



Letters From Abroad 2018

Rotary International District 9800 Youth Exchange Program

Experiences and Images from our Outbound Youth Exchange Students for 2018



www.rotaryyouthexchangedistrict9800.com.au

**Outbound
Students
2018**



ROTARY DISTRICT 9800 YOUTH EXCHANGE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

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DISTRICT 9800 REPRESENTATIVES

District Governor 2018-2019	Bronwyn Stephens
District Chair Youth Services	Maria Silber

A Message From The District Governor



Youth leaders with a global perspective in our world are best placed to live fruitful, caring lives that can creatively solve the unique problems facing a 21st century world. Rotary Youth Exchange offers a year long opportunity to gain such a perspective.

Our world is a complicated place. Perhaps we have a heightened awareness of difficulties because of connectivity and ready accessibility. Friends and acquaintances in all parts of the world let us know in real time what is happening in their communities. We can travel relatively cheaply and explore areas that our parents and grandparents only dreamed of in their imaginations. It can become quite overwhelming to be aware of wars, famines, climate change and natural disasters that impact on vast numbers of people.

Getting to know people who were once strangers in a family situation, understanding cultural differences, learning languages and exploring varied foods is enriching during the youth exchange experience. The joy of travelling and having a safe family to be at home with, to immerse in another culture is unique during Rotary Exchange Program as the family aren't paid to host you...they welcome students through generosity of spirit.

Another aspect is the deep understanding gained in political, education and economic situations of the country. Youth Exchange Students as positive peace brokers both now and into the future are nurtured, i.e. Peace Ambassadors. Everyone may consider they have an empathy for world citizens. After living in another country's community for a year on exchange that empathy is very strong indeed.

Reflections from all Youth Exchange Students I have met overwhelming is that they have enormous fun and meet life long friends. These stories reflect that. This year's Rotary theme is "Be the Inspiration". These stories also reflect that. I am optimistic for our world that from this experience Youth Exchange Students will be our positive peace makers of the future.

Bronwyn Stephens

**District Governor - District 9800 2018-19
Rotary International**

A Message From The Youth Exchange Chairman



Welcome Friends, to the Ninth Edition of the D9800 Youth Exchange publication “Letters from Abroad”. I know it’s 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 2018 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 2018 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’s 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**

Ada Epskamp

France

Sponsor Club:

Rotary Club of Eaglehawk



It gets so cold in winter that it would even snow at school



Anzac Day at Villers-Bretenoux! My District organised for us to attend



With some of my best friends during the trip to Mont Saint Michel

When I applied for the Rotary Youth Exchange Program, I was 14 years old and one of the youngest people applying. I never could have imagined that I would be almost 10 months into my Exchange in France, a completely different person from when I left Australia.

France has taken a lot to adjust to. The language, people, school and overall culture is so much more different than I had ever imagined. My school days usually start at 8am and finish at 5:30pm which was very difficult to get used to when I first arrived. I was going to school by bus before the sun had risen and by the time I got home the sun was already down. The structure at my school is very different, every day we sit in the same seats and listen to the teacher talking and take notes, that's about it! At my school there is no room for slacking, every student and teacher put in 100% every day, and 9 and a half months in it's still insane to me!

One of the amazing things about my Rotary District here in France is the fact that we meet once a month and spend the weekend together. Because of this, all 45 or so of us have an amazing bond that is truly unreal. We are honestly a family, we try to meet at least once a week in the main city but we know that even if we can't make it, we will never go more than a month without seeing each other. My District also makes sure we have awesome travel opportunities. As well as the weekends they arrange for us every month, they also gave us the opportunity to go to London for 4 days where we had time to ourselves but also some amazing arranged tours and activities. In June, it was time to say goodbye to our "Oldies" (the Exchange Students from the Northern Hemisphere who arrive in early August the year before us who arrive in January) and as our farewell, our District took us on a bus and we spent an amazing day at Disneyland Paris! They also offer a tour to Barcelona in February which I didn't go on, and in June we went on a Eurotour which was a 12-day bus trip around Europe! I have so many fond memories on these trips with the other Exchange Students, and I am so grateful that I now have so many people I really consider family all over the world. The hardest thing is saying goodbye that last time, knowing it will be years before you can even try to see those people again.

Living in Europe is so amazing, I can take a train for thirty minutes and be in another country! In March my first host family took me to Amsterdam for a weekend trip and it was so incredible to see the country that my dad's side of the family comes from. In July I headed solo to Spain to visit my Spanish 'sister' who I hosted in 2016-2017 and I had the most amazing week of my life. It was so amazing to be immersed in her culture and really living like a local; her family welcomed me like I was one of them and blessed me with so many amazing opportunities I could have only dreamed of! Only 3 days



With friends from Argentina & Canada on Mont Blanc (Eurotour)



Rotary weekend in Amiens - served a dish from our respective countries



Last time with my Finnish friend - a lifelong friendship formed!



With my host sister in Corsica

after I arrived back in France after my amazing week in Spain, I headed down to the south of France to the island of Corsica to spend 3 weeks there with my first host family! I am so appreciative they gave me that opportunity; for three weeks straight we just relaxed at their beach house (more like a mansion!) and soaked up the sun. It was so crazy that I had never even heard of Corsica before going on Exchange! Another trip I just recently went on with my District was to the beautiful Mont Saint Michel, except this was a weekend. A bunch of other Districts went too and there were 350 Exchange Students! It was so incredible to all be in the one place and to make so many new friends.

Every day has its different challenges and highlights. There is no predicting what will happen while you're on Exchange. You're constantly eating new foods, learning new words, getting lost, finding a cool new spot, **MEETING NEW PEOPLE**, and facing new things. But at the end of the day, in all the craziness and hard work, Exchange is the best thing that could have ever happened to me. I think I personally benefitted a lot from heading on Exchange when I was only 15, although I definitely get treated differently because of it, I have proved myself and so many people wrong because although I'm young I **AM** doing this, I **AM** crushing my goals and achieving things I couldn't have imagined even a year ago, I **AM** getting through this year no matter what and I **AM** living my best life. I have grown so much as a person over this year and I wouldn't change anything for the world. Exchange has made me into a more independent, mature, cultured person and I am so appreciative for the opportunities I have been given throughout this year and for the ongoing support I have received from my home District, they go above and beyond for their students behind the scenes and we all appreciate it so much! It will be so tough to leave my new life in France, but Exchange has given me a new appreciation for my country, my culture and most of all my family and friends.

Merci et Au Revoir,

Ada Epskamp, Lille, France



With my welcoming Spanish family (old host sister in front)



My first Rotary weekend with all the 'Oldies' and us 'Newbies'



All of the students from my District in Disneyland



During my trip to Amsterdam



In front of Buckingham Palace During my London trip with another Aussie and an Exchange Student from Namibia (left)



A parma night with my 2nd host family (right)



At the first weekend as 'Oldies' talking to some of the 'Newbies' (left)

Aden Gartly

Finland

Sponsor Club:

Rotary Club of Glen Eira



My attempt at cross country skiing

Terve! My name is Aden and for the past 10 months I've been lucky enough to be living in South East Finland.

People always seem so amazed when I tell them I'm an Exchange Student. That amazement is quickly followed up with "You're brave I couldn't do that". Being an Exchange Student means taking yourself out of your comfort zone and putting yourself into a completely new life, experiencing a way of life that not many others would experience in their own country. As 2006 – 2007 Rotary International President Carl Wilhelm Stenhammer said – "If every 17 year old student went on a Rotary Youth Exchange program there would be no more war in the world." Youth Exchange isn't only about "The experience", it's about building a global awareness and understanding not only of other countries but the diversity that surrounds them.

I didn't know much about Finland before I left, even though it was my first preference. I knew that it was cold and it snowed a lot, however, I didn't know anything about the crazy and memorable experiences that I would have ahead of me.

Stepping out from the airport and facing the harsh Finnish Winter was when I had my first real experience with the Finnish weather. It was something I had never felt before, but something that I knew I had to get used to. I arrived in Finland a week ahead of everyone else in my District, this helped me to adjust to the winter and slowly learn the way of Finnish life.

My second week in Finland was language camp week at Karkku. This was a fun and educational week. We learnt, or tried to learn, the basics of the Finnish language and also tried out some different Finnish traditions. During that week I experienced Cross country skiing, a traditional smoke house and the Finnish sauna. For me being an Australian, the sauna experience sort of caught me off guard. The general practice is to go into a sauna naked, and then in my case, going to "Avanto", or in English the hole in the ice. Which basically means a hole that's been cut out of a frozen lake, and then you swim in it.

My third weekend in Finland was when I had my first official District event. We went ice skating in Helsinki. Although I wasn't very talented at the skating part, it was a great opportunity to meet my "oldies" in the District. The oldies became some of my best friends throughout my Exchange and are my friends for life.

It was also around this time that I began my schooling at the Järvenpään Lukio. Schooling in Finland is one of the best in the world and was a completely different experience to Australian Schooling. School became an enjoyable experience, something which I could do during the day and became somewhat of a social experience as

well. Throughout the year as I learnt more about the culture of Finns, I started making friends and talking to more people.

Easter Break was filled with fun. My second host family has a summer cottage in the central Finland region, and I went there with both my first and second host families, as well as one of my Finnish friends from school. We went to sauna, played in the snow and tried to make our own Avanto, although the ice was too thick, and we couldn't break through. The Easter trip was great! It was fun to experience a Finnish Easter with both my host families and to experience such a nice winter.

From a great winter we went into an even better spring, the weather was starting to warm up and I was beginning to make more Finnish friends. With spring also comes the first of May, or as the Finns like to call it, Vappu. I celebrated Vappu with my Finnish friends, we cooked traditional Vappu Munkki, drank Sima and celebrated with a picnic at the local park. During Spring I also visited my second host family's summer cottage a couple of times and continued with school.

Summer holidays were coming, which meant the Eurotour. Eurotour has been one of the highlights of my Exchange. I am so thankful that I got the opportunity to participate in it. We spent 15 days going through different countries in eastern Europe with a bus full of friends. My favourite place out of the whole tour would have been Hungary and more specifically, Budapest. It was such a beautiful city and I look forward to spending more time there. Summer in Finland was a lot hotter than expected. The summer temperatures reached 30 degrees, something that I was definitely not expecting in a place like Finland. Luckily at the summer cottage there was a lake to cool down in. Throughout summer I spent some of my time at the summer cottage as well as seeing school friends and Exchange Students.

As the weather is slowly cooling down and the leaves turn brown, you can definitely tell that winter is coming. I am hoping that it snows again before I leave Finland, as I would really like to experience a white Christmas. I am very much looking forward to experiencing the Finnish Christmas and seeing what almost twenty-four-hour darkness is like. I am also very much looking forward to my Lapland tour which takes place in November. This will hopefully give me an opportunity to see the Northern lights and do some down-hill skiing.

During my Exchange I also got the opportunity to visit Sweden with my second host family, as we cruised from Helsinki to Stockholm. My Australian Aunt's family was holidaying in London and as a birthday present to me from them, I went to London for 6 days. It was fantastic being able to go see the different iconic attractions and spend time exploring such a wonderful city. My highlight



My District at the District Camp

from this trip was visiting the set of Harry Potter, which was magical.

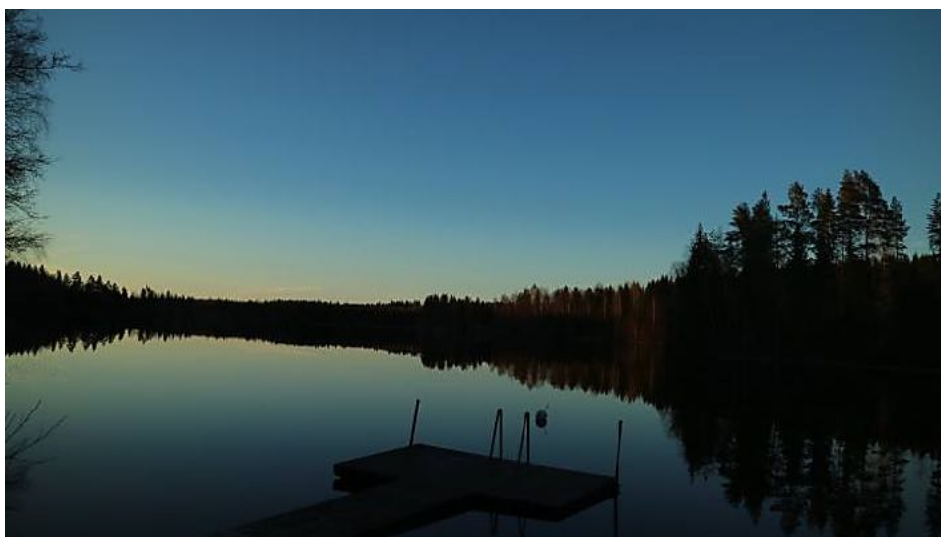
Exchange has taught me many different skills that I will carry on and use in the future. I have learnt so much about myself throughout this year and where my strengths and capabilities lie. However, I couldn't have done this Exchange without the help of my parents back in Australia, all of my host families and all of the different Rotary representatives both in Australian and Finland. These people have helped mentor me and always gave me the time of day to express any issues I was having and to help me work through some of the harder moments of my Exchange.

Kiitos Paljon Rotary!



A view of Helsinki

Summer cottage in winter



Summer lake cottage in spring

Maeve Emmerson

Spain

Sponsor Club:

Rotary Club of Laverton Point
Cook



Group photo of all the inbounds in my District this year

So here I am. 10 months into my Exchange.

My name is Maeve, I'm from Northcote Melbourne and I have been living in a small city in La Rioja, Spain called Logroño for the past 270 odd days.

Logroño is a beautiful little city in the north of Spain that is surrounded by vineyards and is famous for their wine.

I am constantly asked by locals here why did I come to Logroño for an Exchange? Why not choose a big popular city like Madrid or Barcelona? I explain that with Rotary Youth Exchange you don't choose the city or provenance, you choose the country. Where in that country you end up going is a surprise! People also ask me if I could go back and do it again, would I choose a different city? I've thought about this question a lot but I struggle to imagine my Exchange year being anywhere else. I wouldn't have the same memories and relationships with people. I could not be happier with how my Exchange has turned out; I love the people that have come into my life from my Exchange. The memories I have made here are ones I treasure deeply. And Logroño will forever hold a place in my heart.

People don't realise how different Exchange is for us Aussies. We live in the Southern Hemisphere while Europe and America are in the Northern Hemisphere. Which means our Exchange years don't line up, the Northern Hemisphere students start their Exchange in August/September and go home June/July. Whereas the Aussies go from January to January. The full 12 months.

While this means we get to meet two very different groups of Exchange Students we only get a very limited time to get to know each group. And it can feel really hard making all these amazing friends, going on Eurotour and then saying goodbye. Then having summer holidays all to yourself, until you get to meet the newbies, but then it can feel like just as soon as they arrive, you have to prepare to leave.

The friendships I've made on Exchange have been wonderful. It's incredible that in just a few months you meet some of your bestest friends in the world. I am so grateful for all the amazing people that have come into my life through Exchange from friends to my host families.

I have had two wonderful host families throughout the year. My first family consisted of my host parents (who don't speak a word of English which was definitely challenging at first with communicating since I didn't know any Spanish) and their daughter who is my age who, luckily, could speak English. My host sister and I became very close. She is currently on Exchange in Michigan, USA. I was the first Exchange Student they had hosted so it was very new for everyone.

Their extended family were so lovely and inclusive towards me and accepted me right away as their new little Australian. We ate lunch every Thursday and Sunday at the Abuelas house and would always finish the evening



The Logrono girls and our tutor



Logrono

with a game of cards. My host family took me away to their holiday house in Asturias (a city near the beach in Northern Spain) during the Easter holidays and again for summer. They were very excited and made it their mission to take me to a different beach or small town every day! I travelled a bit to visit friends by myself and my host family were always supportive and very on top of getting all the permissions done from my tutor so I could go. I was with my first family for 7 months, then the weekend my host sister left for America I changed to my new family. My old host mum and I still chat regularly and she's always asking for updates, what I'm up to and inviting me to events with her.

My second host family consists of my host parents and their youngest daughter who is 13. I come from a family with two older brothers so I've always been the youngest and the only girl so having two different host sisters in two different families of different ages has been so much fun. As soon as I moved in my host family took me to their village in Teruel (3 hours from Logroño) where they grew up to meet their grandparents, extended family and friends. It was so much fun; I got to know everyone really well and they were so excited to show me around their hometown and introduce me to their life. We all get along really well and again I'm the first Exchange Student they have ever hosted, so it's all new for them. Their eldest daughter is currently in the states on Exchange too.

One thing to remember with Exchange is that nothing is permanent. No matter how close you and your host families are, you are still a guest and it's important to be clean and organised.

It's compulsory to attend school but your grades during Exchange don't count in Australia. School can get quite tiresome and if the truth be told a bit boring, especially in the first few months when the language is so new. When I first started school I was always so tired, school for me involved me trying my hardest not to fall asleep in class. And making friends was definitely a challenge. The language barrier meant I just couldn't keep up with the conversations! But now I have a great close little group of Spanish friends at school and class is so much easier now that I understand the language really well and my teachers get me to do presentations to my class instead of doing the exams.

I get asked constantly if we speak English in Australia, I am 100% serious the Spanish know nothing about Australia. My English teacher even asked me to say something in 'Australian' my first day and I was so confused as to what he meant.

Eurotour: 10 countries in 20 days.

The Eurotour was unforgettable! First we explored the beautiful city of Paris. We enjoyed a short boat ride through the city and later got to enter the Louvre, the Eiffel Tower and many other tourist venues. Then we hopped on the bus to Berlin and had a quick lunch break in Brussels, Belgium on the way. We ate the famous local waffles and hot chippies. Unfortunately we only had 4



When my family took me to the snow in February



With my first host family



My first host sister's going away party for her Exchange to the US

hours to eat and see the city but we did as many tourist things as we could!

Once we got to Berlin, Germany we went to a flea market and the John Lennon wall. Later we travelled to Dresden, another city in Germany and we had the opportunity to learn about a concentration camp, Sachsenhausen, first hand.

Later we hopped over to breathtaking Prague in the Czech Republic. Prague was by far one of my most favourite cities that we visited. It was such a pretty and light city I just loved every moment there. Next stop was Bratislava for lunch and a short tour through the little city. Then Vienna where we visited the famous Royal Palace, drove through the streets on horse drawn carriages and we got to dress up and see the opera.

Then on to Budapest , Hungary. Budapest was filled with breath taking views, buildings and cathedrals. Next we got on our way to Italy with a stop in Prostojna, Eslovenia to visit the famous caves of that area on the way.

Once we made it to Italy we took the day off to go to the beach to relax. The next day we went to Venice and there was the opportunity to explore that very famous city. We also visited the famous Vatican City that was incredible to see.

After almost three long weeks Eurotour came to an end. I couldn't have asked for a better group of people to travel the world with and I am so grateful for my Rotary Exchange family.

A year sounds like a long time, but it's nowhere near long enough. One of my favourite Exchange quotes is "it's not a year in your life, it's your life in a year." You only have 1 of every day. You find yourself constantly being challenged, changing and growing.

A year isn't enough time to become truly fluent in a language. Although it is enough to learn how to communicate reasonably well. When I first came to Spain I knew absolutely no Spanish, except for a few phrases, and now it's so funny to think back on my first few months when I had no clue what anyone was saying to me. My host family, friends and I all love to joke about how bad my Spanish used to be. Now I can talk confidently and have a great understanding of the language. ¡Me encanta hablar español! Pero por supuesto todavía tengo mucho que aprender.

I could go on and on about all the wonders from my Exchange year. I've travelled so much over Spain, with Rotary and with host families. My parents are coming to visit me in November. It's hard to believe almost 10 months have gone by so fast. 2018 has been by far the most memorable year of my life. I love Spain with all my heart.



In a small village in the mountains (top left)

First day of the camino De Santiago (top right)

Group photo from the camino De Santiago (middle)

Host family and I in a small town in Asturias (left)



Logrono

Group photo with the Zaragoza kids after hiking to the border between France and Spain



Paris, Eurotour

Eurotour



Matthew Woolley

Denmark

Sponsor Club:

Rotary Club of Bacchus Marsh



With two of my best Danish friends - Nicolai and Anders

As I sit here and write this, I think all good things must come to an end. Is that right? Must that really be what shall happen? Hello, I am Matthew, and I have been in the wonderful country of Denmark for 10 months and I can say I have had the best experiences of my life.

When I left Australia, I had goals to become a better me. I had goals to change in ways that were unthinkable to me but as I had heard from many other Exchange Students alike, those changes were acquirable. I arrived in Denmark on a cold, windy night. My plane riding into the airport terminal under the pretty, glowing stars in the sky and I think to myself how I am not nervous at all. I am ready to start a new year; a new life. When you ask an Exchange Student how their year was, they cannot explain it. They cannot grasp such an unfathomable font of knowledge. They cannot condense such an eventful endeavor of their life. They cannot document such a moment, nor a point in their life where they really felt alive. They can only smile and smile and smile, while thinking about what has come forth and blessed them for that year, and many more to follow.

My first dinner was memorable. I got home from the airport with my wonderful host family, aptly surprised that my host brother at 15 could speak fluent English. We sit down at the table as they ask me about myself and life at home as many laughs were had and many memories were made. It was also the first time I had eaten lasagne in about 5 months, so I knew life was going to be good. Luckily for me I had flown on planes for 25 hours and was going to start school the next day.

I remember all of my first day at school. I remember the car ride, the confidence I thought I had and the nervous shivers after realizing, 'this is it'. I had been on my way thinking everything will okay, I will do fine. As I walk into the school, I feel a sudden wave of nervousness fall over me, like I had seen something of the spectral sort. As I walk into my class, I was introduced to everybody. I look into everyone's eyes and everyone looks neutral, but I felt no sense of judgement or difference. It was a feeling I couldn't describe. I hear the lady from the office say to everybody that I was Matthew, and I was from Australia. I see everybody's faces light up and smile. Good thing I was Australian, hey? After that class I had been bombarded with questions jam-packed with curiosity and enthusiasm. I remember going home to my host family and telling them all about my day, and the people I had met.

Since that day, and every single day after, school in Denmark has shaped me into a brighter person. I have made actual friends; best friends. I have made friends I can laugh with, cry with and most importantly feel at

home with. I have met people here that I will never forget about, and the thought of leaving them makes me weak.

Exchange isn't just about what you experience in your own country though. It is also what you experience in and from other countries, even from your own country. Eurotour was the best trip I have ever been on in my life. You'll hear everyone say it, but it is true. People say money can't buy happiness, and they are right. You can tour around the world or at least in my case, Europe, and do as much as you would like but none of that can compare to going to places like The Eiffel Tower with friends that you have made from every nook and cranny of the world.

Nothing can compare to going on experiencing a childhood revival at Disneyland with all of your friends. Nothing can compare to walking in Amsterdam and accidentally going through the Red-Light District and seeing many out-there things with your friends. Nothing can compare to the feeling of being in gondolas in Italy with your friends sailing around the canals of Venice, reliving and feeling the history and culture flow through your veins and body awakening that thirst for travel and truly being alive. Nothing can compare to looking at that special someone in their eyes on top of the Eiffel Tower and thinking how ever lucky you are that they are in your life. Simply put, nothing compares to these experiences. Nothing makes you happier than this. Experiences! That's exactly what Exchange is about.



With Exchange students from Language School

I can say that through these experiences, from any hardship and any great thing that has ever happened to me. I have changed. I have become what I wanted to become. I am who I sought out to be. Most people would say you can never thank one person for it, and that it's the surrounding factors that make your Exchange great. I agree to some extent, but Denmark will always be that one person, despite everything else being there. Denmark has made me who I am today. Denmark has changed me in ways that I never thought I could be changed. Denmark was the one who was truly always there for me. Denmark is perfect. Denmark is amazing. Denmark is the reason I don't want to go home. Denmark will always be in my heart. It would be pretty cool if you could marry a country, but if you could I would definitely marry Denmark. Thank you so much Denmark.

I can only wish that others can have the same experience. I hope the next Exchange Student going to Denmark feels the way I do. I hope they feel the strength and vitality pulse through their body and that they really indulge themselves in this beautiful land. You can never experience this otherwise.

Not just me, but every other lucky kid who has been on Exchange has stories and feelings of their own. All of us

can thank Rotary. No one really understands our undying respect and thankfulness toward Rotary. They have given us an experience that is life-changing. They have always had our backs and always look out for us. They spend their free time making sure we are safe, and nothing happens to us. Most importantly, they enable us to have these moving experiences with their kind hearts and generosity.

Thank you, Bacchus Marsh Rotary Club, and thank you Allerød Rotary Club.



A panorama of Kronborg Castle (above)



An old townhouse (right)

Tahlia Rogerson

Taiwan

Sponsor Club:

Rotary Club of Melton



Visiting Taipei 101 for the first time with my classmate



My best friends and classmates from school

It is currently the 6th of October, 8:15 pm in Taiwan and I have just sat down to write my letter. It is strange to believe that it is the 10th month of my Exchange because the year has flown by so quickly. I have grown so much as a person and learnt so many incredible things about life and am able to look at the world from a new perspective.

Going on Exchange was definitely the most challenging thing I have ever done, but I don't regret it at all. Being able to pack my whole life into 30kg's of luggage, move to another country for a year, and be completely unfamiliar with the place is not something that everybody can do. It was difficult at first, but in such a short amount of time I joined a new family, created new friendships, and learnt a language that I still find impossible.

I remember my first day in Taiwan as if it was yesterday. I got off the plane and collected my luggage and started heading towards the exit where everybody would meet me. My heart was racing, I was so tired from not being able to sleep on the plane at all, but I had this rush of excitement and couldn't wait to meet everybody. I got outside and the first thing I saw was a huge banner with my name on it. Along with the banner there were about 20 people all taking photos and screaming my name. They took my luggage to a car and we drove to my new home in Zhunan. I was left at home by myself to settle in and sleep. My host dad had a Rotary dinner and thought it would be best if I stayed home. I still couldn't believe I was actually here.

When I woke up the next morning culture shock hit me like a truck. I began the day with breakfast and we ended up going out to buy milk tea and noodles. I was surprised with getting noodles for breakfast, but the culture shock didn't end there. We got in the car and drove to buy supplies for lunch and get my phone sorted out. The first thing that I noticed was that the streets were so busy. The road was filled with scooters everywhere, people were yelling in Chinese 24/7 and all eyes were on me because I looked different. All I really remember from that day though is the smell of one of Taiwan's signature dishes, stinky tofu. Along with stinky tofu, another famous food I was introduced to was pig's blood cake. I guess you could say I'm a vampire, I've eaten that much blood, pig's blood that is.

At first, everything was so odd. The Taiwanese people are very direct and I felt as if they were forcing me to do many things without asking my opinion beforehand. However, as time went by, and it went by quickly, I have learnt to realize that they all have my best interests in mind when they make these decisions. I eat what people want me to eat, I say what they want me to say and I go where they want me to go. I've seen many beautiful things that range

from massive skyscrapers and buildings with bright lights, to the bluest of oceans and green mountains. But Exchange isn't just about seeing and doing cool things, I am also still a high school student three days out of the week.

Whenever I meet someone on the streets or another foreigner they ask, "Are you American?" I simply reply, "No, I am from Australia" which soon enough leads to them asking, "What university do you go to?" I then say, "I go to Zhong Hsin High School" and yes, they are surprised that a foreigner goes to high school in Taiwan. Taiwanese schooling is pretty intense, especially for high school students. The school day begins at 7:30, with the first official class starting at 8:10, then another 8 hours of class time plus a 30 minute lunch break and my favourite part of the day, nap time! But, of course, it's not over for Taiwanese students yet; cram school begins and even after cram school they have a ton of homework. I get classmates texting me at 2 am asking for help with some English homework. They are so dedicated to school and it really amazes me. Hopefully, their study habits will rub off on me, and I'll study like them back in Australia.

For the other two days of the school week I get to attend one of my favourites - Chinese School and culture class. On Wednesdays and Thursdays we don't go to school and we go to a university with the other Exchange Students in our District. We learn Chinese as well as various aspects of Taiwanese culture such as cooking and traditional dances. Languages are always tough and I continue to learn more and more, but I still remember the feeling when I ordered food for the first time at a restaurant in full Chinese, I was so proud.

The only bad thing about being an Australian Exchange Student is that I had to say goodbye to 30 amazing people who helped me through my first 5 months of Exchange and who I called family. However, that also meant new people would be coming in just a short 2 months who I would call my newbies. I love my newbies probably more than my oldies; new friendships were formed and soon

enough we were calling each other family. I try to enjoy every moment to the fullest, as the days are slowly counting down to my departure, but I can't help but feel sad every time I think about having to say goodbye to people I may never see again.

I would honestly like to thank so many people for this opportunity. My parents who listened to me go on and on about wanting to go on Exchange and supporting me, Rotary Australia for sending me, Taiwan Rotary for hosting me and organizing so many amazing things for us Exchange Students. Then my host families for giving



My 'oldies'



The 'newbies'

me a roof over my head and food on the table and my host siblings. How could I forget my classmates, they made my school days full of smiles and I will miss them so much. My Chinese and culture teachers for being patient with us and teaching me everything I know about Taiwan and the language, and last, but not least, my Exchange family, especially my best friend who was with me every step of the way, Jasmine.

I had my heart set on Taiwan from the minute I applied for this Exchange program. I've always had a love and interest for Asian culture so much and wanted to surround myself with it 24/7, and Taiwan has done nothing but bring me joy and be so beautiful and unique. For a tiny island you can go around in 2 days, it is always amazing me and exciting me and I have loved every second.



My favourite host family; I love them so much. This was taken on my host Dad's birthday.



The Culture Tour was so much fun; we went to one of the highest Buddhist Temples in the world.

I love Taiwan so much!

This photo was taken during our Culture Tour when we went river tracing up a mountain and found a really big, pretty water hole.



Taylor Jones-Wilson

Switzerland

Sponsor Club:

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My very first ski lesson (above - taken just before I skied into the wall for the first time)

First day in the snow (below)



Never in a million years would I have thought I would be living in a different country on the other side of the world for a year, but here I am coming up to the ten-month mark since living in Switzerland and I wouldn't give it up for the world. I arrived in Switzerland on the 14th of January with little idea of how much this tiny beautiful country would change my life.

Switzerland stole my heart from the first ... its food, jaw dropping views, the people, but mainly their culture because it's like no other. Switzerland has given me so many opportunities and life lessons which I will have forever. I have learnt many things from the Swiss and the other Exchange Students who now feel like family.

I have been living in the kanton Wallis for my Exchange and am living in the tiny village Torbel, with its population of 400. Wallis might be just a kanton in Switzerland but it is home to its very own culture as well as their very own dialect, which the rest of Switzerland barely understands. No matter where you are in Wallis you always feel safe and welcome plus there is always something going on within the towns so you never get bored.

My Exchange definitely hasn't been all rainbows and butterflies; I have had my fair share of bad moments and experiences but they are always outweighed by all my good times. I have made bonds with my host families and they feel like second family now and I can always chat to them about anything. We started off as strangers, but now I couldn't imagine not having them around. This has been a major highlight of my Exchange getting to build strong relationships that I will keep for the rest of my life and will have people there that will always welcome me back with open arms to what now feels like my second home.

It was the Saturday that marked my first month when my host family finally thought it was time for me to hit the slopes. That Saturday morning I had woken up with no idea of the adventure I was about to endure. The drive up the mountain felt like it went forever. My stomach turned and twisted at the thought that I would be on skis in less than an hour. Within the 2 hours of my ski lesson I had managed to ski into the wall of the children's ski track approximately 4 times and I had fallen over so many times that I lost count, but those 2 hours were the best 2 hours of my life. After that Saturday my host family would take me skiing every weekend and finally on my 3rd and final lesson my ski teacher said to me "you're ready to do the actual run". I remember thinking to myself 'are you dumb?' but with a bit of hesitation I dragged myself up to the ski lift and before I knew it, it was too late to back down. I got to the top and I was actually shaking in fear as I thought I was going to die, but as I started heading down I forgot about everything and just focused on having fun

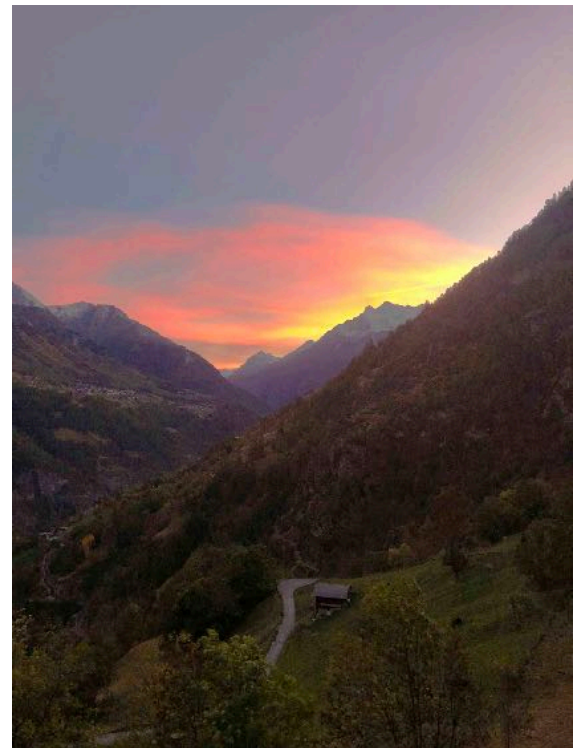


Exploring the fairytale town of Basel

and before I knew it I was down and this time without falling or running into anything. I was so proud of what I had done that I wanted to keep going all day.

Before long the snow had melted, the sun was shining and the trees were bright green and this is when I started my trip around Europe with the other Exchange Students. We travelled to approximately 10 different countries within 2 weeks. I got to experience new languages, new foods, new cultures, how many stairs there really are on the Eiffel tower, the amazing history each country holds in their streets and just how dangerous bike riding in Amsterdam really is... the remainder of my summer holidays were spent swimming in lakes and relaxing.

Switzerland definitely is a strange country with its many dialects, foods and traditions but it is a country I have fallen in love with and see as home. This country has given me nothing but love, kindness and experiences that I will hold forever in my heart. I only have 2 months left in this country but I will never say goodbye as I will return; I don't know when, but I know I will be back to experience all of its quirks that I will so dearly miss and to eat ever so much cheese. I can't believe how lucky I am to be an Exchange Student and to have what some could only dream of having.



Clockwise from above left:

View from my first spring hike in Switzerland

A beautiful autumn sunset from my house

Last day at Language Camp (we love Doris)



**Clockwise from above left: Being a typical tourist on Eurotour
Sightseeing in Budapest
A photo after we walked the cows down the mountain - typical Swiss
Amusement Park adventure in Austria**



Clockwise from above left

Trying to get the right shot in Berlin

First snow fall of the season and its only October!

Snow walking at its finest

Just typical Aussies eating Vegemite on Austrian croissants using a Swiss Army knife while driving in Slovakia on a Czech Republic bus