



Ainsley

from Woodstock
to
Finland

“Moikka”

It seems like only yesterday I was sitting in the airport waiting to finally board the plane! I had just said goodbye to my family and friends and was ready to embark on a one and a lifetime adventure. Flying was an adventure in itself. Starting off with all the systems down, I waited not moving in this line for two and a half hours. Eventually the line got so big having three planes full of people waiting. Once I got through it was crazy to find a spot to sit. My plane took off now past 11PM two hours after it was scheduled. My stop in Reykjavik, Iceland was cut short with me rushing through the airport to get on my next flight. Next, I was flying to Helsinki to learn that one of my bags was lost.



My first week was spent at Karkku language course with about 100 other exchange students. Because of losing my bag, I survived the week with two shirts, a sweater, a pair of pants, two pairs of socks and a pair of shorts. So not the great start I was hoping for! At the camp, we learned some basic Finnish words such as numbers, colours, expressions and some questions. After the camp, I was welcomed with open arms by my host family and excited to see

everything. For me it was very exciting because my first host family has two French Bulldogs and I've never had a pet, so I very much enjoy playing with them. Quickly my older host sister was excited to show me around; I spent the next hour driving around Lahti my new home town! I soon will change host families and will then live in Hollola.

In Finland sauna is a big thing, every family has one in their house! I quickly learned how much they really love the sauna and was introduced to the correct way to do it and let me tell you it was ... hot. But now I've gotten used to it and enjoy it a lot. I like it as a place to go relax and just have some quiet time to think.

I have tried many traditional Finnish foods such as karjalanpiirakka (thin rye bread with rice), savulohi (smoked salmon), pinaattikeitto (spinach soup), ruisleipä (dark rye bread), salmiakki (black salted licorice), perunarieska (mashed potato flatbread) and my favourite riisipuuro (Rice porridge with cinnamon and sugar), that I look forward to making back at home.

I had an amazing opportunity to visit the Finnish Parliament and met an MP. I got a private tour of the building, I also got to witness a real meeting and got to see many important people in Finland politics.



My school is Lahden Yhteiskoulu; it has approximately five hundred students in the high school part. School here is very different than my school back in Canada. The first week of school was very tiring, I was exhausted. I had five courses in the first period which included English, sports, chemistry, physics and Russian. Each period is about a month and a half long. You have each class three times a week each for seventy-five minutes. School is where I have met some amazing friends. I was warmly welcomed by classmates. For Finnish people it can be hard to step out and make the first move and also to speak English. In school I really enjoy having those free lunches, which are most of the time very tasty! In school they don't have sports teams, but I was able to take part in a soccer tournament and my school won!

One of the best experiences I have had so far is going on a camping trip with my school for two days. On this trip we first stopped at a military base in which we were shown around, got to wear the equipment and hear about what it's like. In Finland it is mandatory to go to the military for at least six months if you are a guy. I was able to experience and see the Finnish nature up close. This trip included hiking about 20 km, heating up lake water and using it to prepare meals, sleeping in tents and swimming in the lake.

I've now been in Finland for three months and done, seen and learned so much! There wasn't much culture shock for me, but I quickly noticed that young children were walking around alone. That threw me off to see such young kids do so much on their own. Mainly they do so much because they need to get themselves to and from school since they don't have school buses here. The language is very different from English but I'm slowly starting to understand more and more. I currently am taking two classes a week for a total of four hours a week till the end of November. These classes are teaching me more words, rules, proper sentence structure and phrases.



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After school I also have joined a soccer team, FC Reipas. We currently practice four times a week. Joining this team, I was able to make great and amazing friends. The girls on the team were at first a little nervous to have an exchange student training with them and having to try and speak English but they are very nice, and we get along great!

The views here are amazing. So much forest and natural beauty, I've really got to enjoy the nature and fresh air. I went on a two-day hiking and camping trip with school mates and had a blast. In Finland most forests aren't considered private property and you can freely walk through and pick berries and mushrooms. I've gone to the forests many times to pick mushrooms, take the dogs for walks and just to see the stunning nature!



I'm looking forward to the rest of my exchange and the next part is heading to Northern Finland, Lappi where I will experience the true Finnish weather. In Lapland I will get to ski, snowshoe, dog sled, go to Santa's village and possibly meet the real Santa because Santa is actually from Finland, go to a reindeer farm and experience some Lapland music traditions. I would like to end by saying Kiitos (Thank you) to everyone back home for helping me go on such an amazing adventure!

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