

Profile: Helen van Asch



Hometown:

Auckland, New Zealand

Program:

Work USA Plus

Length of time spent overseas?

12.5 months

Tell us in a few hundred words where you lived and what you got up to in the USA?

I lived in Hawaii on the island of Oahu in various cities and suburbs including Milliani, Waialua and Pearl City. I worked mostly nights and weekends which enabled me to enjoy various outdoor activities during the day namely hiking, surfing, and swimming, yoga, paddle-boarding and off-roading. My friends and I would also organise camping trips and bonfire parties on the beach. My favourite place to hang out was on the infamous North Shore where I lived. I attended surfing events such as the Triple Crown surfing event at Pipeline, where I saw the Women's final, and I also attended the Eddie Aikau surfing competition. I also had the privilege to visit friends on the other outer islands, Maui and the Big Island. Both islands were amazing but I especially enjoyed the Big Island. The Big Island was like a big rural jungle, inhabited by many interesting people. My friend and I had the opportunity to visit an active volcano on the Big Island where we poked sticks at hot lava. In addition we attended a Reiki healing course, hiked a waterfall, snorkelled and swam in a natural hot pool and saw a friend perform African drums at a local kava bar. Over the year I worked at two American military bases, worked on the set of Hawaii 5-0 on two occasions as an extra, made many new friends and learnt many interesting things about both the American culture and the Hawaiian culture.

What are some experiences that you had which made an impact on you?

The Hawaiian people and culture is very unique and memorable. The Aloha spirit truly exists and many times I have had the opportunity to befriend locals and engage in their culture. These opportunities included attending local weddings, one of those weddings I even helped make the

wedding cake which eventually melted in the heat! Other impacting experiences included seeing a 'green flash' during a Maui sunset which is very rare and phenomenal, and attending a friend's Military graduation where I had the privilege to see her commission as an Army officer which was a very important moment in her life.

What are your 3 favorite memories of living and working in the USA?

1. Meeting Johnny Depp while he was filming the Pirates of the Caribbean was definitely a highlight.
2. Visiting the outer islands of Maui and Big Island was amazing!
3. Working as an extra on the TV show Hawaii 5-0 was so much fun!

Were there any times that were hard?

Yes, living in Hawaii is pretty expensive and it was financially challenging at times. There were times I was offered other Management jobs but I was unable to accept them without a green card or a long-term work visa. Therefore, I had to work at a pizza place which was only bearable because it was temporary. The only good thing about that was earning lots of tips from deliveries!

What did you find valuable in going to the USA on an IEP program?

I think you need to have a degree of open-mindedness, confidence and a positive attitude to fully benefit from the IEP program.



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What is something unexpected/different/strange about the USA compared with other places you have lived?

I think the dating scene is much more developed in America than in New Zealand. American guys are much more forward and willing to take you out anywhere and pay for everything, unlike some kiwi guys! American guys, in particular, Military Christian guys would say grace before a meal on dates. I thought that was neat being a Christian myself you hardly see that happen on dates. However, the people that I met in Hawaii especially in the military marry very young and marry and divorce quite often before they are even 30 years of age it is quite sad. There is also a lot of immoral (and illegal!) behaviour that goes on in Hawaii which seems quite normal over there. Also people are always coming and going in Hawaii, everyone lives for the moment and its pretty much one big party all the time over there! I think New Zealanders are quite conservative and ethical in comparison to some Americans and Hawaiians that I met there which is a great thing. Americans are also so fascinated with the New Zealand accent, where you are from and what New Zealand is like. But it is always short-lived; Americans tend to move on to the next interesting thing pretty quickly and their interest can come across as false and fleeting at times.

Has working in the USA benefited your career work experience?

Working for one of the busiest Domino pizza stores in the world (Schofield Army Barracks) allowed me to develop my customer service skills very quickly and it also enabled me to work well under pressure. The training I received briefly from American Income taught me organisational and managerial skills, effective selling techniques and a strong work ethic which I still carry with me today.

How did you find employment in the USA?

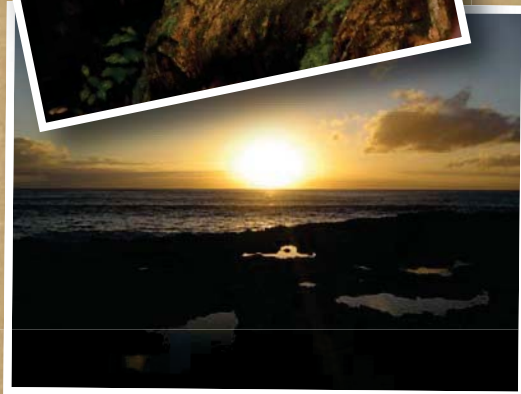
When I first arrived to the island I was able to find work through a mutual friend in my Christian fellowship who owns a chain of Domino Pizza stores. I was then employed as an Assistant Manager in the Head Office and then later on in the stores. I also applied for other jobs online through Craigslist and I had a couple of job offers as Management Trainee for big companies American Income and Enterprise Cars but I was unable to accept these roles due to the brevity of my visa term.

What is your advice for someone who wants an American adventure?

Be prepared with enough funds to get you through the first couple of months especially when trying to find work and a place to live. Most rental arrangements require 2 months rent up front, half of that is the deposit but that can be quite a chunk of change when converting it from New Zealand dollars. You also need to be flexible with jobs, work hard and be friendly and the opportunities will open up. Also do not underestimate the power of your New Zealand accent! It definitely catches people's attention and can lead you to many new experiences and opportunities to make new friends.

What is next?

I am currently completing my Masters in Management, majoring in International Business at Massey University. I am also involved in the family paua jewellery business and I am thinking of exporting our products to Hawaii.



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