



Graham

from Mississauga West
to
Czech Republic

“Hello all! Welcome back to my BeaverTale”

I’m super excited to get you all caught up on my adventures over the past few months! And what a few months they’ve been, from a ski trip with Rotary and switching host families and even the country I’m living in, in March, to most recently, EuroTour in late April and early May, the last three months have been full of excitement and adventure.

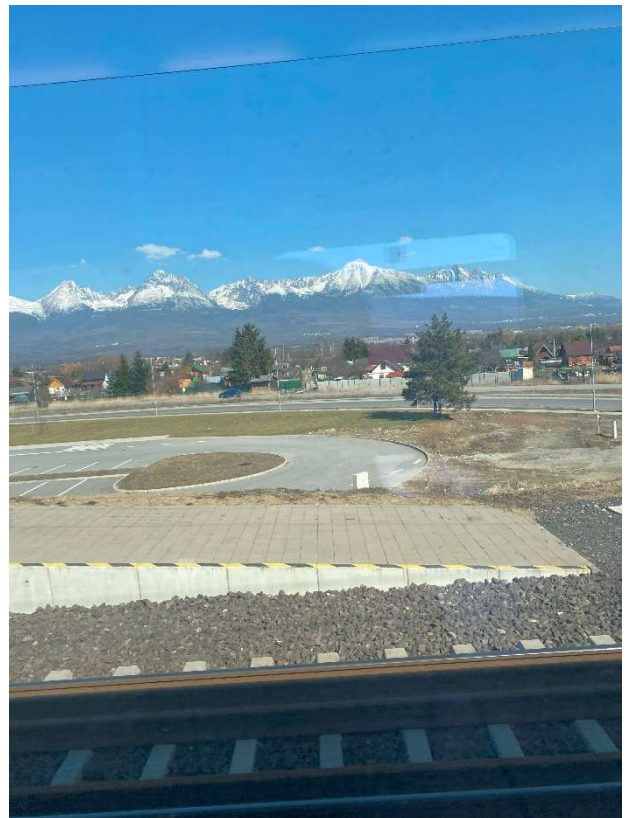
The last time you all heard from me, I had just come back from a ski trip in Italy with my first host family. Since then, I’ve switched host families to my second and final one, they are a very nice family who lives in Slovakia actually, so I’ve been lucky enough to live in both countries under Rotary District 2240, which has been a blessing. The morning commute to school has been really interesting because we cross an international border! It was very unreal the first few times because you are simply able to cross without any security checks or anything, which is obviously a big change to the Canadian border system with our neighbours down south. The town I am living in now is called Skalica and it is one of the oldest and most historical towns in all of Slovakia, one thing that I am really enjoying about my stay here is that there old castle walls that run all throughout the town so as you walk around you are literally walking in history.



Only a few days after I got settled in Skalica, I was on the move again. This time it was for a Rotary run SkiWeek in the High Tatras in Slovakia, I took a train for the first time in Slovakia, and it was a little intimidating, especially because there were some delays, but I've had plenty of experience with Czech trains, so I made it in the end!

Me and the forty or so other exchange students who went on the ski trip stayed in a nice hotel in a beautiful town called Poprad, which sits at the base of the largest mountain range in Slovakia, the High Tatras!

The first day got us immediately used to the weather, as it was a truly frigid day with lots of snow and some brutal winds that made for a very thrilling ski experience. Throughout the week, I was skiing with the expert group. Honestly, I wasn't sure if I would be a good fit, but in the end, I'm happy I made the choice to join them, as we had so much fun all week long. The weather warmed up tremendously over the week, and by the end, a few people were even riding in only a t-shirt! There were a few accidents, but everyone ended up okay and had a great time. Altogether, it was a great trip, and I got closer to many of the students.





Similar to the Christmas traditions, the Easter traditions here are a lot different from what I'm used to, but they were a lot of fun nonetheless, and it was super interesting to get to see and experience them! The main thing that they do here is that the boys will make a stick which is woven from the branches of a willow tree and then go around to the girl's houses and when the girls come outside the guys will sing a little song and give the girls a few taps with the sticks as a way to wish them good fortune for the next year, in return the girls will give chocolate and small decorated eggs. I had the opportunity to participate in a few of these activities, and it was definitely

interesting but also very fun because everyone got along and had a good time.

I had my 18th birthday recently, and it was really cool. First, I got to celebrate with some friends, and I got some amazing presents, and we had a great time! Next was with my class, there is a tradition where the whole class sings happy birthday to whoever has had a birthday recently, it was a very special moment for me because I really got to see how close I've gotten with them over the past 9 months. There was also a small celebration with my host family, and we had a very nice cake which we all enjoyed together.

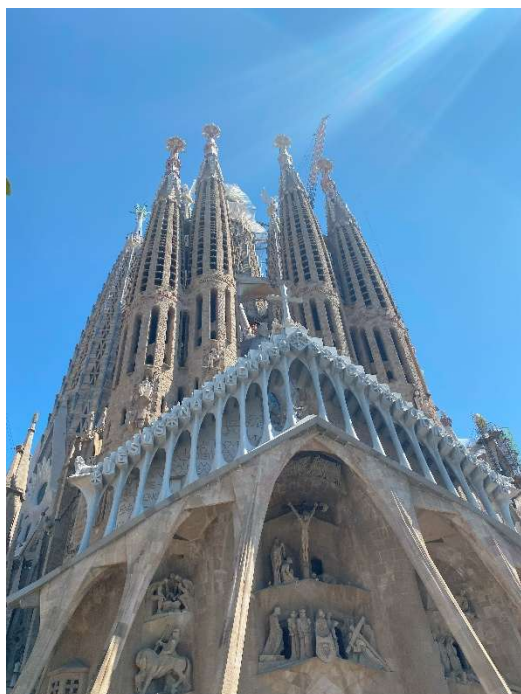
Eurotour actually started on the day of my birthday. It was an incredible two-week journey across six countries and the Mediterranean Sea! My journey started by taking a train to Bratislava to meet up with the other exchange students living in Slovakia. A little while after everyone had arrived, the bus showed up and the journey officially began! We soon after picked up the Czech students in both Brno and Prague, then began the first long bus section of the trip. We were on the bus for nearly a day as we drove through Germany on our way to Paris. We didn't make any notable stops in

Germany, but there were some bathroom stops, so I can officially add Germany to the list of countries I've been to.

After an exhausting bus ride, we made it to France and the beautiful city of Paris. Our first day was spent with a short tour around the center of the city, and we then headed to the Louvre for some free time to look around. For me, the Louvre was like something out of a dream. I really enjoy museums, so getting to experience such a historic one with so many incredible art pieces and statues was just simply incredible! The next day was again full of so many fun and historic things.

The main event for the day was the Eiffel Tower. We had a picnic as a group and had many opportunities for pictures, after our picnic, we headed up to see the view from the top.

For our afternoon plans, we headed over to the Arc de Triomphe and got to look around the museum and see the incredible sunset views from the top balcony.



The next morning, we regrettably had to leave Paris and hop on the bus for the second long bus portion of the trip; this time, we were headed to Barcelona, Spain! We would spend another two days in Barcelona, which was great because we had plenty of free time to explore the city's many historical sites, interesting shops, and

There were, of course, some guides, so we had a more complete understanding of the city's history and culture, but Barcelona was the city where we students were given the most time to ourselves to just explore. The last day of the first week of Eurotour and the last day of April was the boat ride across the Mediterranean Sea. It was a big shock for many people to discover that the boat didn't have any Wi-Fi, which made for a much more enjoyable experience, in my opinion. Almost everyone left the boat much closer than they got on. It was really cool to see how quickly everyone became best of friends.

May:



Our second week of Eurotour begins in an awesome way as we pull into Rome for my personal favourite stop of the trip! Our first day is spent visiting Vatican City and St. Peter's Basilica, we also saw the Pantheon and had a nice lunch as a group before heading back to the hotel for some time at the beach! The second day was arguably even better; we started by heading back to the Vatican to check out their museum. It was truly incredible, filled with all sorts of historic monuments from all over the world. Afterwards, we had some free time for lunch, and I had one of the best pizzas I've ever had. It was perfect fuel for the

afternoon, which consisted of a tour of the Colosseum and the old Roman senate. It was another completely surreal experience for me, I'd always dreamed of seeing it with my own eyes ever since I was a kid, so getting to see it was mind-blowing for sure.

Dinner that evening was free time once again, and we headed over to another pizza place, but can you really blame us? The next day we were off to Naples and its amazing coastline. We spent only a day in the city, where we had some time at the beach before heading to Pompeii the next day. Pompeii was another of my personal favourite stops on the whole tour. We had a guided tour around the old ruins, and I learned a lot about the old ways of life they had in ancient Pompeii and how crazy some of their engineering was. They had a special technique to heat their saunas and even an automatic hot air release system! After spending a few hours looking around all the history that is there, how it was all those years ago, we had to get on the bus and take a ride to Florence.

Our stay was very brief, only a few hours, but we made the most of it and saw some truly incredible statues, including a replica of Michelangelo's David! Unfortunately, the weather wasn't very good, so we had to cut our stay a little short.



Our last stop of the trip was the wonderful city of Venice, and again, it was like something out of a dream. The activities for the day were a short tour around town, and then we had a scavenger hunt, which my group won!

The last thing of the day and Eurotour as a whole was a ride in the famous gondolas. After that, we got on the bus and drove back to our homes again. It was bittersweet, but I was glad to finally get some good sleep in a familiar bed. Since then, I've been relaxing and spending time with my host family watching the World Hockey Championships. We are looking forward to the Canada-Slovakia game on the 17th! I hope you

are all enjoying it as much as I am, and fingers crossed, we bring it home this year.

May 2025

Lastly, I'd like to say one huge thank you to everyone who made my exchange possible. It has truly been the best year of my life, and I have so many lifelong memories and friends. Next, another huge thank you to everyone who has been reading my BeaverTales when they come out every three months, your support means a lot. And finally, one last huge thank you to all the friends, host families, and other people whom I've met while staying here. I'll remember you all fondly, and I really appreciate you all for making this year what it's been.

Yours truly,

Graham Monks