



Eric
from
Kitchener
to
Finland

“The End is Nigh”

Now that the end is nigh I find it appropriate to reflect on the things I've learned during my exchange. Unfortunately the language is still a struggle. Finding a balance between studying and living is difficult. I've come to the conclusion that Finnish is a devoted language. Unless you are willing to consistently study and speak Finnish to your peers it will always dissolve into English. Consider yourself lucky if you land in a family who will only speak to you in Finnish. It may seem like a curse at first but it's one of the best things that could happen to you if you are invested in the language.

As for my exchange overall, I am confident in saying that I've thoroughly indulged in all aspects of the culture and am excited to regale my peers in stories of foreign nonsense. With that said let's begin shall we?

It's been three months since we've last spoken and much has happened. I had my 18th birthday which was an enjoyable experience into adulthood. I travelled to Italy with my first host family. Twas an enlightening experience and a delightful trip for anyone who is artistically inclined. Afterwards I switched host families. I currently live with a family of three, one son and two lovely parents. As my first trip alongside this family they decided to take me hiking in the far reaches of Lapland where we proceeded to complete a hike of over 40km clad in snowshoes. It was a gruelling yet enjoyable experience as I learned much about myself that weekend. After the journey my family had made me a “Certificate” congratulating me on my completion of the walk and adorned me in a small necklace that I wear regularly. Aside from that not a whole lot more to report.

The weather continues to test my patience as the days get progressively warmer. Fun fact: it's been the coldest spring in ten years here in Finland and apparently it was a whole 20° warmer last year, compared to this year. Such strange weather patterns I must say. On another note, Euro tour approaches as I wait in anticipation to finally get to see the rest of this union we call Europe. Well not the rest realistically but the eastern part which I find fascinating.

As I mentioned before the end is nigh and I do believe it is nearly time to pass the torch to the next "Eric" headed to Finland. Here is my advice:

1. Take the time to learn Finnish. It will play heavily in your favor if you can exit this country whilst retaining its language. Put in the effort I failed to resolve and speak in Finnish to as many people as possible because trust me they won't return the favor.

2. Be proactive. In such a country where people are rather hesitant (notice how I said hesitant not shy) it is your duty as a student on exchange to approach them. You need to proactively search for opportunities to make new connection both young and old because in the end it's not about whether or not you know the language or studied hard or experienced the culture. It's all about the people you met and connected with over that year. Your relationships are important and realistically (if you are proactive) are the one permanent you will retain after this experience. Don't become part of the wallpaper be proactive.

3. Finally, have some fun.

As much as I wanted to tailor this last one to my country there's not much I can tell you that will help you on your journey through Finland, because ultimately every person is different so therefore every exchange is different. All I can tell you is remember to enjoy your time away. With all the horrible nonsense that's happening around the world it's important to remember the absurdity of it all and learn to have a good time in spite of it. I wish you luck on your adventure, future ambassador, it's quite the ride.

Eric