



LETTERS FROM ABROAD

2016

Rotary International District 9800 Youth Exchange Program
Experiences and Images from our Outbound Youth Exchange Students for 2016

www.rotaryyouthExchangedistrict9800.com.au



Outbound Students 2016

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DISTRICT 9800 REPRESENTATIVES	
District Governor 2016-2017	Neville John
District Chair Youth Services	Gabrielle Morgan

A message from the District Governor, Neville John



Rotary International President John Germ's theme for this year is 'Rotary Serving Humanity, which he selected after considering a statement by our founder, Paul Harris, that "Serving humanity is the most worthwhile thing any one of us can do with our lives". John is fond of saying that this opportunity to serve is not a small opportunity, but a great one, and that **the only difference between a small and a great opportunity is what you do with it.** That's a great reminder in life that we might think that opportunities are small, or that what we do doesn't matter, but they're not small and everything we do matters.

The Rotary Youth Exchange is one of the most prestigious long-term Exchanges offered anywhere in the world, and its objective since inception in the 1920's has been to foster goodwill, friendships, peace and understanding between countries of the world. This is as relevant today as it has ever been. The objective has never been to offer a holiday, a travel experience or the like, but a cultural Exchange, where a person from one country lives in the home of a family from another. The opportunity to understand first hand each other's values, beliefs and way of thinking provides an opportunity to learn and build friendships that can last a lifetime, as host families continue to visit each other long after the Exchange has been completed.

This is not a small opportunity, but a great one, and to all students, this is your opportunity to make the most of it, by being the best you can be. It's an opportunity to develop the next stage of your life, where you leave the comfort of your family and step up to discover and experience another culture, another family, another language, a new school and new friends. In the process, you will find out a lot about yourselves, like what your family means to you, how to be adaptable and resilient, being responsible for your actions, being diplomatic and many more things that can help you develop into the person that you want to be - if you choose to grab this opportunity. One year away seems like forever, but compared to a lifetime, it's hardly any time at all. It will come and go so fast you won't believe it. Initially you may miss the familiarity and comfort of many things back home, but you will gain just as many. Break down your time away into the segments, communicate with your families here and abroad and above all, have fun, smile, laugh and make every experience a fond memory.

As host parent's to seven students over the years, my wife Rebecca and I appreciate the general needs of the new members of our families, what their parents at home are anxious about and the level of commitment required to be hosts. We understand the commitment the families have made to sending students on Exchange and I admire and respect you for giving them this opportunity.

The District 9800 Youth Exchange Committee is amongst the most dedicated in Rotary, working hard all year round to ensure that students in and out bound are well prepared before, and supported during and after their Exchange. A big thank you to them and the past Exchange students from ROTEX for all that they do to make this program successful.

Neville John

District 9800 Governor 2016-2017

A message from the Youth Exchange Chairman



Welcome Friends, to the Seventh Edition of the D9800 Youth Exchange publication "Letters from Abroad". I know its publication at this time of the year is always eagerly awaited. D9800 Outbound Youth Exchange Students tell their stories of their year on Exchange, enabling our many followers to become "armchair participants" in our 2016 Outbound Rotary Youth Exchange Students' many and varied experiences during their year abroad.

Among the aims of Youth Exchange is the promotion of goodwill, peace, understanding and friendship in the world. Youth Exchange is an educational and cultural Exchange providing opportunities for students to live with Rotary approved families, whilst attending school on a regular basis in their host country and immersing themselves in their host countries culture, customs and language and making lifelong friendships with people from across the globe.

Long term Youth Exchange is very challenging for young people and requires great courage, commitment and resilience. Our 2016 Outbound Students have challenged themselves this year and have shown remarkable resilience during what can at times be a difficult year, whilst at the same time being the "best year of their lives". Youth Exchange is definitely a life changing experience.

A year away from one's family, home and friends is a very challenging experience for anyone let alone a young person aged between 15-18 years, some of whom have never been abroad before their Exchange year. Our D9800 Outbounds land in a foreign country where they commence their Exchange not knowing anyone nor indeed the language. However, our Rotary Youth Exchange Ambassadors soon acquire family and friends and a new country and language, thanks to the power of Rotary International and the Rotary International Youth Exchange program. The Rotary family and network is particularly important and provides the necessary support and family to enable our students to quickly immerse themselves in their new country, its customs and culture and their year long education in a foreign country. Their host country becomes the student's new home and the ties to their host country grow stronger as the year progresses, to the point where our Youth Exchange Students feel they have two countries and multiple families and are reluctant for their Exchange year to end.

During their year on Exchange our Youth Exchange Students participate in their host Rotary clubs service projects and upon their return I would urge our students and their families to continue their involvement and connection with Rotary by participating in their sponsor Rotary club's many programs and projects as well as those of our D9800 Youth Exchange committee, perhaps by hosting an inbound student.

Thank you to our Outbound Students who have contributed to this year's edition of "Letters from Abroad". Your contributions make for inspiring reading. I wish you all the very best for your future. Please keep in touch with our committee and your sponsor Rotary club. Thank you to the "Letters from Abroad" team for their magnificent work in producing such an outstanding publication year after year and this year is another wonderful edition. My thanks to the exceptional and hardworking Youth Exchange Committee members for your dedication and commitment to the Youth Exchange program and our students. Our sponsor and host clubs and families I gratefully acknowledge and thank you for your ongoing support for the D9800 Youth Exchange program, without which our program would not be the hugely successful program it is, promoting international peace, goodwill, friendships and understanding.

Gabrielle Morgan

Rotary D9800 Youth Exchange Committee

Rotary Youth Exchange A Chance of a Lifetime! Host Families Invited Now!

Rotary Youth Exchange invites kind and caring Host Families within the community to assist local Rotary Clubs offer an outstanding Exchange program to young people from all over the World.

A Host Family is a vital part of this cultural and educational Exchange and typically hosts a student on a voluntary basis for a period of between 10 to 16 weeks. In doing so, a Host family officially becomes a Friend of Rotary International. The Host Family plays an integral role in offering the student the experience of a new culture and language, whilst at the same time learning about a different culture from a young leader. It is a direct window to the world for all members of a Host family. You not only share a young person's hopes and dreams, but more importantly, you make those dreams possible.

Hosting is the beginning of a lifelong friendship and connection with a student and family overseas. Whilst it can be challenging to help a young person transition to a new culture and ease into the surroundings, it is always fun and the rewards are immeasurable.

Host Families in the Rotary Youth Exchange program come in many shapes and sizes! Young children, older children, no children at all, extended families and older generations - all have been successful in hosting Exchange Students.

Please consider this amazing and rewarding opportunity now. Enquiries are most welcome.

Further information is available at www.rotaryyouthexchangedistrict9800.com.au

"Letters From Abroad"

is compiled and published for the
Rotary International District 9800 Youth Exchange Program
by Barry Mullen



Where do I start... I have so many stories and memories to share with so little space. At the beginning of the year I was so ready for Exchange, there had been so much to do working up to it, finally getting on that plane was amazing. When I first arrived it was the most magical feeling, the air was crisp sitting at -17 degrees and snowflakes were trickling down from the sky so peacefully. It was perfect.

I love the snow and the cold weather, so I guess looking back at it now, that must have been one of the reasons I chose to come to Sweden, and I'm so glad I did. That decision wound me up in a town of around 50,000 called Östersund, which if you look on a map is nearly exactly in the middle of the country but to all swedes, it is considered 'north'.

This year has been a rollercoaster but one that has been so enjoyable that I don't ever want to get off and when I'm forced to, I'm going to run and try and be the first one on again. This rollercoaster has connected me with people that I never would have thought would mean something to me. The friendships and bonds I have made with my families and friends at school I know will last a lifetime. This year has also taught me so much about myself as well, whilst experiencing a new country I have also discovered another side of myself, it's not too different from the old me but it is more



Australian flag in Kiruna- Representing Australia in the Arctic circle

knowledgeable about the world and things around me, more independent, more confident, more wise and more cultured. The middle of this rollercoaster has been the best part yet. It is those three weeks right in the middle of your Exchange when you get thrown in a bus with 50 other students and spend a whirlwind 18 days travelling through 10 different countries with some of the most amazing people you will ever meet. During those 18 days I got to experience the life and culture of so many countries and I was doing it

with people I love. Those weeks have definitely been the best in my life and I will never forget them.

The things I quickly learnt from being on Exchange in Sweden was that swedes are quite reserved, they eat ketchup on their pasta, they take their shoes off when they enter the house, so to me they are considered 'weird' but I wouldn't want to have spent the last 9 months of my life with anyone except these weird and wonderful Swedes.

Exchange is a package, a big package that is full of surprises, but one that you want to make sure you see everything that it has inside. That's what I have done with my year, I have explored this whole package that I was given and now 9 months in, I'm getting to the final presents but I know they are going to be just as good as the ones before, if not better.



Austria- Euro Tour in Austria hiking



Stockholm- my German best friend and I loving the rain in Stockholm at the aquarium



Exchange Students on Eurotour in Hungary



4 countries, 3 continents- Germany, Australia, Italy and Japan, friends all around the world.



Paris- on Eurotour in front of the Eiffel Tower

Judzea Gatt - Japan

I think for every Exchange Student the beginning of Exchange is surreal. Getting on that plane feels like a dream; it doesn't feel real. When you dream of something so huge for so long it is so exciting and terrifying that you just don't know what to feel. I remember sitting on my new bed in my first host family the day I arrived and having this feeling I believe all of us Exchange Students have of "...Oh crap what in the world have I done to myself! Am I stupid? What have I done? This is real I can't go back now!" But you also have the sweet period of Exchange where everything is new and exciting and you can be entertained by something as simple as going to the store.

The beginning of my Exchange was unfortunate to say the least. I spent my first few days very sick and unable to eat. My host family was very kind and helped me though it and took me to the hospital to get me medicine. It was not the start of Exchange that I had hoped for and I cried when I was waiting in line to get papers so I could go to the doctors; I was so tired, felt so sick and had called my mum and wanted nothing more than to be home with my family. But despite the bad beginning I powered



Wearing my own Yukata at a festival.

through and got the worst of it out of the way so the rest could be amazing.

School was the first thing I did on Exchange and I was nervous. I had other Exchange Students at my school that helped me get to know the ropes and now I am doing the same for new students. The school is almost the opposite of mine; here in Japan the schools are so serious and my school has a strict uniform and rules. The school teaches the students to fit in as much as possible. My school in Australia is freer, with no uniform and it encourages students' self-expression. The friends I have made at school and on Exchange are what has stuck with me.

Other Exchange Students from all kinds of places around the world became my friends and I have had conversations I would have never have had otherwise, with people who are like me, or at least similar enough to want this experience. In my discussions I discovered how all of us had been through some rough times and needed to get away either from something they didn't like or they just needed to feel free from the normal lives they had; we were all people who wanted an adventure and people who had been through something to make us feel prepared to be on Exchange. I think we Exchange Students not only find another culture on Exchange, we also find ourselves through being away from friends and family who influence us.



Being interviewed for a Japanese News show

One of the first big things I did on my Exchange was the trip with Rotary. We went on a trip with the other Exchange Students to Osaka and Hiroshima. We visited U.S.J which was the first theme park for me in many years and I got to go to Hogwarts which I loved so much as I am a huge Harry Potter fan. We also spent the whole day by ourselves in the park and planned for ourselves, giving us a sense of responsibility which is something we don't get much from our schools here. I went on the Jaws ride and got splashed with water and spent the rest of the day wet as my skinny jeans slowly dried to my legs. When we went to Hiroshima we visited the Memorial Museum and saw the devastation that was caused by the atomic bomb as well as the effect

that it has had many years later. I felt an extreme respect for those who helped in the aftermath of the atomic bombs and further felt passion for peace and hatred for weapons of mass destruction. The trip gave me a deep feeling of learning, along with all the fun. Staying in a crowded hotel room with friends was fun and we had conversations long into the night. With my first host family I got to do something I had always wanted to do which was to put on a kimono and even go to a class to learn how to put it on myself. When wearing the kimono I felt the love for Japanese culture that had brought me here in the first place. I have even now bought a yukata for myself and look forward to showing others how to wear one when I am home.

One of my main goals for my Exchange was to go to Tokyo and experience the extreme sub cultures in Japan I love so much. It took me a while but I saw that my Rotary club wasn't going to take me there so I decided to take the initiative and do all I could go get myself there. With a lot of emailing around and organising, and a great host mum, eventually I managed to get myself and 2 other Exchange Students there. Tokyo was exhausting and amazing. We went to Akaihabara and Disneyland on the first day. Disney land was very crowded and we only went on two rides but they were really fun. The next day we went to Shibuya and Harujiku. Both of those places are famous for the crazy fashion subculture I love so much and it was great to see the side of Japan I was really excited about and I would love to go back again.

Exchange for me, whilst being full of adventure and new experiences, has been a path to self discovery and reflection. I have never been more confident in myself I have learnt that I have to accept myself to be happy and that accepting oneself is not giving up on self improvement but knowing when to stop, when you are self improving and when you are trying to be something you are not. I hope I can use this new self-confidence to help others be comfortable with themselves and show others the beauty I see in everything in the world.



Roof tops of Hogshead at U.S.J. covered in real snow



Japanese Photo Booth

Brianna Carroll - France

Ok, how do I simply sum up one of the craziest, joyful, hardest, saddest, loneliest, best years of my life in one letter?

When I first applied for Exchange I had no idea what I was getting myself into, I was going in blind. Yes I had heard stories from others but I didn't fully understand. After what felt like years of waiting, the day finally came. I remember waking up thinking it didn't feel real, my mum was already crying but it didn't feel like I was actually going. Standing at the airport with my family waiting with me, filled with so many emotions, surrounded by a swarm of green blazers. I kept telling myself that everything would be ok, I kept saying it's only a year, and then the final hugs made it clear that I was leaving. I was terrified.

The flight via Abu Dhabi and Brussels to Lyon was very long. The whole last flight all I could think about was my host family. I had so many questions, but I lost them all when I saw my host family waiting for me at the Lyon airport and I went into shock. I couldn't believe that I was actually there.

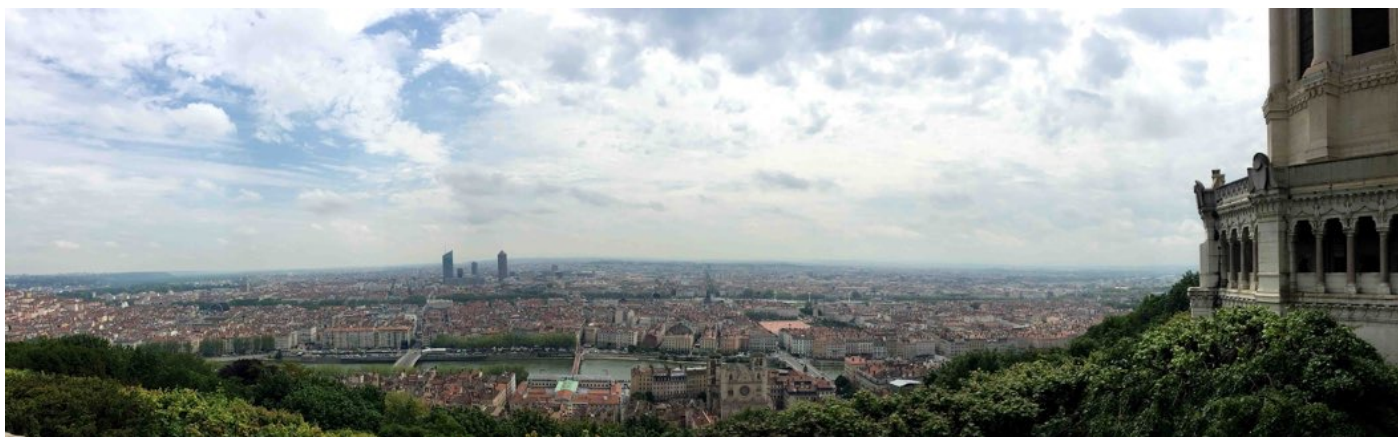
The first thing I thought when I woke up was "please let this be a dream," but now realize just how glad I am that it wasn't a dream. My first day was great, I slept in late and my host dad took me out for a coffee. He showed me the money and how it worked. He told me to turn around and to my surprise it was snowing! I had never seen snow falling from the sky before and all I wanted to do was be out in it.

I live in Lyon which is the 3rd biggest city in France. I think that it is the most beautiful city with around 2,000 years of history. I live right near the centre of the city so I have easy access to public transport, the main city and my school. My favorite part of Lyon is 'Vieux Lyon' it means 'Old Lyon' and to me it is everything you'd expect France to be; little cobble stone streets, cafes everywhere and there is this point called Fourviere and it overlooks all of Lyon and is just absolutely breathtaking!

I started school on my 3rd day and was it strange. There is no uniform so I was conflicted on what to wear. Also my school is huge compared to my one in Australia; so many students and so many classrooms. School is one of the hardest things about Exchange. My school here is called 'Cite Scoliaire Internationale'. It is an International School with around 8 different language sections.



At the Integration Camp taking typical Exchange Flag photos



The view from Fourviere (one of my favourite places in Lyon)

Of course I was in the English section so I had 6 hours of what I would consider normal English classes a week. The rest of my classes were in French.

The day took a long time to get used to. I must admit the French love their school. A normal student starts at 8 am and can finish anytime between 4.30-6 pm. Luckily the latest I had to finish was 4.30 pm. The school system here is set up so differently with little free time. I think the only thing I liked about the school here is that if your teacher was absent you didn't have to go to that class. Also you have this thing called permanence or "perm" where you have no classes so you can basically do whatever, that just depends if you have a good timetable. Lunch was strange at first as I wasn't used to eating in a big canteen with an entree, main, yoghurt/cheese and dessert. At the start I was skeptical about it but over time I began to like the meals and I liked the thought that I didn't have to worry about bringing my own food.

Exchange can throw some pretty weird things at you but one thing you can never dodge is Host Families. Every Host Family is different and they are what make up a big part of your Exchange. I have had a total of 4 families but they weren't all great. My first were great at the start and then as the excitement of me being there wore off so did a lot of other things; as helpful as they were I just never felt a part of the family and I never knew my place in the house. My second family were incredible, I loved living with them. They have an apartment in the middle of town and they were so helpful; I felt a part of their family. My third family wasn't your typical host home; it was just a youngish woman living with her 2 cats. She worked a lot meaning I was alone a lot.



My first host sister, Karla and I, made a pavlova for a Rotary dinner



My Newbie Chema from Mexico and I being cute with our flags



My favourite French Rotarian. Jacques

Finally, my last family. Although they only have 1 son who studies at school who is never home, I feel great here. My host parents are so wonderful and caring. Their house is amazing and it overlooks Lyon, I definitely feel apart of their family.

I laugh when I say that I have visited more places and countries in these 9 months than I have in my life. But its true, I have had the opportunity to visit so many places I never thought I would get to see. I did a Bus Trip organized by Rotary and we visited, Paris, Strasbourg, Munich, Prague, Vienna, Venice, Milan, Geneva and Chamonix and it was one of the highlights of my Exchange. We met other districts from France and from Germany and luckily I made a really good friend from the German district. I went and stayed with them for a week in the summer holidays. It's amazing the amount of people you meet and things you get to do.



Some other highlights of my Exchange have been the gala we had with Rotary, it was like a prom and we had a king and queen. There was food, good music and everyone danced. That night remains in my head because I was with friends just having a good time. Also when my mum came to visit me and we hired a car and went on a road trip, we went to Paris, Strasbourg, Luxembourg, Brussels, East Germany for Europa-Park and finally Lyon so I could show her around. It was amazing to spend that time with her because I did miss her so much and it is an unforgettable memory.

Throughout this year I have met so many people. I have formed friendships that will last a lifetime. I know that when I travel (which I hope will be a lot) I will have a place to stay. The friends you make on Exchange are different to any friends you'll ever have. These people know the struggles you go through, they have the same mind set as you and yet are completely different and that's why you are all here, they are all so open minded. They get you. These people have made my Exchange what it is. These friends from all around the world have influenced me in some way. They helped me be me, they helped me see different sides to things and I hope that in return I can do the same for them.

Exchange has opened my eyes in so many ways, its like I've been living on a cloud. I see a whole new world, and I love this world, I love these people, these foods, these cultures and these languages. I know it sounds so cheesy but its true. Everything I know about me now I learnt on Exchange through new people and new experiences.

Most people back home and even sometimes here in France like to say that I am very lucky to be getting this opportunity, but they also refer to this year as a gap year, a holiday a year off. I 100 percent agree with them that I am extremely lucky to have this opportunity but this is not at all a gap year, a holiday or a year off. Exchange is no doubt the best year of your life but it can also be the worst year of your life. Exchange is a mixture of things. It makes you appreciate the little things from your home country and your host country. It's knowing how to deal with new situations, it's changing families, learning a new language, starting at a new school, having no friends, culture shock, home sickness, trying new foods, getting lost and not knowing how to get home, meeting new people, taking different modes of transport, learning how to be independent and learning how to be you. Yes Exchange changes you, but not all of you, you are still the same person you were before you left - just more independent, courageous, open minded, relaxed and more worldly. I think Exchange creates the best you that you could be. I always think of Exchange as diving head first into a black lake. You have no idea what is beneath the water; you just have to dive anyway. Although it is scary, the end result is so worth it.

Emmaby Barton Grace - Denmark

Sponsored by
The Rotary Club of
Bendigo South

"You build a life for 16 years and leave it for 12 months. You build a life for 12 months and leave it forever. Which one is harder?"

"Hej, jeg hedder Emmaby. Jeg er 16 år gammel og i de sidste 9 måneder har jeg boet i Holbæk i Danmark." Let me translate for you: "Hi, I'm Emmaby. I'm 16 years old and for the last 9 months I've been living in Holbæk in Denmark."

2 years ago, if you'd told me that that was a phrase I'd be saying now, I'd have told you, you were crazy. A year ago, I was counting down the days until I'd be able to say that phrase, counting down the days until I was boarding that plane to Denmark and my Exchange year would start. Now, sitting here with 90 days left in this amazing country, I'm wishing time would slow down, so I can keep saying that phrase forever and so that my Exchange year will never end. It's funny how time changes things, and how much difference a year can make. And this year has definitely made a difference.

This year has been one of the most amazing years of my life. I arrived in Denmark on the



In Nyhavn

17th of January 2016, at 5pm to a minus 5 degrees dark and snowy Denmark. I'd fallen in love with Denmark 6 months prior, before I even got chosen to come here and I fell in love all over again, flying over a snowy Denmark, watching the sun setting over Europe. And I've continued to fall in love everyday since.

I'm often asked why I came to Denmark for Exchange, and often get very surprised looks when I tell them it was my first choice of country. "Why Denmark?", they'll ask me, and I honestly don't know why I was so drawn to this little country at the top of Europe, but I'm so glad I did. I am in love with this country, a country that a year ago I knew nothing about. I love seeing Danish flags everywhere you go. I love the trust Danes have in each other. I love being able to take a day trip to Sweden or Germany. I love living so close to Copenhagen. I love all the pastries that you can buy everywhere. I love my host families and everyone else I have met here. I love how everything is flat and how that results in beautiful sunsets. I love how it's so small that you can easily visit anything you want to. I love the fashion. I love hygge, the Danish concept of coziness. I love the freedom everyone is given. I even love the language. I love Denmark, and I love being an Exchange Student here.



With first Host Family



View of Copenhagen

I was greeted at the airport by my first family who I've been lucky enough to have lived with for 6 months. They made my settling into my life here in Denmark so easy and I felt at home with them straight away, something of which I am so grateful for. I have only been living with my final family for a month so far but they have been lovely and I'm looking forward to spending my last three months here with them.

I have been lucky enough to go on several trips with my first family during my time here; all of which have been amazing.

The first one, in my winter holiday, was their yearly skiing trip, this year a week in Italy. I had only ever really skied once before so my experience was very limited; however, with patience from my family and several days of lessons, by the end of the week I was confidently going down the easy slopes, and even a few medium slopes, which I was very proud of myself for. It was such a fun week, although very exhausting, and one of many experiences I've had this year that I won't forget.

With my first family I also explored some other parts of Denmark, including a visit to the most northern point of Denmark, Skagen, where the two seas meet, Møn's Klint, LegoLand and HC Andersons Childhood home and museum. I've also spent two weeks exploring northern Denmark with my second family, in their summer house in North Jutland.

With Rotary, I've also visited some more of Denmark and Europe. There are 5 main Rotary events throughout the year in Denmark, the first one being the introcamp in North Jutland, for all the newbies. In my case, this meant 30 Exchange Students from South America, New Zealand and Australia getting together for a week, with 6 hours of Danish a day, lots of fun and games, and a trip to Aarhus, all resulting in a really fun week.

With friends in Venice



The next big event is the Get Together (G2G) in my town, Holbæk, where all 200 of the Exchange Students in Denmark met for a weekend of hanging out and having fun. The G2G is held twice a year, once in April, and again in October, and is a lot of fun.

There's also the District G2G, which was a weekend in a small town around ten minutes from where I live where we got to explore a nearby castle, visit the beach, have a talent night and just enjoy each others company.

But by far, the best Rotary trip of the year is the Eurotour; an 18 day trip around Europe with 40 other Exchange Students from all over the world. We travelled to Germany, the Czech Republic, Austria, Italy, France, Monaco, Belgium and the Netherlands. It was an amazing 3 weeks during which I met many friends as together we travelled Europe, getting to see some of the most amazing places the world has to offer. Many special memories.

But you also get to see some of these amazing sights in your host country; from the typical touristy sights such as Nyhavn, to the little things most people wouldn't care about; like snow falling in April, or the little cobblestone streets and yellow houses, or the beauty of a sunset in a country without mountains to block the view. That's one of the great things about Exchange; you get to see these amazing sights wherever you go, and you learn to make the most of every single one of them because you know you may not see them ever again. You learn to fully appreciate and fall in love with everything life has to offer.

The fact that I'm currently on Exchange, living overseas on the other side of the world from everything I've known at 16 is something I still don't think I fully comprehend. There are some days when I have to pinch myself, when I realize that I'm living in Europe, and that I have been living and experiencing things many people could only dream of.

Over the last 9 months Denmark has become my second home; I've made new families and friends and I now have several new homes as well as my one in Australia. I walk through the streets of Denmark, feeling at home, when a year ago I barely knew this country, let alone my town existed. Every day I wake up in a house with people I feel are my family. My best friends are people I only met 9 months ago and half my time is spent speaking in and listening to a language that a year ago I didn't even know how to say 'hi' in. And that is one of the best and worst things about Exchange; it is a hard thing to do; creating a second life in a short 11 months, but, that is the easy part compared to what happens when those 11 months end; you are back on a plane to your first home, but you have to leave the life you created behind, not knowing if you will see these places and people again, and knowing if you do just how different it will be.

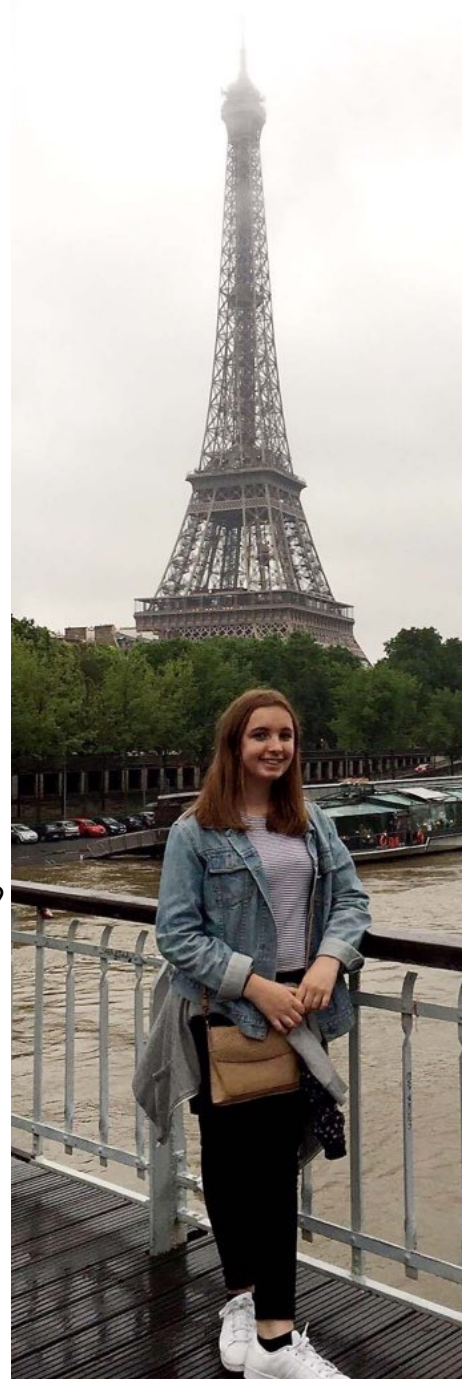


However this year is not all easy; through this year, I've experienced some of the highest highs and lowest lows; over the last 9 months I have experienced every emotion you could think of; from pure joy to the feeling of freedom to annoyance to utter devastation, and everything in between. There are days where you might not speak to anyone at school, and the highlight of your week will be that one person who smiles at you, or you might have to go to a 2 hour rotary meeting and not understand a thing and feel like you haven't learnt any Danish at all. Or you might just have a week where you feel like you haven't accomplished a single thing on Exchange. But on these days you just have to remind yourself that you're 16 and living abroad in a foreign country, and that's definitely an achievement to be proud of. But that's not to say Exchange isn't worth it; it is worth it. And its worth it because of these challenges, not in spite of them. Because the hard parts are what make you grow, they are what makes going on Exchange so powerful. On Exchange you'll go through 5 years of emotions, and with that is bound to be highs and lows, but with 5 years of emotions comes 5 years of growth; and that's the powerful part of Exchange; that even though it might feel you only walked through those airport doors yesterday, the same person you are now; in fact, it was 8 months ago and not a single part of you is the same. You learn to adapt and assimilate, just like all Exchange Students do, you learn the little mannerisms of your country, like shaking everyones hand when you meet them, and saying 'tak for mad' after eating, you start to catch onto the fashion sense, and no longer freak out over the green H&M at the end of the cobblestoned shopping street or the 7/11 in the snow covered train station or the fact that some of the money has holes in it.

Writing this letter was such a hard thing to do because there are simply no words to describe this year or to do it justice. No words to describe how it feels to live as an Exchange Student for a year. No words to describe how it feels when you realize 9 months ago you were arriving at Copenhagen airport and now in 3 short months you'll be back there but at the departures gate, not the arrivals. That instead of walking into your new life you're leaving it. There is no way to explain how amazing and hard and wonderful this year has been; all I can say was that it was worth it. When people say you should go on Exchange, they don't mean it will be an easy holiday, what they mean is, despite all the struggles and difficulties, it is worth it. And that is all I can say to you, that it is worth it. Despite how hard this year has been, I would still fill out my application and go on Exchange all over again, and I encourage you to fill out your application and go on Exchange too.



Colour night in Copenhagen (above) and in Paris



Holly Tomlinson - Hungary

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West Footscray

Living in Hungary is not what one would expect, a lot of the time is made up of hearing "eat more, eat more, eat more" when you've already had more than you can handle and being told "nagyon jó beszélsz magyarul" which is also, you speak very good Hungarian, after you've only said hello to someone. For all I know the quirks I have discovered and come to love about my host country could be the same for most Exchange Students in any other country, but I wouldn't know, because I live in Hungary. When I applied for Exchange like most people I had my country preferences, in my case they were based on very little knowledge of the real culture those countries possessed, so when it came down to actually handing in my final choices I simply wrote "send me anywhere" because I felt I could create my own experience so no matter where I was sent, it wouldn't matter, because I would, and did make the most of what was given to me and what was sometimes thrown at me.. from behind.. completely knocking me off of my feet for a moment.

I was placed in a small region of Hungary called "Bács Kiskun". This area is made up of many small towns, 3 of which I have lived in. I would say the centre of this region is Kiskunhalas, Kiskunhalas is the largest town in the area and is also where I go to school. "Halas" is about a two/two and a half hour drive to the capital of Hungary, Budapest. After experiencing travelling to Budapest, the distance doesn't bother me anymore, spending a day in the beautiful city is worth any amount of travel. Although I live in a small town rather than a city, I have really enjoyed my time here. I arrived in the middle of January to what I thought was a very cold winter, not necessarily a white winter as I found out later it was the warmest January Hungary had, had in a fair few years. I remember arriving, being so exhausted after my 3 flights



from Australia and hearing my family speaking Hungarian in the car and just being so confused, I can tell you the minute I arrived home and was shown where my bed was I passed out straight away.

My first full day in Hungary I attended school, my school is called "Bibó István gimnázium" and is one of three high schools in my town. Walking through the school for the first time, greeting students and sitting through my first couple of classes I had no clue what to think, it certainly felt a lot different from my normal school day in Australia, but slowly day after day it became a routine that I understood and enjoyed as much as one can enjoy going to school. Here I take classes such as; art, history, English, Italian, German, Hungarian literature, chemistry, physics and PE, the schooling here is definitely more academic based and also quite full on, I respect my fellow classmates for the amount of work they put into school each day. I was put into a great class, most of the people are now 18 so I'm a little bit younger but that hasn't stopped me from making friendships. Many speak English which was a big help at the start, not needed too much anymore, but when I didn't understand something or needed help or just a friend to have a normal conversation with, my classmates were all amazing.

In my first few months here when I would remind myself that I was walking through the streets of Europe getting one more day further into my Exchange the rush of feelings and emotions I would get was surreal. I'd been dreaming of this for a long time and it was here, thanks to some hard work and mainly thanks to Rotary.

I call Exchange the best and worst year of your life, now, that is a fairly dramatic way to put it, but let me explain. Exchange is not a "holiday" or a year long "vacation" Exchange has been the hardest thing I have done in my short 17 years and there were many times when things got tough where I would think "why am I here?" "is everything I'm doing worth it?" But I think going through the tough times is a must, as they say Exchange is a life changing experience, if you didn't experience the bad you wouldn't know just how amazing the good times were and you definitely would not grow, mature and learn to appreciate the world we live in nearly as much. The happiest I've ever been in my life has been during my 9 months here. I've gone through chapter like stages of my feelings towards not only Hungary, the Hungarian language and Exchange, but also myself changing. I feel like I've grown more in just these nine months than I ever could half in spending another year at home. I am more comfortable to be who I am.. Whoever that is, I know what I want in life and more so, how to achieve those goals, I know what I want when it comes to friendships and most of all I feel I am more knowledgeable about the good and bad that goes on in the world and my appreciation of opportunities I have living where I do is amazing. I hope once I arrive home, people will be able to see this growth.

Being a Crossbound means that for a whole entire 3-4 months you are fairly alone, your oldies (past group of Exchange Students) would have left and your newbies (new group of Exchange Students) would not have arrived yet. It's pretty lonely knowing the amazing friends you found in other Exchange Students are now gone, and you only had 5 or so months with them, and that the next group you'll grow to love and feel for them as family too, that after another 4 or so months, you leave them. I see that as luck though, I have met twice as many Exchange Students and had more opportunities to create life long friendships, and thats what they are, friends you make during the span of 5 months, that you keep for life.



It's hard to pinpoint highlights of my Exchange as I have experienced many amazing things, but if I really thought about it, many of the moments I hold close to my heart are ones I spent with other Exchange Students here in Hungary. I was lucky enough to go on 2 euro tour trips, both lasting 10 days where we visited 10 countries in the north and south of Europe. I would love to go into depth on this trip but my letter would end up being 20 times longer than it should! But I can say this, this trip allowed me to see some of the most beautiful things Europe has to offer, I heard about 8 different languages being spoken fluently in the span of 10 or so days, and for this short time I became a "typical tourist" seeing and doing things I had always dreamt about doing. I swam in the freezing cold sea in a European April in Nice, I sat under the Eiffel Tower in Paris, eating strawberries and croissants, I roamed around the streets of Venice and Rome eating Galati with my friends and toured Oxford street in London admiring the beautiful clothes that on an Exchange Students budget, none of us could afford. This trip, well actually Exchange in general is something I would love to do over and over again, never getting sick of the beauty it supplies.

I owe a lot to my host families, I will have 4 families during my stay and so far I have lived with 3. At first moving to a new family is always awkward, you have to go through the period of not knowing when it is appropriate or when it is the right time to start going to the kitchen and grabbing your own food!! No no, I always felt at home with the families I had, they always made sure I had anything I needed and put up with the weird things I do. I consider myself incredibly lucky to have been placed with such generous and loving people. At home in Australia I live with my mother and grandmother and I never knew what it was like to have and live with siblings, here I have lived with two families with both mum and dad and two children, and a family of just a dad and again, two children, so I feel like I have experienced many of the situations that you can find. Not only did my families offer never ending love and support but also, I got many travelling opportunities living with them, I was able to see many other cities in Hungary, I spent a week in Romania, I visited Serbia several times spent a few days in Austria, how awesome is that? My host families give me an even stronger reason of why I would visit again. Now I can definitely say that I have a home to come back to, not only in Australia, but in Hungary now too, which is a very special thing to have.

The Hungarian language is not something that you can learn by yourself or at school in Australia. I feel that it is the hardest language I have ever come across and trying to learn the hundreds of grammar rules just makes me want to scream, but alas, now nine months in I can understand most of what I hear and can translate that into English, I can write to my families and friends in Hungarian, using (hopefully) correct Grammar, and I can have a simple conversation with nearly anyone. Knowing that makes me so so proud of myself. I definitely wouldn't give myself the title of being fluent, I'm currently far from it, but maybe one day.

Hungarian culture is something I have come to love and appreciate. During the first half of my Exchange of course I loved Hungary already but I never considered it a country that I would want to live in if I moved to Europe when I was older, but now I am looking at applying to universities in some cities around the country and I would love to study and live here for a few years. Hungarians are very proud people, even more proud than Americans and that's saying something. After having such a tough past with several wars and many years of the entire nation being in a state of poverty to now being a much more independent and prosperous nation they celebrate every national Hungarian holiday with such passion and enthusiasm that it has given me such a strong sense of pride that I never felt before when I thought about coming from Australia. Another thing I love about Hungarian culture is the food. They are definitely food lovers, with lunch being the main meal of the day with 3 courses of soup, a main meal and a cake or pastry as dessert and every meal being filled with heavy foods such as bread, potato and meat. I have fallen in love with the cuisine here and I hope I can recreate it to a somewhat respectable point for my family back home.

I know it is not the end yet, I still have 3 beautiful months to go until I fly back to Australia but writing this is making me think about how much I want to take advantage of every moment I have left here and really do all of the things I still want to achieve.

Going on Exchange is amazing and terrifying and crazy all at the same time, but I think going home will feel similar, after building a life here in just a year, learning the language, making friends that have turned into family and spending time in places that now feel like home, returning to Australia might feel completely new and different also. And I'm scared, but ever so grateful that I was given the opportunity to create all of these memories and friendships here in Europe. My appreciation of this experience and the people that helped me get here is mammoth. I cannot wait to show you more of my experiences here in Hungary.

Szeretlek Magyarországot. Köszönök szépen mindent amit adtatok és tanítottatok nekem. Sosem foglak elfelejteni titeket.

"I love you Hungary. Thank you for all that you have given and taught me. I will never forget you"



Shaina Brook - Brazil

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The Rotary Club of Bendigo

I guess you could say that from the moment that I stepped foot into the world; I was a born traveller and adventurer. I think that's why it wasn't all that surprising when I decided I was going to become a Rotary Youth Exchange Student and live abroad for a year. This absolutely crazy year, a year I've never looked back on.

My name is Shaina and I've been living in Brazil, the city of Sete Lagoas (translated to Seven Lakes) for the past 9 months. A year and a half ago- it was a city I didn't know existed. A year ago it was the disappointment I'd be living here and not in Rio de Janeiro. And today? It's a place I call home. And it really is home to me. Although it's a small city, it is so filled with the raw and distinct Brazilian culture that I imagined before I arrived. It has the happy and bold Brazilians who make you feel at home the moment you step foot here, the bare-foot and passionate soccer games and the houses built from every colour you could imagine (and definitely more than 7 lakes).

The Brazilian culture is a culture unlike no other. The people are so happy and so warming to everyone- I like to say that they are the kind of people that have open arms until you give them a reason to close them. It's a nice change from the Australian culture where you have to work for their arms to open.

Brazilians are also very passionate about their country and the aspects it has to offer, this has been a huge benefit to me because it's meant I've been able to travel a lot with different people. I've seen more waterfalls throughout my time here than I ever knew existed in just one area of the world. I've been able to hike through and swim in canyons, witness the difference in



historical cities and so much more! My highlight though, was of course the Amazon Rainforest. This is where I swam under waterfalls with just the moon to give light. It's where I jumped down into the water of the Amazon or into rivers hidden in the forest. I held sloths, touched dolphins, caught piranhas and alligators. I met indigenous tribes and watched their rituals along with so much more that I couldn't help but fall in love with. And of course it wasn't just an adventure, it was an eye opening experience into my surroundings and the difference in lifestyles portrayed throughout Brazil. Luckily for me too, I'll be spending my last 2 months with 2 trips to Rio, a trip to the Pantanal and one to the gorgeous Northeast beaches.

My Brazilian adventure has really been something of the unexpected. It didn't matter my thoughts and expectations before I arrived because it's really been something else all together. Just these past 9 months alone, I've grown more as a person than I ever could have done in one year of high school, I've seen more of Brazil than I've seen of my own country, I've viewed a world in a new language and I've made irreplaceable friends from all over the globe.

An Exchange year is a year that tests you in more ways than you could ever imagine. A year that will have you feeling like you want to go home but feeling like you never want to leave at the very same time. It's a year that teaches you of the importance of difference within people and countries and shows you everything that you can battle through. When you make it through an Exchange year, you make it through every emotion its possible to feel at every height its possible to feel, you battle through difficulties to come out with amazing memories and you come out the other side as a bigger, better and stronger person.

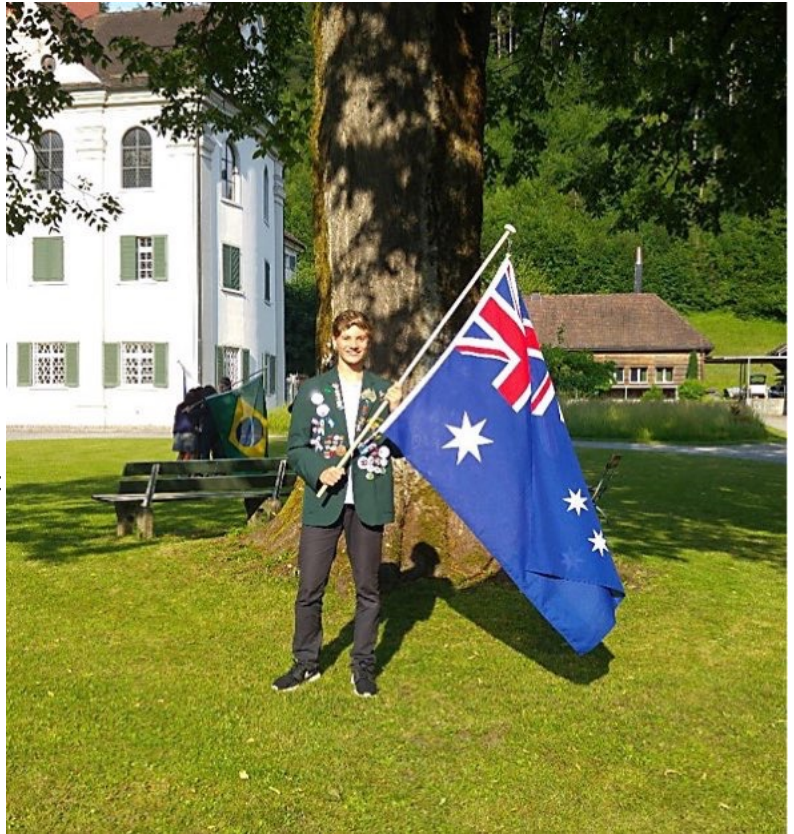
I know for a fact that when I board my plane on the 8th of January 2017 I will be doing it with forced feet. I'm not entirely sure how I'm going to say goodbye to my friends, my family, my dearly beloved acai, all of my memories- the good and the bad, but most importantly to my home. It's been more than I could have ever hoped for and I can't begin to describe how my heart breaks when I think of leaving. An Exchange year is a year that you never forget and it's one that I know will never leave my heart or my soul.



As I sit down to write this letter with beautiful, snow-capped alps outside my window, I can't believe that this time last year I was still In Australia. These past 8 months have absolutely flown by in a blur of new experiences. After exploring different regions of Switzerland, living life with Swiss people and learning to speak the language, I feel as if I have become completely integrated into a new culture.

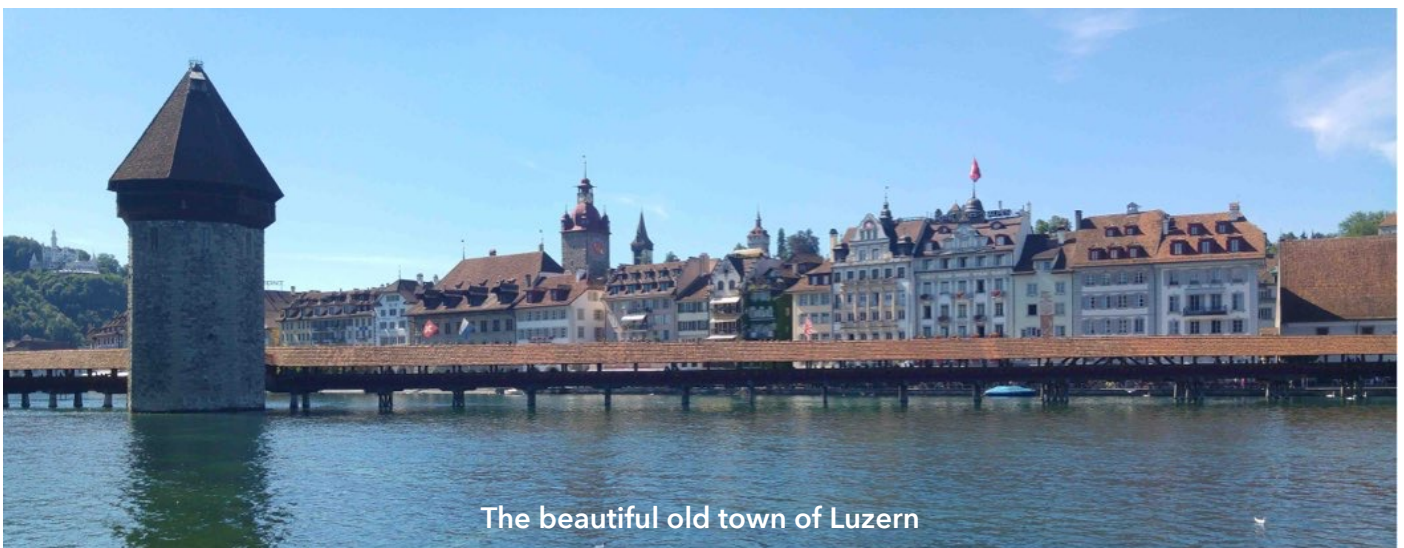
Although many may refer to an Exchange as a 'holiday' or a 'gap year', it certainly is not. It was daunting having to integrate myself into a culture I knew little about and a country I knew no one from. During my Exchange, I have really had to step out of my comfort zone and manage a range of challenging issues. However, having overcome these difficulties, new opportunities and benefits emerged which were definitely worth the initial challenge.

I can remember my overflowing emotions when I first landed in Switzerland. Of course I was excited to experience living my life with a new family, but I was also nervous as I had heard that Swiss people were generally very reserved and distant and I wasn't sure how I would adapt to that style of living. However, despite my concerns, my family opened their doors with warm, loving hearts and I got along with them really well.



Rotary D2000 Flag Parade

Since then, I have been on many amazing adventures with my host families. We have explored different parts of Switzerland together including the alpine ski resorts and also the beautiful, sunny towns in the Italian-speaking region. I was also able to try traditional Swiss dishes with them including fondue, raclette and Röstli.



The beautiful old town of Luzern

Going from a rather large town near the centre of Melbourne to a relatively small agricultural village was a big change for me. All of a sudden I found myself struggling up steep, narrow paths in freezing temperatures to find my way back home. However, the gloomy forests and beautiful mountain lakes is what makes this part of the world so special.

I have shared many special moments with my host families. We have laughed together over my hopeless attempts to speak German and they helped me overcome my initial culture shock. Most importantly though I was able to call their house 'home'. I have made lifelong relationships with my families and they will each have a special place in my heart.

Prior to starting school I was absolutely terrified. Someone had unhelpfully told me that I had absolutely 'no chance of making Swiss friends', so spending an entire year of my school life alone seemed very frightening. However, when I nervously walked through the door, I noticed that all my classmates were excited and eager to meet me and we quickly became friends. After a few weeks of school, I soon got into a rhythm of being completely clueless in physics, biology and history, failing to remember anyone's name and feeling sleep deprived due to having to wake up at 6.30am and not getting back until 7pm each day.

However, I have now settled in and have become accustomed to Swiss school life and I love my class very much. They have taught me so many things and we have shared some incredible trips together. We were lucky enough to spend a week in Lugano together, an Italian-speaking town with beautiful lakes and sweeping mountain ranges. We also recently spent a week together in the forest where we learnt about the significance of forests throughout the country and assisted some volunteers in some physical work.

Prior to arriving in Switzerland, I had been learning German for a few years at school and had also been completing an online course. Therefore, I was reasonably confident. However, when I arrived and heard Swiss people speak, I found it difficult to understand and say even the simplest of phrases. It also didn't help that the local dialect was Swiss German, which meant the pronunciation was very different and difficult to understand. One thing you will learn if learning a language is that there no better way to learn a language than living and interacting with the locals on a daily basis.



It's well known amongst Exchange Students that you have become properly immersed in the language when you experience a dream in the language of your host country. I am never able to remember my dreams, but have been told that once when on a school camp I actually spoke German in my sleep.

My German is definitely not yet fluent, a goal which I am still working towards. However, I am very pleased with my progress in the German language. I would say that I have successfully overcome the language barrier as I am able to communicate with my host family, my friends and the locals. I have had a huge development with my language as I am able to make jokes and have conversations with everyone. However, there may be times when I am unable to express myself in the way I intended.

Although spending time with people from your host country is very important, the other Exchange Students have also played a major role during my Exchange. My first Rotary weekend was absolutely incredible. We were lucky enough to cruise across a lake together with waterfalls and snowy mountains in the landscape. The other Exchange Students feel like family and I am extremely close with all of them. Since we are all experiencing the same challenges as one another, we are able to give each other advice and work together to improve our Exchanges.

One of my highlights over the past 8 months was the Eurotour; a trip with the other Exchange Students exploring 11 different countries over a period of 17 days. My favourite city that we visited was definitely Amsterdam. We rode on a bicycle tour around the city experiencing all of the pretty bridges, visited the Anne Frank House to learn about her experiences in the Second World War and cruised in a gondola along the narrow canals.

Since I embarked on this adventure of a lifetime, I have seen myself grow into a more confident individual. I have gained so much maturity whilst being here and have formed many lifelong friendships. I've learnt so much in this amazing country and there have been so many remarkable things which I have accomplished.

This year has definitely been the best of my life and my strong sense of belonging here in Switzerland allows me to call it 'home'. It makes me sad realising that in only a few months I'll have to start saying my goodbyes.

I am so grateful to Rotary, my families and my friends for this amazing opportunity to become a Rotary Youth Exchange Student. I have fallen in love with this beautiful country of Switzerland and a part of my heart will be left here forever. Thank you for the experience of a lifetime!



Making new Swiss friends



Skiing with my host family in Laax, Switzerland

Isobel Langtry - Germany

Sponsored by The Rotary
Club of Woodend

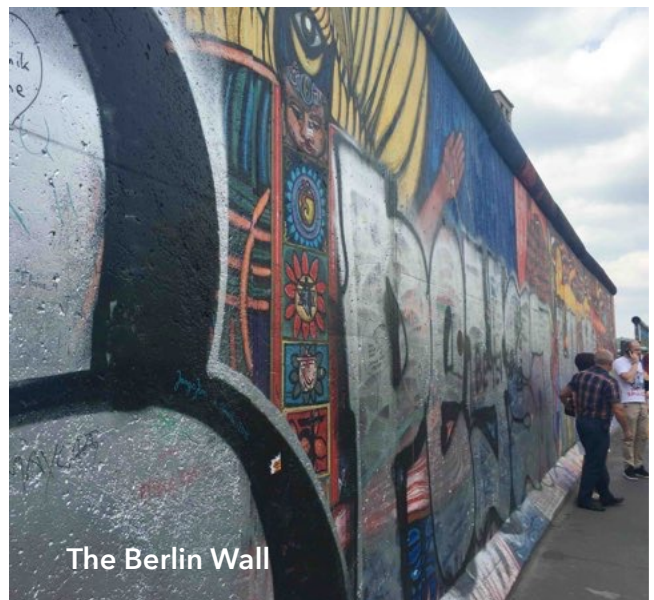
There's a certain kind of dread connected to writing this article for us outbounds. It's not the article itself; it's what it represents. By writing this, I'm summarising my Exchange, and a summary is for something that is almost or is complete, and that terrifies me. The idea that this time that has seen me grow and experience things well beyond the point in which I can discuss them, is so close to being finished.

There's a pretty clichéd saying everyone hears connected with Exchange; "it's not a year of your life, it's a life in a year", and to anyone who isn't an Exchange Student, this sounds like the sappiest saying ever. Before my Exchange, even I thought it was dumb. But a cliché is a cliché for a reason; because it's so true that everyone knows it. You don't realise how relatable this quote is until you experience it. I could never summarise my Exchange in just a couple of words or experiences, because it would almost be belittling toward it. Exchange isn't just one experience that you can put into the "Exchange" category, it's an endless array of experiences. On Exchange, you have the greatest and the hardest times you'll ever know. You'll grow up by 3 years in the span of 12 months, and it will be terrifying, but it's the risk you take to feel the sense of loving, independence, acceptance, connection and belonging that you can only truly acquire through worldly knowledge like travel and Exchange.

I find that most people that I have read in their Letters From Abroad would discuss what they've done in their year, what lessons they've learned or the ways in which they've changed, but I simply can't do that. Because much to the dismay of my friends and family who always ask about my Exchange, it's something I don't feel I need or want to publicise with the world. The hardships I've conquered, the moments of seemingly endless bliss, the hours of sweat and tears and the life lessons I've learned in the most irrelevant of moments, they are mine to keep and cherish. I don't need to share every photo, every feeling, every experience, because that would make them less personal to me. It's not to



say that the world shouldn't know, or that my experiences are the type that only I would find interesting; it is simply that most of my memories that I have made are the type that need to be experienced to be understood. Sure, I could write a long chronicle about the incredible people I've met in this year, the various extreme differences in cultures, or the stories I will keep with me for my lifetime, and these lessons and stories can be viewed, read and pondered, but words can't properly articulate the incredible experience that is Student Exchange.



What I will say, with the air of mystery I have built, is that Exchange is an experience far beyond words. It's something I feel that every teenager should experience. There are lessons in life you can only learn on your own, and Exchange is the way to learn them early and get the most use out of them. Yes, of course the added knowledge of a foreign language and culture is something incredible to know, but there are smaller, life changing lessons that you will never learn in a classroom. They will make you confident, focused, care free (in a good sense), independent and so much more. They will make you complete.

Finally, a short lesson in the German language that I learned in my second week of Exchange; in German, they have two words to mean "home". The first is "Zuhause", and it's a location; somewhere you go to and live in. The other is "Heimat"; it's not just a place. It's a feeling, it's loving and it's meaningful. Through Exchange, in relation to your home country and your host country, your opinions on these words will constantly be switching, until your Exchange begins to draw to a close and you realise your true feelings on where your true home is. Australia is my "Zuhause", but Germany is my new "Heimat".



Reichstag, Berlin (upper left); my amazing class of 12G (below left); end of Eurotour at Brandenburger Tor (below right)



Kynon Hickman - Brazil

On January 16th 10 o'clock I said my last goodbyes to embark on a 32 hour journey across the globe, the hardest goodbyes, saying goodbye to people who have been the biggest part of my life for over 16 years. Now after 8 months I realise that goodbye was easy now faced with the goodbye of a life I've lived for a year but this time a goodbye for a lifetime. After the first leg of our journey I said good by to 13 of the last familiar faces in my life and then in Sao Paulo I said goodbye to the last person I new on the planet. That night I also said what I wasn't aware would be my last words in English for almost a month. Once I boarded my last of three planes, I quickly gained the realisation that this was going to be no easy ride. Everything said on the plane meaning nothing to me.

My name is Kynon, and the last 9 months have been the hardest in my life, from the moment I stepped off the plane with only my two massive bags and my huge ambitions I realised that nothing would be as expected. I Nervously walked out of the arrival gate in Rio De Janiero, a mixture of excitement and the sudden urge to pee. I was greeted by two great big smiling faces and two big hugs. Only after telling them how horrible my 30-hour plane ride was for about 2 mins did I realise that they did not speak a word of English lucky I knew how to say



Amazon Boat Trip



"Hello, how are you" in Portuguese but that was where my language skills ended and that

became the full extent of my conversation for what felt like forever. I later learned that a laugh is a perfect reply for almost anything, until it's a question - then you just have to choose yes or no which doesn't always go as planned. I remember one time my host grandma said to me I'm very old and I replied with yes very; lets just say me and my first host grandma for some reason didn't get too



'Exchangers of the World'



Amazonia

To many people back at home I'm sure my Exchange seemed like some kind of exciting long vacation, but those 5 hours a day and 25 hours a week in school not understanding anything seem to say very differently. It has been the most amazing opportunity to discover myself for who I am, to grow as a person. Now I am more confident than ever feel like talking in English is easy, not only have I been able to learn a whole new language but also gained a greater understanding of English. When I say I learnt a whole new language, the most important thing to remember is learning a language doesn't happen over night and it doesn't just come to you, no one learns a language without trying. I have come a long way over my 9 months here but my first 6 months were hell, barely anyone speaks English in my city and you can begin to feel very alone. Even now I get lonely sometimes.



Festival Junina



Host Family

Undoubtedly the most amazing people in the world are Exchange Students and one of the most amazing places in the world is the Amazon rain forest, what could be more amazing than a week on a boat in the Amazon with 20 other Exchange Students. I can say with confidence this was one of the best weeks in my life. I discovered a part of the world, a part where very few people visit, with amazing animals, (not talking about the Exchange Students) while partying almost everyday. The Amazon is now a place I will hold in my heart with some of my most precious memories. The food we ate for the week was the most amazing fish and Amazonian food, each meal leaving you rolling instead of walking.



Rafting

Schooling here in Brazil is very different, the teachers here aren't just teachers but they are also friends. It is completely normal for students to hug teachers or our class to go out for dinner with a teacher or go to their house for a barbecue, my principal even asked if I would like to go on a family holiday with him. The environment for learning is so much happier everyone smiles and is relaxed. My first day in school was truly terrifying, everyone looking at that tall blond kid, who didn't even have the school uniform, I was so

scared, standing by myself, not understanding a word, only very few people can understand the type of fear I felt that day of starting with nothing.

Throughout this year so far I have lived with two amazing families who have treated me like family, like their own son. They have been truly amazing, now I am nervous to move to my third family tomorrow. Moving families is definitely one of the hardest things, gaining their trust, respect and love. After your family begins to trust you, you can do so much more but every time you move families its back to the start. My families have taken me to Rio and to a beautiful costal city called Cabo Frio and I will forever consider them family and be forever grateful for all they have given to me.

I have been on one weekend camp with my district, 16 of us from around the state of Rio all travelled to Cabo Frio, a beach city with white sand and blue water, the weekend was amazing, but saying goodbye forever to those people was truly heart breaking and having extreme jealousy of those who lived on the beach of this beautiful city.

I would like to end my letter by simply saying a big thank you to Rotary for all your support throughout my year, they could never do enough to help. I would also love to give the biggest thank to all three of my host families and wish them all the best and especially a big thanks to my mum and dad for allowing me to travel so far away for so long, not many would allow this.

Holy Fest (top right); Festinhas de Brazil (second from top); in the mountains (bottom right); cabo frio (below)



Lucy Joseland - France

Sponsored by
The Rotary Club of Yarra Bend

Bonjour ! My name is Lucy and I live in Lille in the very north of France amongst the ch'ti's.

It's absolutely crazy to think I've been here for over 9 months, it's feels like I got here only yesterday but at the same time I feel so at home like I have lived here all my life. Before my Exchange I was always told to be prepared for the best year of my life but even as I was boarding the plane I had no idea how amazing this year would really be. However that's not to say it's always been easy... that's right, those 9am-11am school days have really been a killer... oh and travelling Europe for 2 weeks with some of my best friends or spending 3 weeks on the beaches of Corsica - Exchange really is a tough life. But seriously, moving to a new country, new city, new school, new family, it's bound to be challenging at times. Not to mention an entire new language! And yeah, I thought before Exchange that I knew some French... I didn't.

Exchange is a year of opportunities, of laughter, tears, hugs, smiles, torture (10 hour school days), adventures, learning, travelling, singing, dancing, pretending to understand, pretending not to understand (forgot to do the homework), and eating WAY too much because the food is just that damn good.

When you think about France, lots of people think of the stereotypical French person riding a bike to go buy some baguettes and pastries for breakfast and having cheese and wine with every meal. I think here is where most Exchange students would laugh at how ridiculously wrong these assumptions of their countries are, however to my delight they have proven to be quite true. Whilst by no means am I saying that all the stereotypes are true, as I'm yet to see someone wearing a beret and I discovered that only 8 of the 30 students in my class had eaten frog's legs before in their life, a large majority particularly surrounding the food are true. And I honestly couldn't be happier because the food is to die for!! ...Literally, as I learnt in geography at school the ch'ti's have a shorter average life



My French District - 1520

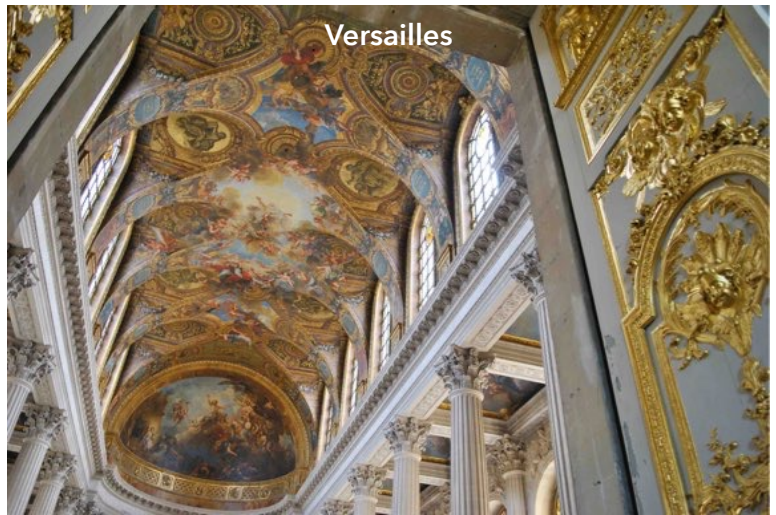


Lille - my home (above and below)

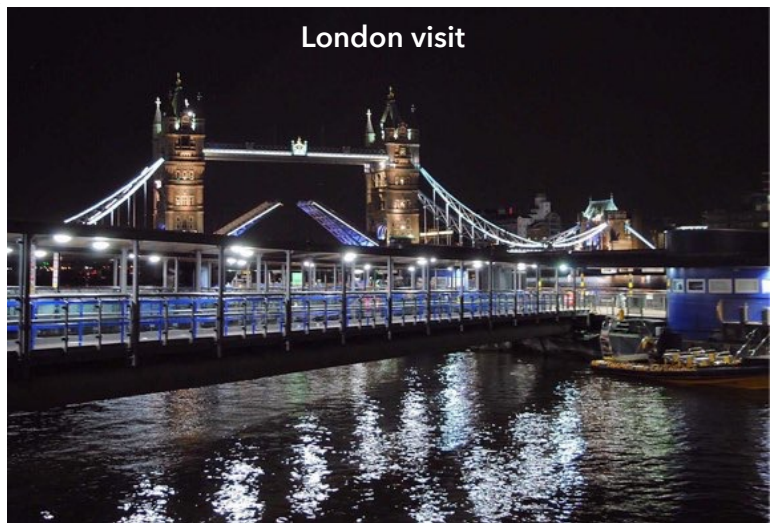


span than the rest of France due to how much butter and oil they use in cooking, and because frites (hot chips) is a weekly, if not more often, meal. But I'm not complaining and trust me if you lived here you wouldn't be either.

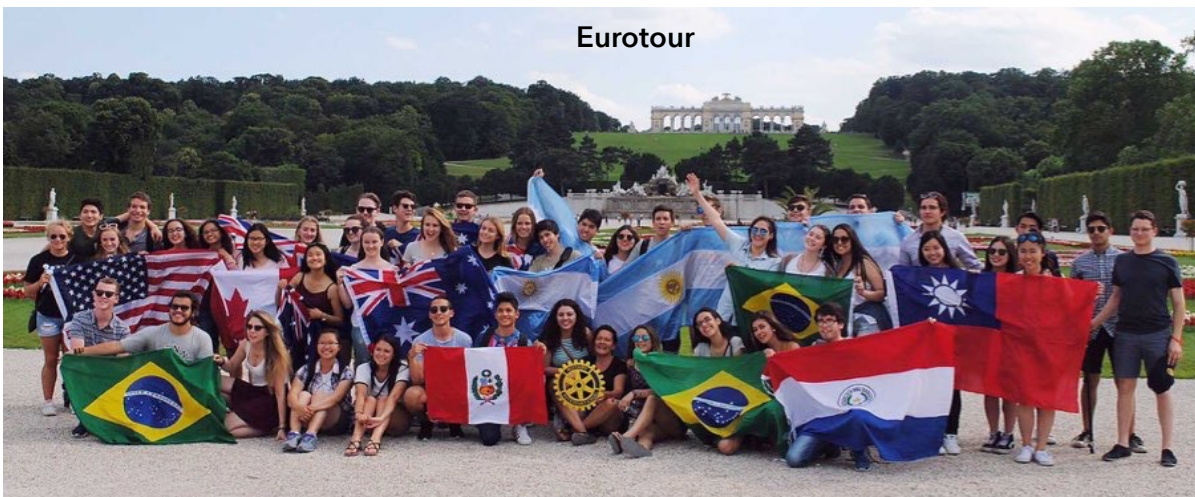
One thing I've learnt on my Exchange is to always be ready to answer the most random questions that are thrown at you. Before my Exchange cheese was not something I ate very often so when I got to France to find that « est-ce que tu aimes bien le fromage ? » (do you like cheese?) is a surprisingly common get to know you question, (I'm talking "what's your name? where are you from and do you like cheese?") I would smile and answer « oui » in a horrible accent without really knowing what I was getting myself into. Luckily for me it's absolutely delicious and now one of my favourite foods and something I will definitely miss when I return to Australia in January. It's only fair after all that France has taught me that I teach the French a bit about Australia too and it's hilariously surprising how little some people know. I've been asked numerous crazy questions such as "why do you speak English so well if you're from Australia?" and "do you know anyone who has been eaten alive by a snake?" but my favourite will forever be "do you have chocolate in Australia or is it too hot that it would be always melted so it doesn't exist?"



Versailles



London visit



Eurotour

endless family; A family in which no one is ever alone, where there's always someone to talk to, laugh with, smile and

Another question I get asked all the time (beaten only by do you like cheese) is "how do you live without your family?". Whilst it would be wrong to say that I don't miss my family in Australia, it's also wrong to say that I live without my family. Over this past year my family has expanded to be much larger than just my biological family. As soon as I was accepted into the RYE program I was welcomed into a giant

give hugs, someone who understands, and language barriers do not exist. As Exchange Students we are and always will be a family and to me that's the best part of Exchange. The goodbyes are going to be unbelievably hard but they're not so much a 'goodbye' as a 'see you later' and I cannot wait to travel the world to go visit all my brothers and sisters.

This year has been more amazing than words can explain; not only have I found a home in France, but I've been fortunate enough to visit so many different places all throughout Europe with both Rotary and host families. Some of which, last year I had never even heard of, let alone imagine I'd have the opportunity to visit them. I've experienced so many different cultures and learnt more this year than a year of school in Australia could ever teach me. I know nothing will ever be able to thank my family and Rotary enough for making this year possible, but as Exchange Students we always try everything (I've even eaten fish and seafood this year) so merci à tous ceux qui ont rendu de cette année possible or thank you to everyone who has made this year possible!

"Ne pleure pas parce que c'est fini, souris parce que c'est arrivé " "Don't cry because it's over, smile because it happened" - Dr. Seuss



Madeline Hannan-Jones - Spain

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Rotary Club of
Richmond

It snowed in Pamplona. Once . . .



Driving a car. Sounds easy, right? Maybe, you've always wanted to drive, it makes you feel a freedom that just isn't there by walking. Maybe you feel such a thirst to be able to drive that you take the test and get in the car. They told you that it would be hard, but you didn't expect this. There are sharp turns and blind crests that disorient you, traffic that slows you down and other cars on the road that expect you to do things a certain way. You want to pull over and get out of the car. But the feeling of being on the road with so many cars around you excites you and you think about where you could go with your car and you keep driving.

Now swap the idea of driving a car with the idea of going on Exchange. Sometimes you hit quiet, unlit roads and couldn't feel more alone and sometimes you're on a five-lane road with other cars everywhere you look. Being immersed in a new part of the world that you always knew existed but never ventured into alone is both the scariest thing and the most exciting. Soon you find yourself cruising smoother than ever and realise why you first wanted to drive. This is something you will hold with you the rest of your life.

An Exchange is the opportunity to turn stereotypes into educated knowledge and to

learn to be able to speak with just that many more people in the world. My Exchange in Pamplona, Spain taught me that not all Spaniards dance the flamenco in their free time, and they aren't all raving supporters of bull fighting either. It taught me that not everyone takes a siesta in the middle of the day (though I did fall in love with this part of the Spanish day), but also that soccer is VERY important and so is food and wine.

I learnt the importance of family in Spanish culture during my stay with three different host families, through the sitting down to lunch together as a family every day and in my third family going to my host grandma's place every day to eat together. I learnt that even if they aren't related to you, family are people who accept you no matter what, and who are always helping you to become a better version of yourself.

I learnt the routine of the Spanish school day, felt my attention and patience levels stretching like elastic as I sat in a classroom for 6 hours a day watching the blackboard, and even learnt how to please the grumpiest of old biology teachers.

Through the influence of my first host mum Aurora, I learnt secrets of Spanish cooking, and not only the importance of LOTS of olive oil but also how to make the perfect Spanish potato omelette and a pretty good gazpacho. In one of my first months in Spain myself and all the other students in my host district took part in a tortilla (Spanish omelette) making competition in Bilbao, and can I tell you I have never been in the presence of so much egg in my life. I also mastered the art of polishing off a huge chorizo and cheese baguette in one go. That was a proud day.



The wedding of my host cousin that lasted thirteen hours taught me how much Spaniards love to dance and sing, as I had the raspy voice and sore feet to prove it days after the event. Celebrations are a huge part of the Spanish lifestyle, not only for weddings but communions and birthdays as well, which I also had the privilege of experiencing.

The care and patience put into me by all the people around me taught me the Spanish language, and the ability to communicate which just that many more people in this world. It makes me so proud to be able to joke, learn and build relationships with a whole new population.



I learnt to navigate the streets of a new city, all the perfect spots to sit on a sunny day, the meeting spots of a teenager from Pamplona, the best places to get churros and chocolate, patatas bravas, or a perfect array of tapas. Climbing the mountains behind Pamplona or watching the sunset from the edge of the city made me feel on top of the world, and though they weren't huge achievements they are definitely moments I hold close to my heart when I reflect on my Exchange.



One of the best (and only) Spanish foods I mastered (above right)

Classic Exchange Student Shot (middle)

My support system this year made up of India, Germany, the U.S.A and Taiwan (below)

I learnt the traditions, culture and customs from not only Spain but also Germany, Taiwan, the US and India from the girls I shared the city with. I learnt that in Spain the wedding finger is on the right hand instead of the left, and that it's important to keep both hands above the table when eating.

I learnt the art of surviving 10 hour bus journeys as 65 teenagers including myself (all had been living in Spain as well) toured Europe, visiting 11 countries and 13 different cities, learning the history and culture of these places while making life long friends. I learnt how to say "hello" and "thank you" in many different and obscure different European languages including Czech, Slovakian, German, Dutch and Hungarian while touring.

I learnt how to be alone, but also be surrounded by hundreds of other people and I learnt to adapt and thrive wherever I was. I learnt the importance of being with myself, and in turn resilience and confidence as I experienced things I didn't think possible, because I believed in myself. I learnt to keep driving, no matter what.



I learnt to be grateful and say thank you for everything that people do for you or give to you, so if you are one of the people who made my amazing Exchange possible THANK YOU in all of the languages possible because you have helped make my world so much bigger.

Twenty years from now you will be more disappointed by the things you didn't do than by the ones you did do. So throw off the bowlines. Sail away from the safe harbour. Catch the trade winds in your sails. Explore. Dream. Discover. (-Mark Twain)

All Spanish Inbounds on stage with the Rotary International President



Sean Hughes - Germany

Sponsored by The Rotary
Club of Bacchus Marsh

Ok so for me personally I feel like my Exchange started early 2015 when I sent my applications in to Rotary, I already knew about the organisation and what they did because my sister went on Exchange a year before so considering that I sort of knew how it would be and what to expect. Then I had an interview with Rotary in Melbourne, which I got very stressed about, and to make matters worse Mum got lost on the way getting there. I think my meetings could have gone better because I was extremely nervous and I just blotted out the first thing that came to mind when they asked questions, but luckily enough, after an hour of intense interviews and the cold sweats I finished and went home. I'm not sure how long it took for me to get the email saying I was invited to the first camp but I was extremely excited. Yet again I can't remember dates but the first orientation (classic Mum was late again) so we arrived late as per usual and yeah, that was the weekend I was told where I'd be living for the next year.

Our plane was on the 16th of January at 11:30 but had to be at the airport at 8 o'clock. Mum decided to get there an hour early for some reason, so I had Maccas, got told off by Dad for the last time that year and just talked to the other Exchange Students that kept rolling in, as well as my family of course. Then came the time when we had to go through customs and that is most awkward thing I've been through, all the Exchange Students crying and I was standing there making sure their tears didn't touch my dapper blazer. So we finally made it through and that's when my life changed basically. I don't think anyone realises how far Australia is from every other country until you jump on a plane and it's takes almost a full day just of flying.

After extreme heat in Australia with temperatures reaching in the 40's the week I left



I made the decision to wear shorts and a singlet. I got a big shock when I arrived in Germany and it was -7 degrees. So when I first met my host family we had a huge laugh about it and we still laugh about it now. I was really lucky to get a great family; they helped me with almost everything they could so I made sure I could do anything to help them. The street they live on was great too, everyone was friends with each other and very nice to me. My first week of school was kind of a weird one - they had an art thing for two days and on the third there was an accident - so we all left early and then the rest of the week we had free.



The next big thing was probably Euro Tour. That is the best experience of my life; travelling the world with some of the best people I've ever met. It's a great feeling. My Euro Tour was for 21 days and we went to Belgium, France, Monaco, Italy, Austria, Hungary and Czech Republic. I don't know how to explain how grateful I am to have been able to do what I did and I can't put into words how amazing it was. I'm not going to talk too much on Euro Tour because I'm sure everyone else has and even though they're all different in their own way it's just something you need to experience for yourself.

And yeah, so far I feel like I've grown as a person and this will probably be the most memorable thing in my life.



Toshi Preston - Finland

**Sponsored by The
Rotary Club of Glen Eira**

Exchange has been running in the family- I grew up listening to stories about my father's Exchange to Japan when he was 16, my mother's Exchange from Japan to Australia when she was 18, my sister's Exchange to Japan when she was 16, my uncle and cousin also went on Exchange." They always told me that going on Exchange was the best decision they ever made, and living abroad was one of the best years of their lives. I was only 14 years old when I made the decision to apply for Rotary Youth Exchange, so at the time I was quite nervous and didn't know what to expect, and couldn't imagine what it would be like to live in another country across the world for a whole year. My year in Finland didn't turn out how I expected it to, but then again, nothing really turns out how you first imagine it to, and this was in the best way possible. Exchange isn't just a holiday abroad. It really is much more than just being in a foreign country. There is so much more to it. Living in a different environment, a new language, culture, lifestyle, and a new school. You can't just fall back on your old friends. You have to make new friends. You can't keep relying on your family back home. You have to help, and be helped by your new family. No, it isn't always easy but that is exactly why Exchange is so fantastic. Sometimes you just need to take a step outside of your comfort zone, from what you are used to and go to a new place to really change and grow as a person.

I am not certain as to why I ended up choosing Finland as my first preference. When I was deciding which country I was going to, I tried to think of one where I would be able to do many things that I am unable to do in Australia. When I heard about Finland I heard about beautiful quiet forests and peaceful and quiet people. This is probably why I came to Finland and now I realize it was a good decision. I think Finland has a very unique experience of being able to walk through a quiet untouched forest peacefully and being able to just enjoy nature. Of course there is also the aspect of all the unique experiences that are unavailable in Australia and unique to Finland.



What better place is there for going swimming in a frozen lake and then to a hot room that reaches 90 degrees.

There are so many things that I love here. I love the beautiful trees that are never far from anywhere you go. I love the lakes that cover the entire country. I love the pink, orange and purple sunsets. I love the beautiful northern lights. I love that the night sky is always clear. I love the Finnish food and especially the desserts. I love the beautiful snowy winters. I love the warm Finnish summer that brings everyone outside. I love the people who, when you get to know them, become life-long friends and most of all I love sauna.

Some of my favourite experiences have been going to avanto (swimming in a frozen lake) and sauna for the first time. I remember how relaxing it was after being frozen to death being able to heat up was one of the nicest feelings I have ever felt. Another one of my favourite experiences was the EuroTour. Being able to see so much with my best friends beside me was honestly something I know I will never forget and I am so happy and grateful I got to be a part of. Another of my favourite experiences was when I sat under the stars with my host sister and close friend watching the northern lights. It was unforgettable. The small things like just going into the forest to explore and experience it, just with a friend, is truly one of the greatest gifts in life for me personally. Now I feel like I can just remember how nice it was to do those things and be content with myself. I think it is those little things that make your Exchange. Honestly Finland and my Exchange have changed me so much and my perspective has changed so much that I do not want my Exchange to end anymore.

In Finland I live in a town called Hämeenlinna. It is a wonderful city because it is not too big and not too small. There is a beautiful lake that runs along the town and the famous castle that the town is named after. It is so beautiful and the perfect size for riding a bike around it. It has plenty of things to do but is not too large so you can still get from place to place very quickly. The school I go to is Kaurialan Lukio. It is an upper secondary school, pretty much equivalent to years 10-12 in Australia. The school is great here because you can wear casual clothes and there is a free lunch every day.



This has to be the most amazing year I have been in and has really been a life in a year. I am so grateful to my family and Rotary for giving me this wonderful experience!