

Sarah Otto's December 2012 Report

Wow, I don't know how I'm going to be able to fit everything that happened in December on just a few pages. One of my main interests of exchange was seeing the different traditions during holidays and how others celebrated. So of course, Christmas was an exciting time for me! December also included a trip to Stockholm, two volleyball tournaments, and my move to my second host family.

Starting from December 1, there was snow everywhere! It was just like Mother Nature decided yep, its officially winter and let it pour! Of course, I went out to play in it while the rest of my family was unimpressed and brought out the snow shovel for the deck. Kajsa (my host dog) and I had a great time, and my host mom got quite a kick out of watching us.

A few days later I was boarding a train to Stockholm with my host sister, Lovisa. I was so excited to see the capital that the four hour train ride was no big deal. It was actually nice to get to see so much of Sweden through the window. It's especially beautiful covered in white! Once we got there we spent the rest of the day shopping in the city! Well, after we got lost outside the train station, that is. We walked around for nearly an hour trying to find a certain city square. Once we found the mall we were so happy, mostly because it meant heaters and we could get away from the -25°F weather! Eventually we met my host mom and went to her nephew's house who lives in Stockholm. He was really nice and funny and we all ate dinner together and had a great time! The next morning we went to see the castle and "gammla stan" or old city. It was so beautiful and just another reason why I love Europe, the narrow, stone streets and lavish buildings were so charming. We did a little more shopping, had a sushi lunch, then headed back to the train station and then home. Even though it was only 2 days, it was such an incredible experience and one of the things I'd wanted to do since I got here.

That weekend two of my friends from another Rotary district came down to visit all of us in 2390. We went shopping in Malmö with a group of around 15 exchange students. I was in H&M with Alexis (Canada) and came out to see Tanner and Ryan modeling in the middle of the hallways...so yeah, a typical day of shopping for exchange students. After, most of us went to Gina (California)'s house and had pizza and watched a movie. The next day we had fika at a coffee house and said bye to them until next time.

A couple days later, I saw a few of the exchange students again for a baking day with my host mom. She is a home economics teacher, so we filled her classroom and she helped us make luciakatter and pepparkakor, two Swedish Christmas desserts. About two weeks later, I was back in that classroom with Thomas, Kentaro, and nearly 30 of my host mom's students for a pepparkakhus (gingerbread house) making competition...Thomas, Kentaro, and my house didn't count but we had so much fun making it. We decided to make an Eiffel tower, but put American and Japanese flags on it to be fair.

I had two volleyball tournaments this month! The first one went really well and we got the bronze medal! The girls said we beat teams they'd never been able to beat before and our coach was really happy. We only lost one game the whole day, its so nice to see the team coming together and that all of hard work at practice is paying off! And of course, we took tons of pictures with our medals afterwards..girls will be girls! The second tournament we played with a few different players so the team

had never played together as a whole before we got there. We fought hard but didn't have quite the same result. It was still a lot of fun and I look forward to seeing this new team grow as much as the last one.

Something special I got to experience here was Lucia Day. It's a Swedish holiday on December 13 to remember Saint Lucia (whose actually Italian). But to celebrate, they have what's called Luciatåg, or Lucia train. One girl is chosen to be Lucia and wears garland around her head with lit candles on top. Other girls and boys follow her, with garland also, and they sing Christmas songs and the special "Sankta Lucia" song. I attended a Luciatåg at my school. It was very beautiful even if I could only understand certain parts of the songs. That night, my volleyball club had an event called Lucia-volley where there was a club-wide tournament where they mixed up all the teams from kids to the top womens and mens teams. It was so much fun and my team got first! We got socks =)

My last day of school before Christmas break was the 21st and I spent the next day shopping for gifts like my normal procrastinating self. In Sweden, they celebrate Christmas on the 24th, so on the 23rd I hung up my stocking outside my bedroom door and waited for Jultomte (Santa)! I woke up on Christmas Eve and got to open my stocking. Then, we had Julbord for lunch, which is just means Christmas buffet. There was the Christmas ham, meatballs, fish, eggs, bread, and more! I even tried smoked eel! (A Swedish delicacy) After we ate, we opened presents. My family had several gifts for me and I also received a present from my Rotary club. My family liked the gifts I had gotten for them so I was very happy. Later, my host mom's brother and his family came over and we had fika with glögg (a special Christmas warm drink) and pepparkakor then gathered around the TV to watch a Disney Christmas Special that comes on every year here. That evening we had dinner and then played a gift exchange game. Everyone came with three gifts and then during the game they all get swapped around and stolen and then at the end everyone opens their presents. It was so much fun and everyone was "fighting" over gifts even though we had no clue what was inside! My Swedish Christmas was definitely one I will always remember. I really felt like a part of the family and it was such a cozy time.

On the 28th, it was moving day! I had sooo many bags, I have no idea how I'm going to get home in 6 months. But, I finished up packing in the morning then had to say goodbye to my first family, well at least goodbye to living with them. It was a little hard but I really like my second family also, so the only way I can describe the feeling is just strange. The three Rotary families in Höör met at one of the houses and all had lunch together. Thomas, Kentaro, and I helped each other carry all of our stuff to our new cars and house. My new family welcomed me right away! I can tell it will be another good fit and my months with them will be really great!

Gott Nytt År!



The Castle in Stockholm



Our Eiffel Tower Gingerbread House



Me Outside the Parliament Building in Stockholm



Our Christmas Tree