

# A marae experience

*Melissa Jackson, Aboriginal Liaison Officer with the Mitchell Library, had a great time at the NZLIA conference*

Last year I was fortunate enough to obtain sponsorship from The Maori Library Workers Network and the New Zealand Bicultural Special Interest Group to attend NZLIA

my 'buddy' and she ensured that I wasn't lonely during my stay.

I was on a strict budget and so had to be accommodated cheaply. Marae accommodation offered the only solution at \$10.00 a night. I was worried about living in a commune with people who were both unknown to me and different culturally. Traditionally the Marae was the area within the village where visitors were welcomed, but is now used to describe the total complex of buildings and courtyard. There is generally a sleeping house (whare nui), an eating house (whare kai), and a courtyard (marae).

The marae is a traditional cultural place with its own protocol called Kawa, and is the scene for many types of community interactions. To be allowed onto the marae a visitor (manuhiri) must participate in a welcoming or powhiri. Bronwyn, Alana, and I arrived just as the manuhiri were being called onto the marae by a woman from the local community. We all walked slowly onto the marae and into the whare nui for the section of the powhiri where all the groups

within the visitors group introduce themselves and their ancestry to the tangata whenua (local community). This is usually done by alternating speakers from the tangata whenua with the manuhiri. After each speech there could be a waiata (song) sung with large groups of 'backup' singers, or supporters. Finally, the last tangata whenua speaker invited the manuhiri to come forward to hariru (shake hands) and hongiri (press noses) indicating that we are now tangata whenua for the duration of our visit.

I adopted a 'jump into the deep end' approach in relation to making the most of my stay in New Zealand and the marae was the perfect place to do this. After the powhiri a special bond of friendship developed between all the people staying on the marae and this ensured that I always had someone to share a meal and a talk with. In the whare nui mattresses with a covering sheet and a pillow line the walls, and the only thing the manuhiri has to bring is a blanket or sleeping bag, toilet gear and towel. Communal living was a lot of fun and everyone was careful to be aware of our fellow marae inhabitants' feelings and needs.

All the people were terrific and I made many friends and contacts that I look forward to seeing when I attend this year's combined conference. I certainly will be staying on the marae again this time around. ■



*The whare nui (sleeping house) where Melissa stayed*

annual conference in Tauranga.

From the outset it was a culturally uplifting experience with an emphasis on sharing and togetherness. I arrived in Auckland late Saturday night to give me plenty of time to travel to Tauranga, which is on the other side of the North Island. This trip takes 4 hours so I spent the night with Bronwyn Bauer, a Maori Librarian, and Alana Garwood from AIATSIS, and we all made the trip together. Bronwyn was to become

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