

Charlaine Barth – Summer in New Zealand



Matiu/Somes Island view of Wellington.

When I first found out I could travel to New Zealand for an adventure of a lifetime, earn college credit and gain internship experience, I thought that there had to be some ridiculous catch.

Come to find out, the only catch was that I wouldn't want to come home.

Being in New Zealand was one of the best adventures of my life. The scenery, the people, the internship... everything added up into this amazing blend of figuring out who I want to be after college.

We started in Christchurch, a city rebuilt from earthquake rubble where literal [#pocketsofawesome](#) fill the city. There we met with a tourism company to discuss how the earthquake forced/presented the opportunity to rebrand the Canterbury region.

A few days later, we were in Wellington—at [Weta Cave](#). For those who don't know, this is the think tank and workshop for Peter Jackson, aka the director of the *Hobbit* and *Lord of the Rings*

series. There, we got an inside look at the work that goes into each film— the creativity, time and genius of each specially made piece.

Another highlight of the trip was Rotorua. This Maori tourist town is filled with historic hot pools that helped establish the Maori culture. We visited Te Puia, a Maori cultural tourism business that shares the cultural significance of the pools, the village along its boundaries and look into the school that your admission pays credit to. Here they teach Maori people about their traditional craft and devote their business to ensuring that the culture has a future.

Many people travel to New Zealand to experience the incredible scenery that the Maori call home. Many come for the adrenaline-rich experiences. But many also come to find the birthplace of J.R.R. Tolkien's books. And with that, half the group booked an independent tour into the [Hobbiton Movie Set](#).

Sidebar: I am a heavily devoted Middle Earth nerd. When I was growing up, and today, I will regularly have *Lord of the Rings* marathons and honestly believe that no flu will cure until I have watched all three films, on my couch with a hot toddy and a blanket.



Just a redhead near a hobbit hole.

Hobbiton was spectacular! I was pleased to find out that the family farm that hosts the location also owns most of the rights to Hobbiton's proceeds. This economic surge rejuvenated the community and provided tourism jobs, increased accommodation and increased community pride for their home and landscape.

After I was able to check that off my bucket list, we went on to Auckland—the city with the most sailboats per capita in the world. We walked along the docks, met with Tourism New Zealand and got to experience the nightlife in New Zealand's largest city.

All-inclusive, we went to nine cities, 12 company tours, and 14 days of exploring before we settled down in Wellington to start our internships. I was fortunate enough to be paired with an agriculture company that can only be compared to 4-H and FFA for 11-31 years old in New Zealand.

New Zealand Young Farmers combines technical, business and practical skills of farming into their organization. Each July they host a Grand Final competition that tests one representative from each region of New Zealand to compete against each other for the [FMG Young Farmer of the Year](#).

Contestants were tested on their physical ability to labor the farm, speak eloquently, logically set up a farm plot, give back to their community, get dirty, respond to an emergency and represent the future of farming in New Zealand.



Romney sheep grazing on paddock grass.

Working for this organization allowed me to work with event planning, live streaming, magazine article writing, archive research and working internationally. That is a lot of internship experience to cram back into 4 weeks. More than anything, I realized that agriculture and farming is a common language on any continent.

People understand the need for food regardless of the politics that always seem to surround it. I was able to talk to people who have experience similar to my own about the struggles that they face in New Zealand. Last year, tourism became the top enterprise in the country. Until that point, farming, specifically dairying, was the #1 enterprise.

Kiwis know that increasing land use, filling the land with harsh fertilizers and increasing the number of livestock they own is not the correct approach for their island country. Rather, they need to market the low input, exotic and niche products that you can only find in New Zealand. Working against tourism is not the way to ensure the future of New Zealand, its preserving the reason people choose to live, migrate and visit the country.

The culture, the scenery and the bucket list check-offs are the reason people venture into the small country. Being able to spend 6 weeks investigating the area, understanding its people and learning about how it communicates that message to others, was, as the kiwis call it, sweet as.