

## An Update from the second half of my Leadership in Action Project

### **Wellington and Chocstock:**

My arrival in windy Wellington came as quite a shock to the system as we had gone from tropical Samoa to the below freezing temperatures back in New Zealand. This however did not detract from the beauty of Wellington as a coastal city and the mountainous regions surrounding.

Chocstock, a chocolate festival held in Wellington, was an event like no other. The passion held by the New Zealand chocolate makers was clear through their engaging packaging, colourful stalls, and the way in which they spoke about their chocolate like the art that it is. During the festival we represented Grow Asia Pacific and Rautini, the company which works to provide Pacific farmers with commercial access to premium markets through the trading of cacao beans and coconut sugar. We spent time explaining to the public the work which both GAP and Rautini undertake and let them sample cacao beans, coconut sugar and chocolate created to demonstrate the unity of both. It was a great opportunity to teach people about the bean to bar process, a series of steps many had not previously considered, and to watch them experience eating raw cacao beans for the first time.

I had the chance to speak to many interesting people from different backgrounds including other Europeans who are now part of the chocolate industry in New Zealand which was fascinating. It was an experience which allowed me to see the time, effort, and devotion that chocolate makers put into their products which is parallel to the dedication of cacao growers in regions such as the Pacific. Much more goes into the creation of a chocolate bar than the consumer realises despite it being something many cannot go without.



## **Christchurch and the end of my trip:**

Following my time in Wellington, I have spent a week in the once again beautiful Christchurch. The weather here has amazed me because before now I have never experienced crisp cold with bright sun quite the way Christchurch does it and it is spectacular.

This week I have researched the pests and diseases that threaten the cacao crops in Samoa, with hopes to find affordable management strategies for the Samoan farmers to use in the case of invasion. Many of our modern techniques are costly and even those described as 'organic' are expensive, mainly due to them being biopesticides which are also not readily available for the typical Samoan farmer. This leaves the only viable options being destroying infected crops or simply hoping for the best.

I also spent more time at the Rautini trade house where I was taught how the company tests and quality controls cacao beans that come in from the Pacific before going out to chocolate makers here in New Zealand and across the world. Once we had become world record heavy lifters weighing the sacks of beans, we were able to take samples from each bag before counting and measuring a selection of beans. This was an interesting process as it was very similar to the process we follow when quality controlling potato crops back in England just on a much smaller and much less muddy scale!

Whilst in Christchurch I also had the fabulous opportunity to visit Mount Cook, Lake Tekapo, and the Tasman glacier. Being a geography nerd that lives in the UK we have always learnt about and researched glaciers from a distance, but to be able to see the retreat of the Tasman glacier in person was a unique experience. Lake Tekapo was beautiful and given it was winter when I visited I will definitely have to come back in the summer to see the lupins in full bloom.



To round off my LiA I will be spending a few days in Auckland visiting the office there, but I can safely say now that this trip has been an invaluable, extraordinary experience. I have learnt more during my 6 weeks in New Zealand than I ever thought possible before I left the UK.