



Elizabeth

from
Waterloo
to
Brazil

“From the Land of the Cold to the Land of the Hot”

Three months seem like a long time when you are thinking about three months to summer vacation, three months until your birthday, or three months until Christmas, but when you're an exchange student, three months is like a blink of an eye. Three months ago I said goodbye to my closest friends and my family at the airport, got on a plane and arrived in a completely new world. The language was different, the roads were different, the food tasted different, the people spoke in a different manner. Everything was so different. Different is so good, though.

In just three months I have experienced and done so many things I never imagined I would or could do! For starters, I left everything that was in my comfort zone. It is hard to explain the feeling of being an exchange student. I think the best way to explain is it like the experience of making a new friend.

The first time you meet them, you might be a little timid or not know what you can joke about. Being an exchange student is the same thing. You're put into a new family where customs might be different or a joke might not directly translate from your language to theirs. One example of a new custom I had to get used to was that, after the first two or three weeks in my host family's house, I realized that there was something that seemed different to me every time I walked into the house. It finally dawned on me that when my family came home from being out, they wouldn't say anything to announce that they were home, or to see if anyone else was home. In my house in Canada, we always call out "hello" even if we don't know if there are people at home.

After awhile, you get used to what you can joke about with this new friend of yours, but then they introduce you to their friends, and you don't know again. The first week of school was like that. No one knows you, but they are interested because you are new. Here in Brazil, pretty much everyone has dark brown hair, deep chocolate brown eyes, and beautifully tanned skin. Then I come along with my light, blonde hair, my blue eyes, and my pale skin. It is pretty darn easy to spot me in a crowd of Brazilians. I would add a little something about how this made you feel – otherwise your anecdote just kind of hangs there

I absolutely love school here, it's so much different than in Canada. For starters, the teachers move from class to class instead of the students. That means you're with the same people all day, which is really fun because the whole class becomes really close. Not to mention how different the time of school is. Here we have to be in class at 7 a.m., and we leave at about 12:30 p.m.

As you become closer with these new friends you meet more and more people. After I met the other amazing exchange students from all around the world, all living in Brazil, I had the chance to travel with an exchange student from France and her Brazilian host family. We visited the beautiful Cataratas do Foz Iguaçu, went shopping in Paraguay and Argentina, and visited a park of typical Brazilian birds where I got to hold a bright red, blue and green parrot! It was such an amazing trip and I can't wait to travel more.

Speaking of travelling, in about four days, I will be getting on a plane with the other inbound students and flying to the Amazonas, to Brasilia, and finally visiting Brazil's northeastern beaches. I have heard so many amazing things about this trip and I can't wait to go!

Many people don't realize that being on exchange isn't always about travelling. Some days I might go to school and then come home and just have a relaxing day at home with my host family, or even alone if the host family is at work. A year-long exchange is a lot different than travelling because not every day is something brand new and exciting, it might just be sun tanning by the pool in the backyard with my host mum (which is pretty sweet too).

Another thing that I love about living in a new country is all the everyday things that are different from my own country. I love to go grocery shopping here because there are all sorts of new foods and new brands that I've never tried before. It's a different experience every time that I go! Or for example, a month into my exchange I found myself taking a Brazilian taxi all on my own and having a friendly chat with the local taxi driver in Portuguese. To be honest, my Portuguese was probably pretty rough, but Brazilians are super patient and love to help you improve your language skills. They think it is fantastic that you are even trying to speak their language. Brazilians have told me countless times that Portuguese is one of the hardest languages to learn because of all the verbs and conjugations. Personally I am finding it a lot easier than I thought I would. I think it is partially because Portuguese is a mix of Spanish, French and English and I speak two of the three, so if I don't know a word I just sort of improvise. Either this works really well for me or the person I'm talking to gets really confused, but we end up just laughing about it.

That is what I love about my friends here in Brazil. They are all super friendly and sweet. I never have to ask to go out with them, they always remember! If I make a mistake in Portuguese, they correct me in a really polite way, and if they don't understand what I said they will let me know so I can explain more. They are also really eager to learn about me and my home country!

I absolutely adore everything this beautiful country has to offer, all the wonderfully tanned and incredibly kind people, who always have a joke to tell. All the beautiful clear blue and sunny days (literally every day, except for the times it rains about once a month or so) and the huge palm trees that line every street. All in all, I am having a fantastic time in my host country, the amazing travels, the everyday excitement, and the slow days all the same!

A huge thank you to all of my wonderful host families and all of the Rotarians both here in Brazil and back home, who were the ones who made it possible for me to come on this once-in-a-lifetime experience! It's only been three months, but they've been three amazing months, the best of my life!

Até mais,

Elizabeth