

I rang in the New Year at the best NYE display I have ever seen- the Sydney firework display. My counselor, David, brought me Sydney with him and his family. We stayed in a suburb of Sydney called Macquarie, caught a train into the city, and were then able to walk to the Botanical Gardens. We had tickets to an event in a section of the Gardens. The event was circus themed; so there were men on stilts everywhere, fortune tellers, photo booths, and many other activities to pass the time. We were given a picnic basket full of food and sat in the Gardens right next to the Opera House, with a beautiful view of the Harbor Bridge. It was spectacular. The next day we stayed in Sydney and had a recovery day. We went shopping and saw La La Land as a family.

The next weekend I was back in Sydney but this time with my host family. We went down for the day to move my host sister from a Suburb, Penrith, to a trendy, up-and-coming part of Sydney called Balmain. I had a lot of fun, I don't get to see my host-sister a lot because she lives away from home, so it was good to spend the day with her.

Later that week I traveled to Bathurst with my host mom and brother. We met my host brother's mom there so that they could spend the week together. My host mom took us on a lap around Mount Panorama, the host of the biggest car race in Australia. Then, we all went out to lunch together. The week my host brother was away, it was just my host mom and I at home during the day while my host dad was at work, so we got to bond quite a bit. We painted three rooms together and went out to lunch most days. I became really close to her during this time and know I have made a lifelong friend.

David and his family also took me out to their friends farm on sheep shearing day. They had about 150 head of sheep to shear in one day. I had never even been near that many sheep let alone watch them being shorn. They were really nice people and taught me much more about sheep than I thought was possible. They explained to me that these sheep were meat sheep and their wool could only be used in something like a carpet.

My host mom and dad have also taken me on a few bush walks. We did a walk through Ferntree Gully, about 15 minutes outside of Rylstone. It was a bit dry in the Gully, due to the incredible heat we have been having recently, so I really want to go back in the wet season, but it was still incredibly beautiful. They also took me on a four hour walk in the Blue Mountains called the National Pass. This was a difficult walk, with about 1000 steps straight up at one point (I counted), but might be my favorite place I've visited.

On my last week of break, my entire host family and I went to Nelson Bay. We spent the first half of our vacation at the beach. Then when the weather turned bad, I spent the last few days with my host mom and sister shopping and going to the movies. Our last day in Nelson Bay was Australia Day, which marks the anniversary of the arrival of the First Fleet of British Ships. I went out to brunch with my host siblings and we then went to an artisan market. Later my host brother and I went to the beach and we all went out to dinner together. This was a bit of a sad night because it was the last time I was with the entire family.

Other than these couple of trips, my school holidays have been pretty relaxed. I've spent a lot of time with my host family and with my friends. On my last day of break, my friends and I drove to the neighboring town, Mudgee, and went out for lunch and played on a playground in a local park. This was great for me because I really connected with them all and feel as though I will be able to stay friends with them even when I'm gone.

Then, on the 26th, I moved on to my next family. It was bitter-sweet moving; I absolutely loved my last family and really bonded with all of them, but I was ready for a change. I am now living with the Principal of my high school, James; his wife, the Learning and Support Teacher at the school, Lynette; and their two daughters Layne, age 6, and Lottie, age 3. They live about 15 minutes out of town on a farm with 2 dogs, 2 cats, and 32 cattle. This family is very fast paced, but I think they should be a lot of fun.



The View from my new house