

BY ALI DONOHUE in Boston,  
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NEW YORK DAILY NEWS

A BROOKLYN-RAISED beauty seeking adventure overseas was among three Boston University students killed Saturday in a New Zealand minivan crash as horrific as any mother's worst nightmare.

Daniela Lekhno and two fellow students studying abroad died instantly on the eve of Mother's Day when their vehicle flipped three times on a trip to locations featured in the "Lord of the Rings" trilogy, school officials said.

Lekhno, 20, a junior studying international relations and economics, grew up in Seagate before moving to the Jersey Shore town of Manalapan.

"New Year New Adventure New Zealand," Lekhno tweeted on Jan. 1 as she kicked off her semester overseas.

"Already missing some old friends...#hategoodbyes."

In her Twitter photo, Lekhno is seen sitting on a railing with lower Manhattan as a backdrop.

Friends described her as a literature lover with a dry sense of humor who was proud of her Russian heritage.

"You couldn't not have a smile when around her," said senior Michael Ferrugia, who was on a mock debate team with Lekhno. "She always played a good witness because she took no bulls--t when she was on the stand."

Lekhno's father, Anatoly, struggled to speak after opening the door of the family's two-story brick home.

"We don't want to comment," he said, his eyes rimmed red.

Earlier, her mom, Susanna, rushed inside the house without saying a word about the tragedy.

Lekhno was among 26 students, in three minivans, on their way to trek the famed Tongariro Crossing, a breathtaking walk across a volcanic crater in the central part of the North Island.

The centerpiece of the hike, the cone of Mount Ngauruhoe, served as Mount Doom in the "Lord of the Rings" films.

As the convoy neared the entrance to the site, the second minivan drifted into the gravel shoulder. The driver apparently overcorrected, sending the vehicle into a violent barrel roll about 7:30 a.m.

Two of the passengers were flung to their deaths; a third died inside the van, authorities told the New Zealand Herald.

The roadway was littered with the students' travel items — cameras, backpacks and iPhones.

"Driver error is one factor that will be looked at as part of our investigation," police spokeswoman Kim Perks told the Herald.

The lead vehicle continued to its destination, the students unaware of the tragedy behind them. The third vehicle stopped at the scene.

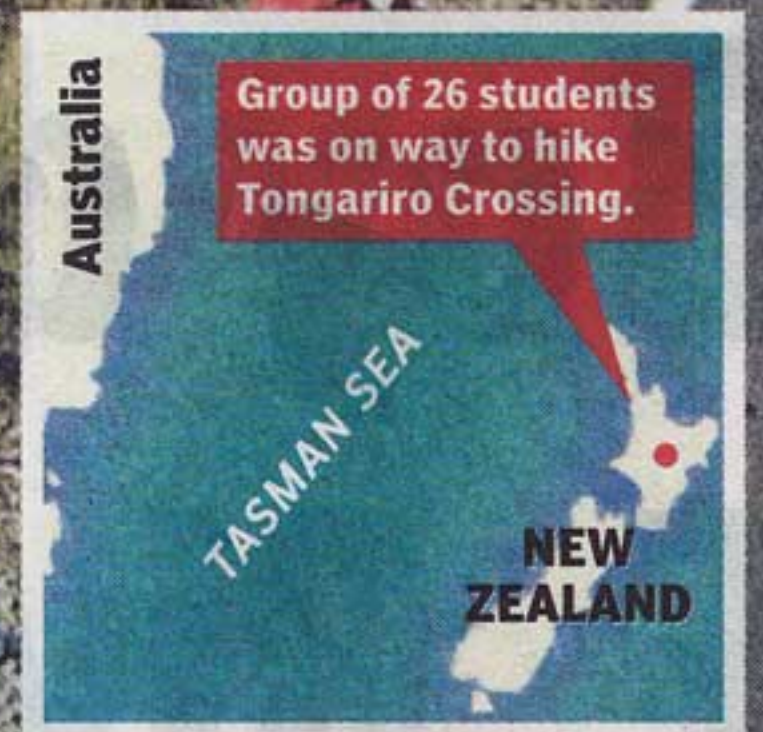
Each vehicle had only seven seats, leaving some students

# College student went to discover New Zealand, but found ...



Debris marks the trail of tragedy in New Zealand crash. Photo by AP/New Zealand Herald

# DEATH A WORLD AWAY



Group of 26 students was on way to hike Tongariro Crossing.



Daniela Lekhno, who grew up in Seagate, was killed in accident.

without a seat belt, the Boston Globe reported.

Besides Lekhno, the two other students killed in the wreck were identified as Austin Brashears, 21, of Huntington Beach, Calif., and Roch Jauberty, 21, whose parents live in Paris.

"Everyone called him the cruise director," Brashears' mother, Julie, told The Globe. "He wanted to include everybody on the trips. He loved having an eclectic group of friends."

A fourth Boston University student, Margaret Theriault, suffered critical injuries and was airlifted to an area hospital.

Four others were being treated for less serious injuries.

"This is a horrible tragedy," Boston University President Robert Brown said in a statement. "Our prayers go out to the students and their families." Boston University spokesman Colin Riley said no staff members were on the tragic trip.

"It was a student-organized adventure," he said.

The students were enrolled in a BU study abroad program based in Auckland, the largest city in New Zealand. It began Jan. 3 and ends June 26.

At a candlelight vigil held on campus Saturday night, one of Lekhno's former sorority sisters praised her wit.

"She was always making some high-brow joke about Shakespeare or something like that," said Julie Hirsch, a member of Alpha Delta Pi. "She was so beautiful and so kind and so cool." **With Matthew Lysiak** [rschapiro@nydailynews.com](mailto:rschapiro@nydailynews.com)

**Boston University students Roch Jauberty (l.) and Austin Brashears also lost their lives in the crash.** Photo by Facebook



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