



# Nathan

from  
Brampton  
to  
France

## *“Next Up on the List”*

August 23, 2016 is the date of my arrival and I have already accomplished two things; stepping foot on European land and traveling alone by plane. It may not seem like much, but to me that was a huge stepping stone for so many more accomplishments lying ahead. I kept in mind that once I got off that plane I am free, free to just use everything I learned in Canada and put into this exchange. I had no idea how France was going to be, but because of that, I stirred my mentality for becoming the curious and learning all I can about this prominent country.

And so, it began meeting my first host-family. With warm hands they welcomed me into their home, and made me feel very comfortable. Luckily both my host-parents spoke good English, which helped communicating easier and of course improving my French. Surprisingly they have six kids, but this number is quite normal for the French. Of which there were only two living in the house, one sister in her twenties and one brother in his preteens, and the rest had already moved out. Being with this family for some time, I learned the different family customs France has from Canada, like having lunch and dinner with your family at the table. And thankfully after every meal, dessert is served. I find that in Canada and assumingly the US, eating with your family at the dinner table is not as important, like back home we would usually have dinner watching T.V and eat lunch when and what we choose. Another is that my family barely ever spends time using technology, like each one of my host-siblings play a different instrument and do some kind of sports. And having spare time means having family time, in which we usually play board games or make dessert. And those little differences are what I love about the French culture. Oh, and don't forget to greet everyone with a kiss on both cheeks.

Then there is school. Unfortunately out of all the European countries, school in France just has to last the longest, but with that said we have a lot of vacation breaks. Depending on my day's schedule I would typically start school at 8am and finish at 5:30pm, which excludes the time it takes me to even get to school. On the Brightside, students in France or just people here in general, are the nicest people I have come across. As I remember, the first day of school I was waiting for our first lunch break, and so once all the students went on break, I ended up sitting alone and eating my lunch, but literally less than five minutes in, I had a crowd of students wanting to talk to me, and I made friends in an instant, and it gradually grew the days after, making so many friends I felt bad for the ones I forgot I have already met. It's almost like being the popular one of the

school. But now I have a close group of French friends who are awesome. In terms of school itself, the school system is far different from the Canadian system, not only is it longer, but you don't change from class to class, you stick with the same classmates the whole day and the teacher changes depending on the subject. And in class it's hard not to get distracted especially with everyone speaking really fast in a language I barely know. But progressing little by little results in pretty good marks on tests, acing two recent math tests and another economics test which I scored higher than about a quarter of the class. So I realized if I do try, I can achieve reasonable marks in school. As of my travels to school, having to take two subways has made me a lot more comfortable traveling around the city. And now, I find it so easy to travel from place to place to visit my friends.

Having the opportunities to travel around France with Rotary and my host-family has also made for some great experiences. My first trip outside of Lille, which is my host-city, was to an entirely different country. My family decided to go to Belgium to meet their daughter and son-in-law who live in Brussels. And that trip was Beautiful. Walking through the open market, going shopping, eating Belgian frites and waffles, and even visiting a classic car museum, which to me was the best part about it. Only if there was a way to go back, although, not needing a passport or any identification for traveling throughout Europe attracts certain ideas for an exchange student. With my Rotary district I got the opportunity to bus tour to the west-coast of France, visiting a grand castle called Mont St. Michel. Surrounding this castle is a large bay, which transforms from a lake to a bed of quicksand. And along with five districts worth of exchange students, we trekked across that land. Luckily when school break came soon after, my family returned to that region for a family get together in Bretagne, Côte d'amour. A few other small travels with rotary included traveling to the northern tip of France in Dunkirk, and as well visiting the replenished lands of Juno and Omaha Beach. Next up on the list will be Skiing in Mont Blanc and a Christmas trip to Paris.

Time goes by fast when having fun. And what feels like it's been only one month, is realistically three months. So getting to live with four different, but amazing families, it's sad to move to the next one getting to know my first family so well at the end. But that being part of the exchange-experience, I recently had to change families, and this family is just as loving. Additionally, the house is quite spacious with a tennis court in the backyard plus a golf course behind that. And like my last family, with six host-siblings in the picture, there is never a dull moment. Along with that many kids I have been speaking as much French as I can, and word from my host-parents I have improved a lot.

Being an exchange student there are many ups and downs, but because of that I learned a very important lesson thus far in my exchange. That is, it doesn't take tropical palm trees, blue skies, nice beaches, warm weather, or any of that stuff to enjoy your travel. In the northeast of France those things are a rarity around this time of year. So inspired by my brother's exchange to Brazil, my life here likely contrasts the life he lived, but nevertheless without those things, you learn to find what's truly great about travel. And that is its people; its divine culture, its public access to go and seek for more; to anticipate it how you want, and that it all relies on what you make out of your travels no matter where you are. France has made me a stronger and evermore positive person because of that, Thank you Rotary.

À la prochaine.

*Nathan*