



Kate

from Burlington Central
to
France

'Coucou!'

As my exchange is coming to an end, I've been very busy, trying to fill these last few moments with as many memories as possible. As I'm writing this I have just over a month left, and only 19 more days of school (which is way crazier).

I had left off in February, just before my birthday. My party was amazing; my friends all came over to my house, and we played games, ate cake, and talked lots. I received some amazing presents too; it's crazy how well my friends know me even after only knowing each other for, at the time, 6 months! My only regret from that night was forgetting to take any pictures. The day after my party I took the train to a nearby big city called Lille, where me and my friend Cait went out for dinner together.

On the 25th of February, I went to a cat expedition, where I saw many gorgeous cats from all across Europe. Then the next day, Cait and I went out again and spent a day together in Lille, where we both planned events for half the day and then surprised each other! We went to the zoo, a Poutine restaurant, painting, bowling, and then ended the day with pizza. It was an incredible day.



On February 29th, I did an escape room with my friends. I didn't realise until we got there that I had accidentally booked a horror escape room! We still had so much fun; even if we were a little scared.

Then on March 2nd, I went to my friend's birthday party. We had an amazing sushi dinner and spent most of the day playing an interactive multiplayer game on her Switch. I had an amazing time, and the food was delicious!



On the 4th of March, I left with my host family for our short tour of the middle of France. We headed south first to Chartres, where I saw one of the most famous cathedrals in France. The next day we stopped at a zoo, where I saw so many different animals. Then we headed over to Chateau Blois, an enormous castle with a famous staircase. The next day was Futuroscope; a futuristic-themed amusement park, with lots of 4D movies and very technology-centric rides! It was so much fun,

and I managed to have the time to do everything! Then at night, I went on a hot-air-balloon-cafe ride and drank a hot chocolate while looking down at the beautiful view. The following day we stopped at Chateau Versailles, the most famous castle in France. Its sights were magnificent, and the gardens were very beautiful. I especially loved the gallery of glass; a room filled with mirrors and chandeliers. We then finished the trip with a stop at the Eiffel Tower at night.

March 10th, a fair came to my town. Cait came down, and we went on all the biggest rides together. It was such a fun experience. On the 21st of March, I went again with some friends from school, where we did the mirror maze and a fun spinning ride.



March 22nd, I left for Dijon (the city that invented mustard), with the other exchange students. On the way there we stopped at Reims (the city of champagne) and did a tour of a cave/wine cellar. It was so beautifully decorated. In the evening, we arrived in Dijon, along with every other exchange student in France. It was a bit hectic, but such an amazing time. I made so many new friends (including one I had met through a YouTube comment section back in August!). The next day we went

to the museum of Dijon, did a tour of the city, and then went back to a large conference building, where we traded pins, and put on shows for the Rotarians (singing, dancing, magic, plays, etc.), and then had a mini gala together.

On March 30th, I changed into my 3rd family and left for Le Touquet for a mini vacation. My first family came with us, and we spent the weekend there going out to restaurants, sitting by the beach, and drinking drinks at 5-star hotel bars (it was insane!!).

April 6th was the Soiree Exotique, where we went to Le Louvre Lens (a museum), and then after, entertained a crowd of 400 Rotarians with our homemade food, outfits, and entertainment. I wore a Canada jersey, made poutine, and danced the Cotton Eyed Joe (to

the music of Footloose), with the other Americans and Canadians. The dance went horribly as nobody was at all prepared, but we still had so much fun. I even made little Canada flags with my host sister and gave them out to everyone with their food.



April 9th, I went to Vimy Ridge, a Canadian memorial, during a ceremony for the Canadians who died in the war. I went with the 2 other Canadians, an Australian, a Columbian, and an Indian. It was a very sad ceremony, but great to meet so many fellow Canadians and to learn their stories about the war.



April 14th, I went to Ypres with my host family, and Columbian friend, Laura. Ypres is the city where Flanders Fields is located, in Belgium. This was my first time leaving the country since I arrived. We first got lunch, where I tried Belgium fries, and then Laura and I walked around a bit and discovered the city. There were many shows all around; one with a dragon puppet, then people walking on the side of a very tall building, and finally, a bunch of people with giant grey alien heads walking down the street with black briefcases and loud music. It was a little weird but very funny.

After, we went to the Flanders Fields Museum, where I learned more about the war. It was very sad and made me realise how lucky I am to be living in modern times. On the way back, we stopped at a small Canadian memorial, where I got to sign my name in a guestbook, beside all the other Canadians who came out to visit and pay their respects.



On April 19th, Laura and I went to Chateau Versailles again together with our school. It was the same as before, still magnificent, but it was nice to go in hotter weather and explore the gardens a little more. I got to try a macaron from the castle, and it was SO GOOD. A little too expensive to recommend though.

The next day, April 20th, I left for the Eurotour! This was 2 weeks spent on a bus, touring Europe with most of the other exchange students (Laura couldn't come, unfortunately). We started Day 1 with Paris, having 3 hours of free time to explore the city. My friends and I walked around the Sacre-Coeur, ate lunch, and then explored the city a bit. We got some nice souvenirs, and then sat at a cafe and took in the sights. Afterward, we met the other district that we would be with for the entire trip.



The next day, we started with a tour of the city, where we learned about the fire in the Notre-Dame and the history of Le Louvre. We then had free time, where my friends and I sat down by a fountain and took in the sights. Cait bought a mini boat for 30 minutes, which she let loose in the fountain. We then walked around for a bit and got some crepes and hot chocolate.

We then went into Le Louvre, where we had 2 hours to explore and see everything.

It was amazing, everything we saw; it was hard to believe Le Louvre used to be a castle until I saw the interior. I'd definitely recommend going at least once in your life.



We then had some more free time, so we explored some more and stumbled upon some monuments across the city. It was fun seeing parts of Paris that aren't just the Eiffel Tower or Le Louvre.

We of course then went to the Eiffel Tower, where we went all the way to the top (on elevator of course). It was very windy, but so amazing to be able to see so much of Paris!

The next day (Day 3) was Brussels, Belgium. We were given free time to explore the city and an optional scavenger hunt which my friends and I did. We then went out for lunch (fish & chips), got waffles, and walked around a bit, seeing the sights. After we got back on the bus and headed out to Amsterdam for dinner. We ate at a hotel that had an entire airplane in its backyard; it was insane.



Day 4 was spent in Amsterdam. We did a bike tour, a boat tour of the canals, an hour of free time to eat lunch and buy souvenirs, a 4D short film of the Netherlands, and the tallest swings in Europe. It was such an



amazing experience; Amsterdam is a very beautiful city. We even passed by the Anne Frank house and the Van Gogh museum during the bike tour.



The next day of the Eurotour was just 10 hours driving to Berlin, so when we arrived, we went straight to the hotel, ate dinner, and slept. Day 6 started just outside Berlin, with a visit to a concentration camp. It was very sad, and we learned lots of very horrible things that happened during the Holocaust. After in Berlin, we did a city tour where we saw the wall of Berlin, Checkpoint Charlie, the place where Hitler died, and some memorials for the Jews affected by the Holocaust.

The next day we drove to Prague, where we did a city tour. We got to see the palace and the changing of the guards. After, we had some free time to buy souvenirs.

The following day was Bratislava, Slovakia. Here, we did a city tour and had lots of free time to buy souvenirs, eat lunch, and take in the sights. It was a very beautiful country.



Later that day we drove to Vienna, Austria. We slept over, and then passed all of the next day there. We started with a city tour, and then had 2 hours of free time. My friends and I first went to a Roy Lichtenstein exposition at a nearby museum, as he's a famous artist I really admire. Then we got sushi at a nearby grocery store and ended with some souvenir shopping. Later that night, we went to an Opera called Sounds of Vienna. It was amazing, the music was wonderful. It was mostly Mozart since he's from Austria.



The next day was spent in Budapest, Hungary. We started with another city tour and then had some free time again. We got some delicious Hungarian pizza-type things for lunch, and then we bought souvenirs and bubble tea and went for a ride on the Ferris wheel.

The city was so pretty from high up; we got to see everything well.



The next day, we stopped at Postojna, Slovenia. We didn't get to see much of the country; instead, we went through a tour of the biggest cave in all of Europe. It was massive; we took a train to get inside and then walked to the highest and lowest points of the cave. We were then shown to a mini aquarium, where we saw some Axolotls native to the cave. It was amazing; I had never been in a cave before; it almost didn't look real. I had also never seen dripstone before, so that was also an amazing experience.



We ended that day by driving to Italy. The next day was then all passed in Venice. We did a city tour to start, followed by some free time. For lunch, we bought pizza. It was probably the best pizza I've ever had; it was perfect. We then went souvenir shopping and walked to a giant body of water so we could sit and take in the view. After, we did a tour on a Gondola. It was amazing, Italy was probably the most beautiful country out of all we went to.

The next day we drove to Zurich, Switzerland. We arrived in the afternoon, so unfortunately, we didn't have much time. There wasn't a city tour; instead, we were given two hours of free time. My friends and I went out and bought souvenirs, and then we walked to a bridge that looked over a lake, where we sat and watched the view for a while. Eventually, we head back, ending the Eurotour there.



The trip was a fantastic experience. I saw 11 different countries in just 2 weeks. Everything was so beautiful, and I'm so glad I was able to go. It wouldn't have been half as fun if not for the people I was with, so I'm very grateful we all had this opportunity and were able to go. I made so many friends, met so many new and interesting people, and saw so many things I never imagined.



The following week, my host family and I left for the East of France; a small city called Malbouhains. We were in the country, and it was so beautiful. The backyard had a small lake, with a boat, as well as a forest to explore. The sights were so beautiful, and I especially loved the stars you could see at night. I happened to be there during the night with the Aurora Borealis, so just by chance I managed to catch



it one night. We had no idea what we were looking at until the next morning, and I'm so glad I was able to see it. We were very lucky.

So, that's been my past three months. I have only one month remaining, and so much to do before I leave. I miss everyone so much and I can't wait to come home, but at the same time I feel like I never want to leave; France has become a second home for me, and the relationships I've built here are going to last with me forever. Coming back is going to be amazing, but leaving is going to be even harder than the first time.

Thank you for joining me on my journey these past 10 months; I've changed so much as a person and learned lots. Thank you for reading up to here; see you in a month.

Bisous,

Kai.