



# Caitlyn

from Milton

to

France

## *“An Amazing Experience”*

Going to Mont Saint Michel with the other exchange students has been the most amazing experience I have had so far in my exchange. I got to meet every Rotary exchange student in all of France as well as dance and eat and sleep with them. It was one of the most challenging but rewarding weekends I've had so far.

Our trip was 3 days long. It started Friday at 7am when I got on the bus. I sat beside my friend Adelaide who is the kindest person I have ever met. Throughout the trip she made sure I was okay. After an hour we arrived in Arras where we picked up Kai and Felix, my other 2 Rotary friends.

After 8 hours of driving, we made it to the American Cemetery in Normandy. We made it just in time to see the lowering of the flags which was a very surreal experience. Walking through the 3 groups of gravestones was a reminder of the tragedy that happened on the same land that we were walking on. This was also the first time we saw the other 70 exchange students. Our district was one of the bigger ones with 25 exchange students. Sadly, even with every French District there, we were still only 3 Canadians.



After our experience at the American Cemetery, we were back on the road after an hour, and we made it to where we were staying the night.



We dropped our stuff in our rooms and then walked to dinner. At dinner we met one of the outbound French students who is heading to the USA next year. It was amazing talking to her. Our dinner was very chaotic and there was lots of singing. It was quite loud, but it was entertaining. On our way back to the hotel, it was even more chaotic! Our group was singing while walking down the street. I think the people thought we were drunk. They were

opening their windows and watching us as we walked down the street. It was so much fun that we almost didn't even realize it was pouring rain on us! But it definitely was since we were soaked and cold while walking back.

At around 10 am the next morning we were once again driving. This time it was driving to the ancient Religious and Military site, Mont Saint Michel. It only took us an extra 2 hours to get there from our hotel. On this day we were told to wear shorts and waterproof shoes. We had the whole 20-minute walk to figure out what we were doing but no one understood why we needed them until we got there.



When we arrived at Mont Saint Michel we found out we were doing something called "Traversées de la baie" Otherwise known as walking the bay. During the first hour of the walk we watched many people fall as well as get stuck in the sand, Kai and I both being people who got stuck.

During our second hour of the walk we were walking through the water. It was quite cold but it was still absolutely amazing. I got so much closer to all of the other exchange students and felt very connected to everyone I spoke to that day. Even the people that I wasn't the most comfortable with before, I became comfortable with.



We understood each other's broken French and tried hard to make conversation while we were walking. During the third hour we were walking back towards the shore. Our feet were in pain but we had to keep going. On the way back the water was very rough. The waves were very strong, and a few people fell. At many points I felt like I was going to fall too! But luckily I didn't.



Kai, Felix and I were the first people to make it back to shore, we got to watch as everyone else struggled to get through the water, Just like we did.

When we got back to the hotel, everyone showered and hung out until we got a message from Val to meet in the restaurant. Once we got into the restaurant, we knew what we were doing. We were going to folk dance. Even though we were all tired we tried our best to understand and follow the directions of the kind woman giving them. She spoke slowly so we could understand her as best as we could. The dances weren't very difficult, but it was extremely fun.



After dancing we got to sing our national anthems. There were 2 groups before the Canadians. Both were decently big groups so as the group of 3 we were kind of nervous. Once we started, we were fine. Even if we sounded awful, we all enjoyed it. We heard so many anthems that night and every single one was absolutely beautiful even if we didn't understand what they said. The last anthem we heard was the French anthem. Most of us had never heard it before and it was amazing. Once everyone was done singing, we had dinner which was very very tasty.

The next day we went back to Mont Saint Michel and we got to go inside of the Mont! It was incredible we got to see the lookout posts as well as the view from the top of the monument. We took many group pictures as well as many pictures from the highest point we went to on the mount. I saw something that looked like a zipline but after asking Kai, Felix and Adelaide I found out I was 100% wrong and became very disappointed. When we were finished looking at Mont Saint Michel, we took a bus back to the hotel instead of walking! We were all very happy because we were tired.

Then it was time to have a quick lunch before we left on our way back to Lille. It was very sad saying goodbye to the new friends I made in other Districts, but it was great eating with them one last time. I hope to see them again, but sadly I know one District will not be coming back.

With that It was time to go back to Lille. We left at 1pm (13h00) and we didn't get back to Lille until 8:30pm (20h30) where we got picked up by our host families. Mine being The Lucas Family who are extremely kind They have a special place in my heart.

Overall, this experience was the most amazing one I have had so far and I hope to have many more over the next 8 months. If you are thinking of going on an exchange, I highly recommend it. In the 2.5 months I have been here it has helped me develop myself and it will do the same to you. You will make new lifelong friends and have an amazing time.



*Cait Burke*