". One of my professors outright criticised the link between college degree attainment and homogenous voting for The Democrats in the 2024 US election in a way that I would have never considered before. This professor also guides us in personalising our essays, so that we plan to reach out to future employers in our desired fields in the research phase. As well as our research, a portion of his class focuses on teaching us about employability and life skills. It is a new take on the purpose of university: the separation of learning for the sake of learning or employability is noticeably stronger here.



Overall, settling in here has come with a mixture of adoration for my favourite media references and culture shock. Slowly, I am finding the good foods and adjusting to the North American style of education, and what a privilege it is to do so in the stunning backdrop that is Carleton University!

Manually edited film photographs of HUNGARY

Lucy Quirk

WHY YOU SHOULD TRY CO-OPERATIVE LIVING IN AUSTIN TEXAS

Liberty Penzik

Orientation day at Pearl Street Co-op. We were talked through the community-based values and the structure that makes the house run. The managerial staff, all students, introduced themselves. We took a group picture, had an impromptu water fight followed by pizza, and everyone jumped in the pool. After the long build-up of tender goodbyes back at home, overpacking, and getting on that plane, I finally felt excited to take on this exchange year headfirst.

As an exchange student from the UK, I feel as though I have paused my life and entered a new world at the University of Texas at Austin. Alongside acclimatising to the very real "culture shock" I was promised, my experience of living at Pearl Street Co-op has been central to my integration. I believe that co-operative living, often unlike other private apartment complexes, provides residents with the opportunity to transform what could have been a lonely year abroad into a unique, community-driven experience.

At first, living here felt like stepping into a bizarre society, something out of a film. But as I sit writing this, the cooking team making dinner in the kitchen, sitting around with everyone, I thank my one-year-ago self for applying to live here with, honestly, very little idea of what I was getting myself into.

Living here requires commitment: weekly democratic meetings in which house matters and budget concerns are discussed, and four hours of labour per week, whether that be cooking meals, cleaning public areas, or engaging in building projects. From the managerial roles, such as collecting rent, to the meals we eat, to the benches we sit on, every aspect of Pearl Street is built and maintained by and for students.

So, why live in co-operative housing, particularly as a student on exchange? I sat down with Joey Stidman, treasurer and board representative, who is entering his third year at Pearl Street. For him, the unique sense of community is at Pearl Street's core. He believes that the house's structure gives those who are "more reserved" avenues to take part. His comment that this participation builds a "unique sense of self-worth" resonated with me most. I can attest to the fact that cooking in an industrial-sized kitchen for one hundred people, and watching everyone enjoy a meal I was involved in preparing, was a pretty special feeling.

"I THANK MY ONE-YEAR-AGO SELF FOR APPLYING TO LIVE HERE WITH, HONESTLY, VERY LITTLE IDEA OF WHAT I WAS GETTING MYSELF INTO."



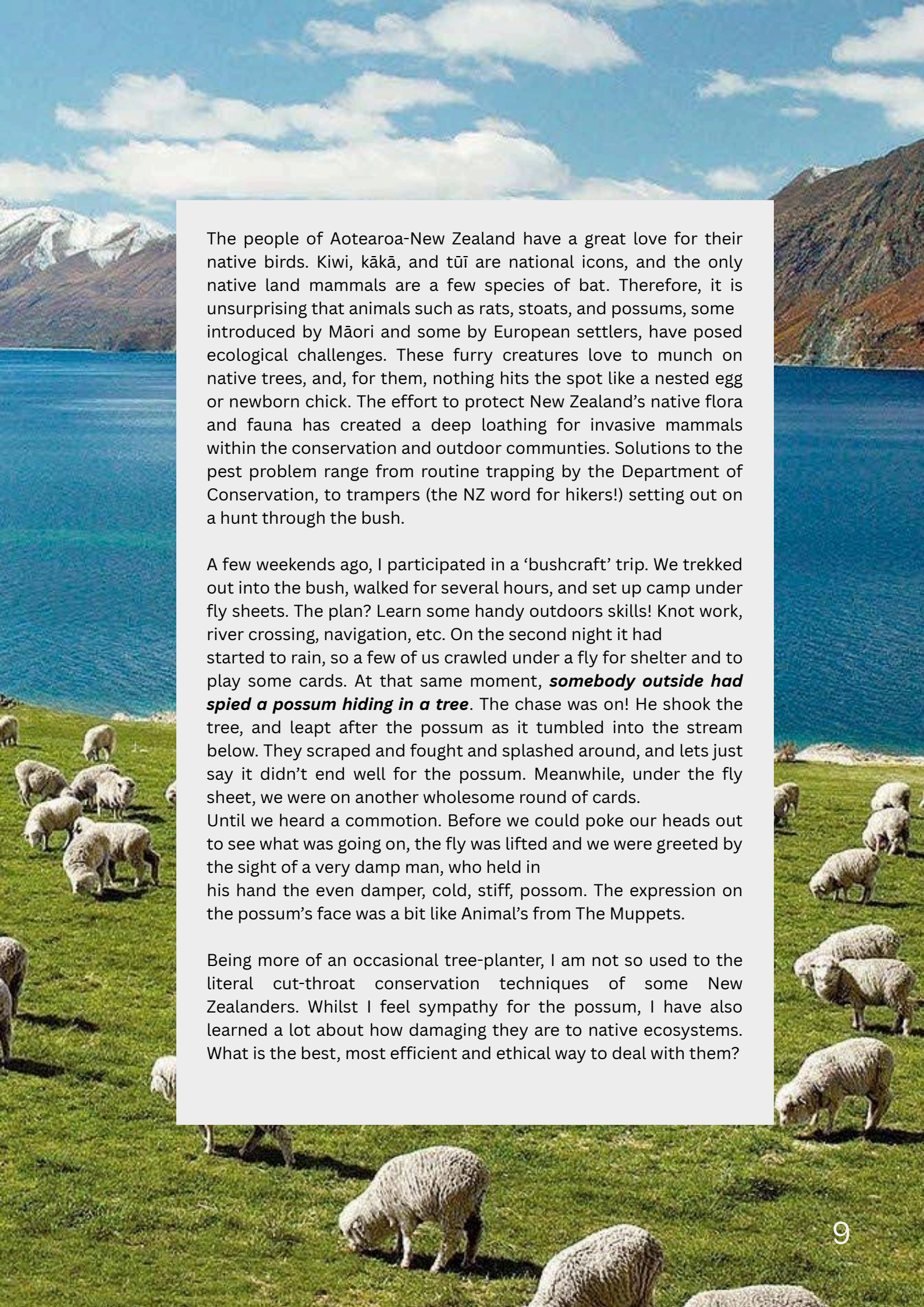




LESSONS IN KIWI CONVERSATION

Robyn Surcombe

I am on exchange in New Zealand, and have been studying in Wellington since July. My first and lasting impressions of Welly have been very positive – it has lots of greenery, the architecture is charming, and it's by the sea. And, much like Edinburgh, it is very walkable! This ticks many of my boxes. Although I consider myself to be settled, reminders that I'm far from home still crop up from time to time. This brings me to a tale of one of the greatest culture shocks I have experienced since arriving in New Zealand, and it is not for the faint of heart!

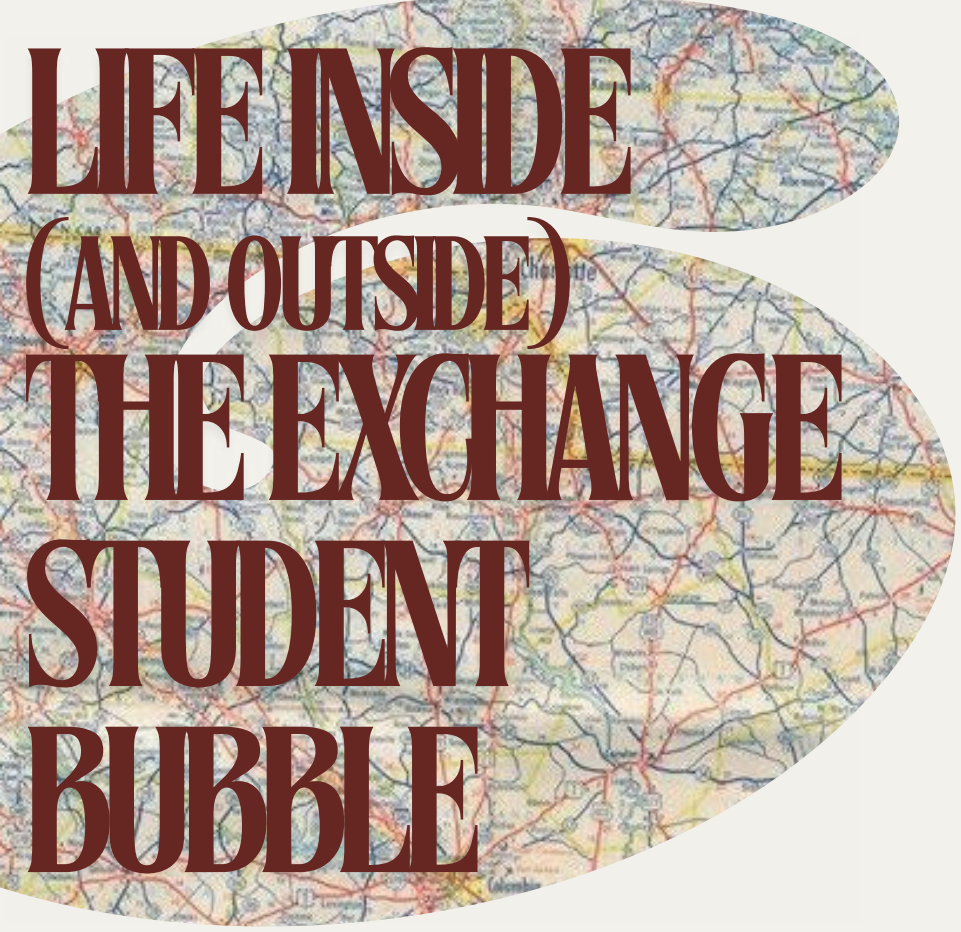


The people of Aotearoa-New Zealand have a great love for their native birds. Kiwi, kākā, and tūī are national icons, and the only native land mammals are a few species of bat. Therefore, it is unsurprising that animals such as rats, stoats, and possums, some introduced by Māori and some by European settlers, have posed ecological challenges. These furry creatures love to munch on native trees, and, for them, nothing hits the spot like a nested egg or newborn chick. The effort to protect New Zealand's native flora and fauna has created a deep loathing for invasive mammals within the conservation and outdoor communties. Solutions to the pest problem range from routine trapping by the Department of Conservation, to trampers (the NZ word for hikers!) setting out on a hunt through the bush.

A few weekends ago, I participated in a 'bushcraft' trip. We trekked out into the bush, walked for several hours, and set up camp under fly sheets. The plan? Learn some handy outdoors skills! Knot work, river crossing, navigation, etc. On the second night it had started to rain, so a few of us crawled under a fly for shelter and to play some cards. At that same moment, ***somebody outside had spied a possum hiding in a tree***. The chase was on! He shook the tree, and leapt after the possum as it tumbled into the stream below. They scraped and fought and splashed around, and lets just say it didn't end well for the possum. Meanwhile, under the fly sheet, we were on another wholesome round of cards.
Until we heard a commotion. Before we could poke our heads out to see what was going on, the fly was lifted and we were greeted by the sight of a very damp man, who held in his hand the even damper, cold, stiff, possom. The expression on the possum's face was a bit like Animal's from The Muppets.

Being more of an occasional tree-planter, I am not so used to the literal cut-throat conservation techniques of some New Zealanders. Whilst I feel sympathy for the possum, I have also learned a lot about how damaging they are to native ecosystems. What is the best, most efficient and ethical way to deal with them?

LIFE INSIDE (AND OUTSIDE) THE EXCHANGE STUDENT BUBBLE



Kitty Jean

Ask any exchange student in Grenoble what their week looks like and you'll probably hear something about intègre parties, international flat shares, terrible Crous kitchens, and endless WhatsApp groups. It's as fun as it is chaotic, but after a while you start to realise that a lot of us are floating in an....

"ERASMUS BUBBLE".

It's easy to see why it happens. You're in a new country trying to navigate the French bureaucracy, so it's a relief to be surrounded by people who won't judge your accent and who are just as excited about €5 train trips to Annecy. Everyone's in the same boat, and the instant sense of community in those disorienting first weeks can turn homesickness into a feeling of comfort.

But the bubble has its limits. When you only hang out with other Erasmus students, you risk missing out on the actual French student experience, and crucially, on the language. You could spend a year here and still feel like you haven't really had the same experience as your French classmates. They already have their social circles and assos, and after a twelve-hour day of French classes (yes, 8am-8pm!), it's tempting to go to another Erasmus soirée rather than attempt more French small talk. After days like that, slipping back into English feels like a welcome mental break. Factor in also that so many courses are exclusively for Erasmus students, and you can see how easily the bubble forms.

The culture shocks don't help. Shops closed on Sundays, strikes every other week, strangers who don't smile back at you, and somehow every French student manages to look stylish even at 8a.m. Experiencing and learning to navigate these quirks is part of stepping out of the comfort of the bubble.

For me, that's meant pushing the bubble a little. I joined the university cheerleading team, les pom-poms, despite barely understanding what was going on at the try-outs. I spent the whole time nodding along, praying I'd copied the right move. Three weeks later, I was catching jokes, following corrections, and actually laughing at the same time as everyone else. The practices have become one of the first times I felt properly part of life here, not just a visitor

.

Maybe the point isn't to burst the bubble completely- as international friendships are part of the joy of exchange- but to stretch it. Use it as a bridge rather than a shelter. Because a year abroad isn't just about Instagram photos and English-speaking friends. Settling in is about venturing beyond the bubble.

OUR TIME ON FILM



Poppy Twort, Berlin, Festival of Kites



Matilde Impavido, Bologna, Weekly Markets

EMBRACING LIFE IN THE SLOW LANE

JAYNI MAKWANA



When I arrived in Copenhagen, I braced myself for the usual culture shocks: the bewildering Danish language, streets full of bicycles, and the absence of Quorn. What I didn't expect was a culture that completely challenged both the perspective and lifestyle I had grown up with.

My first weeks at university were intimidating. Everyone radiated a sense of self-confidence that most people don't have by 20, let alone 18 when we first enter higher education. They moved through the world with the grace of people completely secure in themselves.

Two weeks in, it all made sense after a Danish classmate revealed that most students here take at least two gap years. These aren't spent trying to bolster their CVs, but working, deepening friendships, and understanding themselves. This particular classmate had spent four years in the Royal Danish Navy before studying, which shaped who he was and why he cared so much about his degree. Suddenly, their composure made sense. These weren't 18-year-olds first tasting independence, but people in their mid-twenties who had genuinely experienced life.

In the UK, I'd become used to hustle culture, with success shown through summer internships and LinkedIn connections. I had begun to feel that every moment not spent being "productive" was being wasted, and I hadn't stopped to question it.

Copenhagen offers a different outlook - one that appreciates deliberate slowness. Life is less chaotic; gone are the days of frantically dodging people on South Bridge. The Danish seemingly accept that everyone has their own pace and unique timeline. It's a philosophy enabled by Denmark's generous welfare state, but it's more than just policy. It's a different way of valuing human life, and settling into this rhythm feels like playing a different instrument altogether.

"They moved through the world with the grace of people completely secure in themselves."



The most striking example of this is in Freetown Christiania, which instantly fascinated me. The area wraps around a lake lined with colourful houses. Bright art murals decorate the town and homeowners' belongings are scattered both inside and outside, creating the sense of a carefree community. Founded in 1971 when squatters claimed abandoned military barracks and declared their own autonomous zone, residents practice direct democracy, with everyone voting and participating in decisions. The land is shared, with the requirement for residency being a commitment to the collective and a flair for art and creativity. Though it has faced gang violence and illegal drug sales, in 2024, residents banded together to physically force the gangs out. They value their lifestyle, which requires active choice and courage to protect. Spending time walking around that lake makes me consider the determination required to genuinely resist conventional social structures.

"deliberate slowness"

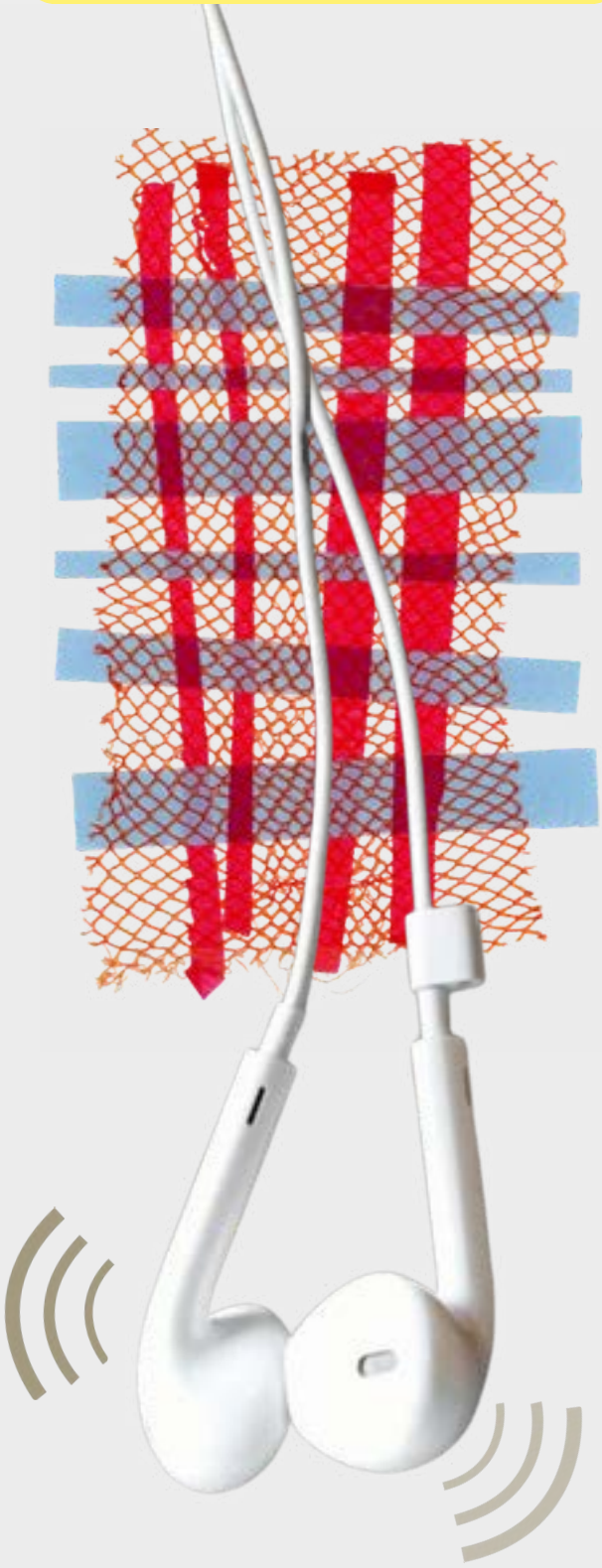
Therefore, I've decided not to try to feel completely settled in Copenhagen. Instead, I'm learning about different ways of living and questioning assumptions I didn't even know I had. The Danish lifestyle has forced me to confront the fact that there is value in simply existing without constant pressure. Community takes priority over comparison, and "productivity" takes on a very different meaning. As I look ahead, I am excited by the ways I have been unsettled, and I can't wait for both the challenges and comforts of embracing an alternative way of life.

"there is value in simply existing without constant pressure"

WHY COPENHAGEN SHINES BRIGHT

FREDA LANIGAN

"THE DANISH CAPITAL IS CONSISTENTLY RANKED ONE OF THE HAPPIEST CITIES IN THE WORLD- AND YOU FEEL IT EVERYWHERE YOU GO"



On my first day in Copenhagen, the city showed all the signs of summertime: Danes had shed their jackets and scarves, and were whizzing through cycle lanes with exposed shoulders and Carlsberg cans. After visiting the renowned bakery "Andersen and Maillard", my mum and I had ventured into The King's Garden, passing through manicured lawns soaked in sunshine. We plonked down into the grass, and I ate my first ever cardamom bun with the same voracity as a polar bear devouring a seal carcass. Next to us, I noticed a group of twenty-somethings in suits and blazers, running around and playing some kind of incomprehensible game involving wooden sticks. I was transfixed; all these people had clearly decided to take a break from the office to play communal, outdoor games in the middle of the workday. "That would never happen in England," my mum remarked, laughing.

This was my first introduction to the Danish approach to "work-life balance." Here, most working professionals are given lots of paid time off and discouraged from staying in the office past 5 p.m. This attitude is refreshing to me, particularly as nearly all of my peers at home have become obsessed with internships, networking, and the godforsaken platform that is Linkedin. Meanwhile, in Copenhagen, relaxed office culture promotes ample leisure time. Look no further than every harbour front in the city, where gaggles of young Danes are laying on pink towels, dipping their toes in the frigid waters and happily socialising. At bars, groups of people spill out of the doors into crowded squares, chatting animatedly. Public spaces thrive here, infusing the city with a real vibrant spirit.

I was therefore, unsurprised to discover that "The Happy City Index" declared Copenhagen the happiest city in the world in 2025. When justifying their ranking, the organisation cited things like the city's prioritization of health and well-being, universal healthcare, urban sustainability, and the highly educated population. The city can afford to provide such comprehensive public services through a progressive taxation system, as the wealthiest individuals and corporations pay generous amounts of income tax. They also have incredibly high VAT in Denmark, which unfortunately makes everything damn expensive (I paid £7 for an iced latte last week and almost shed a tear.) But high taxation is the engine which fuels efficient public service, helping to create high quality of life.

High quality of life is projected by the city's picturesque physical environment - litter is virtually nonexistent, green space is abundant, and shop fronts are pristine. And not only is Copenhagen physically pleasant, but also socially upstanding. Denmark is famously known as a "high-trust society", which explains why my university campus has students pay for coffee through a QR code, opposed to an employee. (I will admit that I have occasionally exploited this system and treated myself to a filter coffee without paying. I see this as evidence that I have yet to be indoctrinated into the Danish cult of happy-Samaritans-who-trust-one-another-unconditionally.) Trust is also a major component of the Metro system, in which you're rarely asked to present your ticket. I've also heard that societal trust is so high that people leave their babies unattended outside stores, which to me feels like a bridge too far, but perhaps it's just a myth. Regardless, Copenhagen is not merely beautiful, but also driven by trusting social values; it truly is lovely inside and out.

As a newcomer, it's likely I'm experiencing the city through rose-coloured glasses. But as I cycle around each day, I can't help but admire the cobbled shopping streets, the extensive waterfront, the plethora of bakeries that welcome you in with their warmth and sweetness. I do feel the city has a special kind of sparkle, as well as a sense of hospitality that makes settling in feel easy. So, Copenhagen, if I could, I would bestow upon you a large bejeweled crown and glittery sash - you are the queen of European cities, you are That Girl. If you don't believe me, I encourage you to come see for yourself.



"COPENHAGEN IS NOT MERELY BEAUTIFUL, BUT ALSO DRIVEN BY TRUSTING SOCIAL VALUES"

My Life in...

Jess Mitchel

Hi my name is Jess and I am currently studying at Keio University in Japan.

As of writing I have been in Japan for just over a month, and it has been a rollercoaster. The first day when I arrived at Tokyo Haneda airport after nearly 24 hours of travelling was quite honestly overwhelming. I remember making it through the airport and standing in the arrivals area of the airport thinking 'what do I do now?'. I eventually made it to my dormitory for the year but even then, the culture shocks kept coming.

The toilet: An endless amount of buttons accompanied with a heated seat

Trains: Nobody talks, nobody eats, rush hour is chaos.

Tweeting noises when crossing the road

You feel safe to walk in the dark as a woman

No bins or rubbish on the street.

It is still hot in October

I will admit for certainly the first week I felt very lost and confused. Trying to pay for shopping felt like a mountainous task with the language barrier and going to the council office to register my residence was just plain stressful. I relied a lot on music that I enjoyed particularly BTS (obsessed ARMY over here) and Scottish artist Nathan Evans. It made the first week a lot more manageable.

Although I live in a dormitory, I have my own room with a bathroom and small kitchen, so I was worried about connecting with the people on my corridor. Yet in that first week I enjoyed exploring Shibuya with my fellow dorm mates and going out to eat ramen. Far too many times to be considered healthy! I hope that at some point in the future we can find something other than ramen to eat!



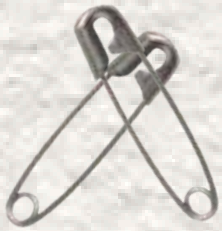
Keio University does not start classes until October; I decided to take the opportunity to explore a bit of Japan with my friend. We went from Tokyo to Hakone, which is nestled in the mountains and visited the Open-Air Museum. Our second leg saw us taking the bullet train down to Kyoto, where we saw the beautiful Kiyomizu-dera temple and the infamous red Fushimi Inari Taisha gates and finishing it off trying unagi and tempura. From Kyoto we took a day trip to Nara and saw the bowing deer that roam free in the town. They love their food! Leaving the deer behind we ventured to Osaka, where we experienced Super Nintendo World at Universal Studios Japan and yakitori for dinner. It was delicious and possibly the best trip of the day so far. Osaka saw us taking the bullet train back to Tokyo and managed to see Mt. Fuji out of the window.

It has been a hectic start of my exchange here in Japan, but I wouldn't change it for the world.











My
First
Month
Here

In starting my year abroad,
began the whirlwind of
Hellos, Holas, Bonjours, and Guten Tags.
People you meet one second you may never see again.
Others become your lighthouse in a storm.
Only after a month,
these people feel like your second family.
How has time passed so slow and so fast?
How is it we will only be in each other's lives for a few short months?
Soon it will be time for the
Goodbyes, Adioses, Au Revoirs, and Auf Wiedersehens.

Emma Noro








UNTIL NEXT TIME
AWW-205
THE OCTOBER EDITION.