



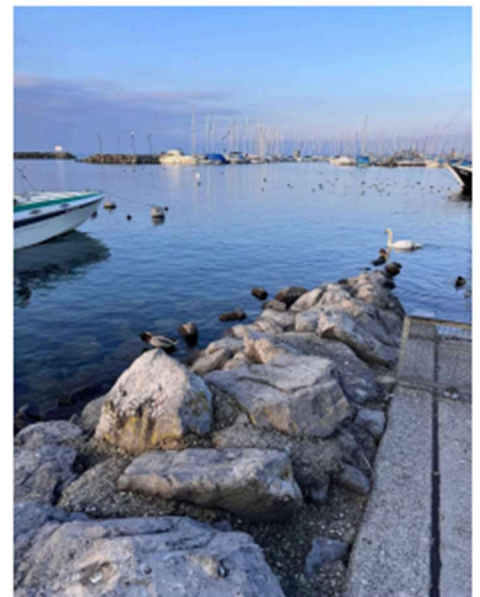
Paige
from
Burlington
&
Burlington North
to
Switzerland

“Building a Second Life Here”

Introduction

I seriously cannot believe that this is halfway for me, the homestretch of my exchange. It has been a crazy six months, and I can only believe that the last 5 months of my exchange will be even crazier. I have genuinely built a second life here and I cannot believe that I will have to leave it all.

In between now and my last BeaverTale, to put it nicely I have been busy but in the best way possible. Life is starting to fall into place here, with friends and classmates who have made me laugh to the point of crying (on multiple occasions). In my last BeaverTale, I mentioned that I was nearing the end of my A2 and maybe B1 tests. Well, I am thrilled to say that I passed both, which has increased my confidence in my speaking and general communication skills here in Switzerland (unless everyone starts talking fast and I am completely lost and I just hope I got the gist of the sentence) I have done so much, so I hope you enjoy this deep dive into my last three and a half months in Switzerland.



Host family.

I am still with the first host family that I arrived in Switzerland with, and it has been a very nice experience. They have taken me skiing on multiple occasions including some bucket-list ski resorts. They have been very welcoming to me and my French level (and my accent) and I feel like a part of the family. I have been included in many activities that I would have no chance of doing in Canada (skiing in the Alps and being able to experience many Swiss Christmas traditions).

Crazy memories.

These past 3 months have been crazy, and I hope that you enjoy the extremely condensed version of these past crazy 3 months in Switzerland.

November.

In the latter half of November, I was kept quite busy (busy is an understatement) If you have read BeaverTales from students who have gone to Switzerland, you have read about the Matterhorn weekend. It is the highlight of being an exchange student in Switzerland (from my experience). It involved a 2.5-hour train ride (the shortest distance for me to travel) and meeting up with all the exchange students with some I hadn't seen since August. We arrived and got the first set of stunning views. We had many activities including a cultural night for the Rotary Zermatt club which generously pays for part of the weekend each year.



It was great to see all the cultures and how the inbounds chose to represent them. The Canadians decided to do line dancing which was interesting due to my low dance ability. The next day, we saw the Matterhorn which was stunning in person. It was around 0 to -1 at the Matterhorn which seriously surprised me considering we were around 3000m elevation. We got fortunate with the weather, and it was at the coldest around -5 and that was closer to midnight. We had some amazing food and then it was another goodbye to all the exchange students.



The weekend after that, I took my A2 test which I passed with a 98/100.

We spent the morning taking the written comprehension, listening comprehension, and written production. Then with a little delay, we did the speaking comprehension. I am very proud and honestly surprised by these results.

December.

December was another very busy month that flew by. On the 6th of December, I went to the next big city over from mine called Fribourg for the St Nickolas festival. It is a story about 3 kids who were killed and then brought back to life, and he was celebrated for it. It has changed a little since with the tradition now being someone dressed like him and throwing bread to a crowd and giving a speech in both English and French (Fribourg is a French/German city and canton).

On my last day of school, my school rented out a cinema and we watched a French film (but with lots of English speakers) about 3 guys driving through Afghanistan. It was a very cool experience to watch, and after which was even cooler; the creators and "stars" of the film came out to answer any questions we had. It was crazy for me to see the film and listen to the people talk about the experience.



At the end of the year, I went up to Valais to ski at a hill called Champex Lac. It is a hill that I nicknamed "tiny but mighty". We spent all of the winter break up there and I spent New Year's Eve going down the mountain carrying a torch with real fire and it was a crazy cool experience.

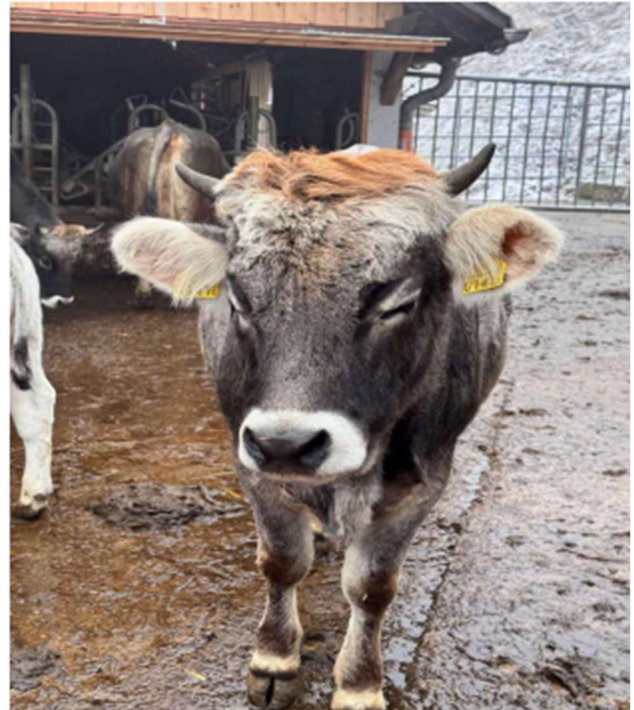
January

In January, I celebrated New Year's and finished skiing with my host family and had to go back to school. I did not have much time for relaxation because I had to take my B1 language test in the middle of January. I ended up getting an 85,5/100 and I am very proud of my results. It was the same format as the A2 test and I'm very happy that I had the opportunity to take my B1 test now it takes me one step closer to my personal goal of taking my B2 test before the end of my exchange year. After the B1 test, it was a lot of school without many breaks which has been difficult, but I have been able to get closer

to my classmates. School is also much easier now to follow even without my grades counting in Canada. Now that my French is much better, I can start conversations naturally and also be able to hold them, a privilege that I did not have 3 months ago at my last BeaverTale.

February

The first half of February when I am writing this has already been crazy. On the first and second days of the month, I had the Rotex winter weekend. We went to a town called Steg. It was in the mountains with a very large surprise with the weather. At the base where the village was, it was clear and not that cold, but at the top where our cabin was, it was snowing and much colder than at the base. We got up to the cabin and ate our lunches after a 1.5-hour "walk" (pro tip for any future Swiss exchange students, if the Swiss say walk it's at least an hour with at least 200m of elevation gain, and wear hiking shoes). After we ate, we went on another "walk" and we were allegedly promised a view but due to the snow and the fog, there was a lack of one. Instead of admiring the view, there was a massive Inbound vs Rotex snowball fight. We went down and just spent the night relaxing.



On Sunday, we cleaned up the cabin and went down to the train station. When we were waiting for our train, there was a massive game of manhunt with all the Inbounds. After that, we went to another town called Diekliton where we curled. Because I was a Canadian and I was gracefully falling, I think I did not meet the expectations that were set for me.

After a train ride home with only one Olympic sprint through the train station (any future Swiss students, you are going to do that at least once).

Language

As I had mentioned before, my language and my French have greatly improved since my last BeaverTale. Since my French has improved so much, I have been able to hold and start conversations much more easily than before. There have also been many times in English class or when I have been calling friends where I can only think of the word in French. I have also written on some assignments in French and then I end up having to erase what I wrote and switch my brain to English. My French improving has also helped

me improve my understanding at school. My grades have been slowly improving with difficulty remaining in my STEM subjects (math, biology, chemistry, and physics).



Skiing at Verbier :)

Closing remarks

I seriously cannot believe that it has already been six months and that I only have 5 months left on my exchange. I have genuinely built a second life here and I cannot believe that I do have to leave here. I also cannot believe that it has nearly been a year since I read the big bold letters of SWITZERLAND on the sheet, with my heart racing faster than it had ever before. I want to give some advice to any future Swiss exchange students. If you haven't heard already from previous BeaverTales the trains/buses/metros (any public transportation) are EXTREMELY punctual. If a train leaves at 7:45 it is gone at 7:46 (there will be many times where you have to run for a train when there is a rare delay, or you have a tight connection). That situation has happened to me on multiple occasions, but the trains are much more logical as well.

The Swiss take their traditional dishes very seriously, along with their walks. Most of the time, a walk is at least 3km with or without elevation gain. I hope that I have you a glimpse into these last 3 crazy months in Switzerland and what life in Switzerland is like for any future exchange students. I want to thank everyone in 7080 and 1990 for the support that they have given me over these past six months and much before I even left for Switzerland. I am eternally grateful that I have been given this opportunity.

Until next time

A la prochaine,

Paige Riiahio