

May 2020



Ainsley

from Woodstock
to
Finland

“ I am Still Trying to Make the Most of it”.

At the end of February my host family and I went on a ski vacation for our winter holiday. We left Friday night taking a train up from Helsinki to Rovaniemi. I woke up Saturday morning to a lot of snow! We decided to go to Santa’s village that afternoon before driving the rest of the way to Ylläsjärvi where the cabin we were staying in would be. We spent the week downhill skiing at Ylläs which was so much fun. I also went to a concert put on by a Finnish singer named Ellinoora. There was so much snow and the nature was just beautiful. I watched the sunrise and at night I got to see the Northern lights.



While there we visited a snow village which was like a big hotel with rooms created out of snow and ice. There were massive sculptures and it was so pretty. We drove down to Tournio to spend a night with my host grandparents and she made a lot of food for me to try. The next day we went into Sweden and did some shopping which included a stop at Candy World. We then started the long drive back home which included a couple stops to walk the dogs, grab a snack and get gas.

Finland had to make a lot of restrictions to stop the spread of corona. My school officially closed on March 17th. We then started online school the next day. We were heading into our exam week so a lot of stuff was happening but because of Corona everything was cancelled including my soccer practises, my last two big rotary trips and anything that involved seeing people that you don't live with pretty much. Online school is just like going to school. We have to be on our computers from the time our school day starts till it ends, usually having online group calls with the teacher and our classmates for the entire class. We still have assignments, tasks and homework. Online school can be very exhausting because I am sitting in front of a computer screen for around six hours a day which includes school and the homework. On the other hand online school can be pretty fun. My school has created some small competitions for us to take part in.. We are actually pretty much done school, all that's left is our exam weeks.



Trying to stay busy with things I enjoy can be hard but as the restrictions are being lifted it's easier to see friends to play sports, go for walks and things like that. I have played a lot of cards with my host family and am learning some new Finnish games. I have been able to really see the Finnish nature going to different nature trails including Kiikunlähde, it is a spring that is clear and has vibrant blue colour.

I also went with my second host family to Pirunpesä also known as Devil's Nest. Pirunpesä is a large rock that has been split right down the center, the walls on each side can get up to 10m high. You can climb up and down this large rock which is 100% earth created. Anything that happens is left how it is, such as a tree that falls. We spent over an hour just climbing up and walking around seeing all the nature and taking stunning photos.



We have celebrated both Easter and May 1st holiday in this corona situation. For Easter my host family and I did a lot of baking and prepared a big lunch. The main food is pork and we also had some different baked items, asparagus risotto and some different desserts. I also took part in something called Virpominen which takes place the Sunday before Easter (palm Sunday). It is when children dress up as witches or bunnies and they normally would go door to door to bless the house and the people for the following year and in return they give you chocolate and candy. You also have to give them a birch twig that you decorated with flowers, stickers, mini eggs, little chicks and anything else you wish to add. I went to my two first host families house and they gave me Finnish Easter chocolates and candies!

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May 1st is a holiday for everyone and is called Vappu. It's a day to celebrate the graduated students and working people. It's kind of like a labour day. When students graduate from Lukio which is like high school/pre college they can wear these hats every year on May 1st and they celebrate by having brunches and barbecues. Common things you eat are Sima (homemade soda), munkki (donut), sparkling beverages and herring. This year I celebrated by having two brunches with my current and first host family and an outside social distance barbecue with some host families friends. All children get these big celebratory balloons and you decorated the inside of your house with balloons and streamers.



It's hard to believe that it's already May and as I am now approaching the end of my exchange I can't believe how amazing this year has truly been. Once again I'd like to thank everyone in both Canada and Finland for giving me such an amazing opportunity and for continued support. Even though my exchange has had a weird twist and isn't the way we thought it would be I am still trying to make the most of it and take every opportunity I can!

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