

"Like all great travellers, I have seen more than I remember, and remember more than I have seen."

Benjamin Disraeli



Yep, Yap

September 2012

Do you know a school student who wants to go on youth exchange?

Could your family grow from the experience of hosting a student from another country for 3 months?

Does your local Rotary Club still need to select their student for the next exchange year?

If you answered 'yes' to any of these questions, contact your local Rotary Club or the YEP Committee Chair below...

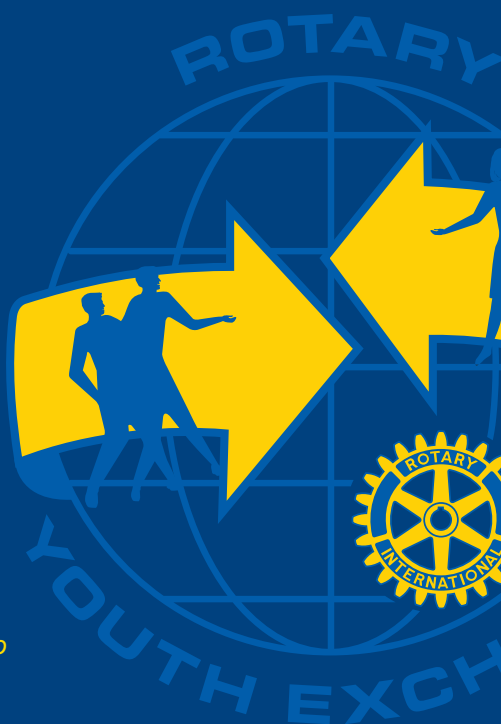
**Rotary Youth Exchange
District 9820**

Bus: +61 3 5658 1182 Home: +61 3 5655 2904 Mobile: 0418 507 574
email: mardilabbott@gmail.com
PO Box 336, Korumburra Victoria 3950 Australia

www.district9820.org

Rotary International District 9820

Youth Exchange Program Outbound Students



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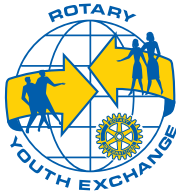
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Congratulations...

you have been selected to take part in
the Rotary Student Exchange Program

Rotary's Youth Exchange Program is a tremendous opportunity for secondary school age students to travel abroad to further their education in an entirely different environment to their own.

Rotary Youth Exchange is an official activity of District 9820. The program is administered by the District Youth Exchange Committee which reports to the District Governor. In our District, District 9820, Tony Spring is the District Governor for this Rotary year 2012/2013.

The Youth Exchange Committee is responsible for the administration of the program. The exchange itself is the responsibility both the sponsor and the hosting Rotary clubs. Within the District administrative structure, Youth Exchange is a part of the New Generations portfolio, which looks after all programs in Rotary associated with youth.

Rotary hopes that the impact of this experience for the participants will not only have a positive outcome for cross culture communications and international relations but will stimulate those in the program to become better citizens. As such, this exchange experience will help students to prepare to participate in leadership roles within their own communities and encourages them to play a significant role in the shaping of tomorrow's world. The impact of the program carries over to all those who are associated with an exchange student; thus youth exchange is not just about the student, it is a program that touches many, many people.

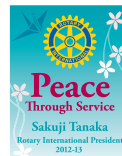
The program is an extremely rewarding experience for all who participate in it, whether a student, Rotary club, host family, counsellor, host community or as District committee members.

Mardi Abbott

Rotary Youth Exchange Chairman

District 9820

www.district9820.org/





The first YEP Camp is where the prospective Outbound 2012 students met the newly arrived 2011 Inbounds. There are fun activities between presentations and time to mingle (and ask questions). Above: students on their early morning walk through the Aussie bush - watch out for the Drop Bears!!



Above: Outbound 2012 Student Josh Eaton (middle) with YEP Chairman, Mardi Abbott (to his right) and the Eaton family at Melbourne Airport. The District 9820 Committee Team endeavors to see every student off at the airport.



Over the three weekend YEP Camps, Inbound 2011 and Outbound 2012 students have their duties, responsibilities and expectations explained. The YEP Committee volunteers cover many issues, including: hosting; VISA's; home sickness; insurance; safety; language; and all the important issues required to prepare both groups for their exciting year on exchange in another land. The camps contain formal and informal presentations (above), including a special Rotary Club meeting attended by the District Governor of the day.



Above: The YEP Committee work as a team to ensure that the Rotary D9820 Youth Exchange Program is successful, safe, positive, and fun for all of the people involved in the program, including clubs, host families & schools. Some of the 2011 Committee are pictured with the Outbound 2012 students.



Rotary District 9820

Youth Exchange Committee 2012

Chairman
Deputy Chairman
District Governor
Treasurer

Mardi Abbott
Dan Kraan
Tony Spring
Wendy Langdon

Country Co-ordination

Brazil, USA/Canada, France
Denmark, Finland, Norway & Sweden
Germany, Austria, Switzerland & Taiwan
Student Activities & Promotions

Dan Kraan
Wendy Farmer
Paul Howells
Anthony Mayer

Outbound Exchange Students January 2012 - January 2013

Student	Sponsor Club	Country	Page No
Amber Mathrick	Frankston	Finland	4
Caitlyn Langdon	Berwick	Germany	6
Celina Gray	Maffra	Denmark	8
Cody Horrigan	Trafalgar	Norway	10
Joshua Eaton	Traralgon Central	Brazil	12
Kaitlyn Crisfield	Koo Wee Rup	Finland	14
Katelyn Peachey	Orbost	USA	16
Leah Sjerp	Bairnsdale Sunrise	France	18
Libby Panther	Leongatha	Switzerland	20
Samantha Scott	Phillip Island/San Remo	France	22





Amber Mathrick - Finland

It seems like a lifetime ago that I stepped off the plane at Helsinki-Vanta airport into the freezing cold, dark Finnish winter. I feel as if I have been living in Finland for my whole life but in reality I have been here for almost 8 months and time has just completely flown by. In the last 8 months I have done and experienced so many things that most 16 year olds only get to dream about.

My first week in Finland was spent at a language camp with all of the other Australian exchange students and one guy from New Zealand. During our camp week we were able to experience many things that are traditionally Finnish, for example, makkara (sausage), sauna, swimming in the ice, (which by the way is the most amazing thing you can do even though it is so cold), skiing, sledding and we also got the chance to go into the Tampere one of the biggest cities in Finland. One of the most important parts of this first week though was trying to learn some of the basics of the Finnish language which is extremely difficult but once you understand it feels amazing.

I have been living in Vaasa which is a city on the west coast of Finland, it has been great living here and I have been able to experience a lot of things that other exchange students do not get to experience because my town is bilingual. In Finland they speak both Finnish and Swedish and living in the bilingual town has meant that I have been able to experience not only Finnish culture but a bit of Swedish culture as well. Living in a Swedish/ Finnish town has meant that I have been able to attend the Vaasa arts night and especially Vil-lavslutning which is only celebrated in the Swedish parts of Finland and the archipelago.

*“the language is
extremely difficult
but once you
understand it feels
amazing”*

School in Finland is very different, it is said to have the best education system in the world and I do believe that to be true. In Finland it is really up to the student to keep up with

assignments and attending class. Teachers don't chase you down about homework and there is no such thing as detention. The other thing that is different is that you got a hot free meal for lunch every day.

Making friends was difficult in the beginning because Finns are extremely shy and really keep to themselves but as long as you talk to them and continue to try they do slowly open up to you. Once they open up Finns are some of the best friends you can make as they are very honest. All you need to remember is to keep trying to make friends on exchange and eventually it will all work out well for you.

I have had three amazing host families. I lived with my first host family for 4 months and while I lived there they even took me to Sweden. It was a really great experience living with this family. In this family I had host parents, an older sister (18), a younger sister (12) and an older host brother (20). It was really great to not be the oldest and also to have sisters. I got really close with this family and I still keep in contact and try to see them as often as possible.

I moved to my second host family at the beginning of summer and I only lived there for 2 months. In this family I had host parents, as well as 3 siblings. I had twin host sisters who were 7 and a host brother who was 2. I didn't do very much with this family but it was still a good experience and made me realize that you really do have to learn to adapt while on exchange.

I am now with my final host family who I am going to be living with for the rest of my exchange. I have been living here for just over a month now and they are all very welcoming and trying to make me feel at home. In this family I have a host mum and dad, a sister (18) who I am becoming very close to as well as host brother (24) who lives in Helsinki, the capital of Finland.

One of the best experiences I have had while on exchange was the St. Petersburg trip in March. Myself along with 90 other exchange students travelled to St. Petersburg, Russia, where we visited the Winter Palace, the Russian ballet and the Hermitage museum just to name a few things.

On exchange the other exchange students that you meet are very important and all amazing people. They become like your own giant family and support system which is sometimes really great to have on exchange if you are going through a hard time, as they all understand what you are going through because you all share something so big in common.

I left Australia completely full of excitement and nerves, ready for the amazing journey that I knew lay ahead of me. Although, I knew that this year would be one of the best of my life I didn't really know what I would experience and what I was getting myself into. Exchange is one of those things that most teenagers and even most people only dream about but for me it is actually reality and it is an opportunity of a lifetime.

Amber





Caitlyn Langdon - Germany

'Memories I'll never forget. Friends all around the world. New experiences. The chance to learn a new language. New foods. New environment. And to start exploring the world.' These were just some things that made me want to become an exchange student.

To think that I left Australia over seven months ago is bizarre, it honestly feels like yesterday, which means everyday feels like it only goes for five minutes. On the day I left Australia for my exchange in Germany, I wasn't scared, nervous, sad or excited; there was just this feeling that I can't explain.

Long term exchange, is all about trust. We all have to trust that Rotary will look after us when we don't feel part of the family, or connected to the Rotary Club, or safe. You have to trust your that your host families will look after you, and that you can talk to your counselor whenever you need to.

For me, this hasn't been the easiest exchange. I've had a few problems with my Rotary Club in Germany, my counselor and even my first host family. It all came down to a lack of communication and took a long time resolve. But being put through all of this, it has only made me tolerate people more, double think everything I do, and make me a stronger person. I would actually explain my year so far as 'the best and worst year of my life'.

Learning German is not the easiest thing in the world, in fact it is incredibly difficult, especially the 'der, die, and das', which in English is just 'the'. A big part of learning a new language is the people around you. They hear your accent, and that you can't speak German perfectly and instantly become interested. It's because of this that I have met a lot of my friends who I'm sure I will keep in contact with for the rest of my life. They have stuck by me through thick and thin: the highs, such as getting a parcel from home in Australia; and the lows, like homesickness.

Having three extremely different host families' meant I have had to adapting really quickly to each family's life style. I have been really lucky to get the great host families that I have had.



While I've had some hiccups with one family, I still love them and my other two families have been so warm and loving that I can't help but love them very much. I know there will be many tears when I leave in just over four months. I feel like I am a part of this family, like I am their extra daughter and it feels ok to call my host parents 'mum' and 'dad'. It's different to my first two host families because doing those things didn't feel right with them.

I was extremely thank-full that I could go on the 'Europe Tour' within three months of arriving in Germany. For 25 days, 49 exchange students, 6 Rotex, travelled through the Czech Republic, Hungary, Austria, Italy, France, and Belgium. What else is there to say? Nothing! Not only were they the best 25 days of my exchange, but also my life so far. There was nothing to worry about in my life back home in Germany, especially the question 'what if they don't like me?' Exchange students have become another family for me; we have many things in common. When I am with them I just forget about everything. We all go through the same emotions and understand each other so much because of our shared experiences on our different exchange journeys.

*"you just grow
and learn and
develop different
expectations in life"*

Exchange is going from thinking you know who you are, to having no idea who you are anymore, to becoming someone different, in a good way. You're not an entirely new person, you just seem to grow, learn and develop different expectations from life; of yourself and from other people.

Caitlyn





Celina Gray - Denmark

This year has been a rollercoaster. There's no other way to put it. Not like one of those 'How could I let you convince me to go on this thing?!' rollercoasters, but a rollercoaster nonetheless. There have been the inevitable lows, that spin you around upside down until you're so confused that you don't know which way is up, followed by the incredible adrenalin-rush high points which have more than balanced out the ride.

To begin with, I couldn't really believe that I was going on this adventure. I had been planning and dreaming about it for years before it actually happened, but I still couldn't fully wrap my head around it until the day of my departure. I guess it was like the calm before the storm. Everything was going smoothly until I was standing in the airport and freaking out.

"oh the high points! Where do I even begin?!"

My first few days in Denmark were a shock to the system. I walked out the international arrivals gate to my first family. The photograph I had with their names was brought to life. Those names that I had practiced over and over and quizzed myself on so many times so that I could call each member of my new family by name, I found were pronounced completely differently. That was just the beginning of the head spinning and confusion. They then took me on a train with no driver to get back to the house; I think I felt like I was going to die. The temperature had gone from a sunny thirty to below zero and it snowed later on that morning. The thoughts running through my head that day: 'Oh my god, this is my new home' and 'What have I done?'

Within the next two weeks I was introduced to a life that I would grow to know and fall in love with. I was introduced to city life with everything at your fingertips. The insane amount of cyclists in Copenhagen. Relying on public transport instead of the 'Parental Taxi Service'. A new school, new people and new friends and to my true second family: exchange students.





My second week of Danish life was spent in northern Jutland meeting all the other new exchange students in Denmark and daily Danish lessons. I will never forget the one day that we didn't have lessons, spent in the city of Århus, shopping and exploring, on the coldest day I have ever experienced, a lovely -19 degrees.

Homesickness has been a hurdle. I missed some really notable family events: my cousin had her debutant and my uncle got married. One sister turned 21 and the other turned 18: we had planned and talked about celebrating these milestones together for years. I found this harder to get through than the initial homesickness because they were one-time things that I was missing out on. Rotary had prepared me for this and I just thought to myself 'Hey! You're having a one-time experience every day you're here! Just enjoy today!'

But the high points, oh the high points! Where do I even begin?! I have seen so much! I have learned so much! I have experienced so much! Within my first month I had already travelled internationally and tried my hand at skiing in Sweden. Later on in the year I had my EuroTour and also travelled to Germany, the Czech Republic, Austria, Italy, France, Belgium, and Holland. I have tried learning a new language. I have learnt about different cultures and lifestyles. I have learnt things about myself that I never knew before. I realized how small the world really is. Rotary has brought me close to people I never would have met, with the craziest of connections. I have done all of this at the age of fifteen and sixteen.

The past nine months have been a blur. When I think about the days before I left my home and everything I knew, it feels as if that was three years ago, but then when I think about my first days in this amazing country and my early memories, they feel like only last month. Looking back on this year, I cannot believe how much I have accomplished, or how much I have grown as a person. I sincerely thank Rotary for that.

Celina





Cody Horrigan - Norway

Oh gosh! Is what I thought when I got told I had to write about my 8 months of my Exchange. Before thinking how am I going to tell you all about my time in my host country, Norway. All I can really tell you about my exchange year is... wait for it...AMAZING!

The moment I first saw Norway through the windows of the airplane and the moment were I first stood on the grounds even if the ground was covered in snow, I knew I was going to have an unforgettable year. We were five Australians including myself walking together to meet our host families or get on another plane to another part of Norway. Even exhausted and wore out I manage to hug my new friends good-bye and greet my host family with smiles that was before I got into a car in Norway for the first time. I'll admit I was beyond terrified, driving on the right side of the road was frightening but after some months I got used to it.

My host families are wonderful and kind people and I was so glad to be welcome into their homes for parts of my exchange. My first host family, there was an older brother called Lars and younger sister called Sara living at home. It was a pleasant change to be a middle child, coming from a family of six children and being the second oldest, it's a huge different. I was taken to BBQs by the sea, to the cabin in the mountains for skiing, trips to Oslo and to a family game night. I love game night.

My second host family were farmers with three daughters who don't live at home. I spend weeks being the only child then one by one my host sisters return for the summer holidays. I got along great with my host sisters, just being able to talk casually with each other, those will be the moments I will remember.

Ok, I only been with my third and last host family for a couple of weeks but just to show how fantastic host families can be. I jump into this host family without any troubles at all. Håkon my host brother is just a crazy guy and the moment I came into the house, there's was hardly any talk between us but the feeling of us being siblings was set in stone. All together I have three older brothers with only one living at home but I already meet them all. The whole family is very supportive and fun to be around.



In Norway, I made friends ... well, actually everywhere I made friends: Norway, USA, Brazil, Taiwan, Canada, Italy, Argentina, France, and Australia. I've done a lot with friends such as the casual going to the cinema, shopping and bowling or even just going out for a coffee or for a meal. There was also a weekend trip to the capital city, Oslo. Then you got the times I went and did a "Once in a lifetime opportunity". There was Language Camp which for a week the "January Arrivals" spent learning Norwegian, Winter Camp with skiing, Holmenkollen which is a skiing competition and Europe Tour where I travelled along with Exchange Students in Norway for two weeks visiting six countries.

I could count all of the things I have experience on my fingers but the list will be very, very long and to explain it all to you, it would be a novel instead of an article. There was a time when I ski for the first time in my life when I was still jetlag but manage to cross country ski due of excitement. Or the time when I walked in soccer boots with my class mates from soccer training and slip and end up going down the hill in -15 degrees. See? And these are just the silly stories I have to tell and some of the most unforgettable.

*"I've never felt
so alive"*

There are so many stories to share but I only have these stories thanks to Rotary. What if there was no Rotary Exchange Program? I wouldn't be here. I wouldn't have travelled so widely and visited so many. Most 17 years olds wouldn't have done anything like this. So, I would love to say thank you and thank you again to the Rotary Club of Trafalgar for sponsoring me; to the District 9820 YEP Committee for preparing me for my exchange and to my family and friends for their love and support.

People have said to me, "This is a once in a lifetime thing. Go and live this exchange year like no other", but it's more than a once in a lifetime thing. It's a beginning of something truly wonderful. I'm realising the potential of full of life, learning new skill and creating great memories.

Cody-Jayne





Joshua Eaton - Brazil

Rotary Youth Exchange. What is it? I know this seems like an odd start but it's a question I only began to realise the on the terrifying horizon of my departure day. This is an opportunity to see and experience, not only another country but another life. This gives me the option of being someone who can change the future; change the lives of others for the better. Set goals and critically examine my views. I'm left pondering the question of my career path. It's interesting how my answer has changed after seeing my dreamed professions function in another land and culture. My dream professions haven't been exactly steady these past few years with thoughts ranging from journalism to random-super-athlete and settling with my general consensus of law.

When I meet new people every day question inevitably pops up. I try to give a straight answer. The question gets me thinking about what's changed in my plans for the future? I know now that exchange students generally tackle this question and think further forward about the answer. The easy answer every exchange student concludes about their future is travel will be a big part of it and it's one of the greatest goals we have. The global community that this phenomenal program creates brings with it a ticket to travel the world. I want to visit every single country and see every single exchange student who has been my friend since I locked eyes with them for the first time.

*"the greatest
chance anyone
could ever offer you"*

The Rotary Youth Exchange Program creates a fantastic and different set of circumstances that makes every day an epic adventure: riding a white water raft off a water fall, dancing the samba in the pouring rain surrounded by hundreds of people living for the moment; or fighting homesickness by following a list of crazy things to do. Every moment is an opportunity.





If you'd like some expert advice on surviving exchange I'll tell you! Make yourself a list of things to do if you get homesick. Before you go, learn the language and learn lots about your host country, about life and about people. When you are there commit to truly immersing yourself into the culture. Finally, be humble and open to the ideas of others and never lose your sense of humour.

To any prospective exchange students who read this, youth exchange is an invitation to make a choice to step up and take your life into your own hands. To stand on the edge of a cliff and leap, not relying on your family or your friends to catch you but instead believing that you can spread your own wings and soar. Exchange is almost a self-dare. What if I did this and changed the way I do that? What if I make this the best year of my life?

This experience is an awakening and a springboard that I am sure I will be diving off for the rest of my life.

Beijos

Josh





Kaitlyn Crisfield - Finland

My year in Finland so far has been ... well, I find it hard to put it into words, really. This year has taught me so much. I've met the most amazing and loyal that I think will be friends forever. I have gotten so many unbelievable opportunities. I'll take you briefly through my exchange journey.

I could tell you about the first day I stepped foot into Finland, but I think my exchange adventure started when I was still in Australia. Once accepted as a candidate following successful interviews with my sponsor club (Rotary Club of Kooweerup Lang Lang) I was invited to go to three preparation camps. Here I met other Outbound and the recently landed Inbound exchange students. I got the opportunity to learn about what it is like to be an exchange student first hand from them. At the time I had no set destination, but I knew I wanted to go somewhere in Europe. My thoughts were Switzerland, France and Finland, but I still didn't mind where I went. I was just so amazingly happy to be getting the opportunity to study abroad for 12 months. A few days after the last preparation camp I got a call from Mardi, who offered me a position in Finland and I was over the moon!

I didn't have any expectations as such, and I like that I didn't. I didn't know a lot about Finland, just that it was cold and it snows! After the 33 hours it took to get me from Melbourne Airport to Helsinki Airport, I was so excited, but it didn't show well through the jetlag! From the airport I was taken to a language camp held in Karkku where I met the other 16 Australians and 1 other exchange student from New Zealand. That was our group, pretty small, but this allowed us all to bond and get to know each other well. After that week, we all parted to go our separate ways and I met my first host family who took me up to Seinäjoki, where I've been living.

After the first week here in Finland, time has just gone the fastest it has ever gone for me. I love every day here. I have the most incredible, loving and honest friends I have ever had. All of my host families have been so amazing and have made me feel like a part of their families from day one of moving in. As much as I miss Australia, I dread to think about coming back because I don't want to leave Finland; it's my second home now. I can't believe I only have 4 months left here!



To be honest, there have been very difficult times; mainly in the first half of my year. Times when I would get very home sick and miss Australia so much that I wanted to come home sooner. Looking back on it now, I am so happy that I had people to talk to about it and help me through. I would've had lifelong regret if I'd have come home early. The good times far outweigh the bad! The days I have lived here in Finland have been the best days of my life (so far) and there is no doubt that I will be coming back here in the future to visit all of my friends and families here.

I get asked a lot of questions as an exchange student. The most common is, "What do you like most about Finland?" I can never answer that question fully because I love everything equally about this beautiful country. I find it amazing how the Finnish people are so modest about the beauty of their country. It's like I've stepped off the plane and landed in Narnia! In winter, everything is covered in a thick blanket of white powdery snow and in Summer it looks like a completely different country! Everything is green and the sky is a vivid bright blue, and in the middle of Summer the sun doesn't set! It's crazy! Another thing I adore here is the music culture. There are a lot of festivals held in Finland that bring people from all different places to see the performers; the atmosphere is incredible.

I don't know what else to say; I could go on forever about how much I love Finland and how happy I am that I chose to go on exchange through Rotary. I just hope anyone reading this seriously considers exchange, because it is the best thing I have ever done!

Kaitlyn





Katelyn Peachey - USA

My year in America has been a full one, filled with good day's bad days, eventful days and even days were I sit with my brother and sister and watch TV. I have changed host family's three times and living with the last family right now. A few days ago I realized I don't have long left and started to think have I really used my year to the best of my ability. I have trailed to Canada, Boston and swam in the Atlantic Ocean, joined a cheer squad met some great girls and am having a lot of fun. Went to prom and will be doing home coming very soon, I have done a lot of stuff I would have never dreamed of doing. Right now I'm down and out from cheering for 2 to four weeks as I am on crutches because of bad footing in cheer practice, and that well it kind of sucked. But that's when I got this thought yes, I have had bad days of when I missed my friends, of stuff happened in their lives and didn't tell me about it, and I found out from my mum or Facebook. It made me feel just so distant and far away. Or sadly when my great grandma passed away and I wasn't there to be with my mum or say goodbye to her at her funeral or even just little things like gossiping about people at school and not having a clue who there talking about. Those times were hard but I really have had a great year. Some people also told

me I would have it so easy because I know English, but there are so many words and slang that you spend half your time scratching your head going "what ??" and "I don't understand?? ". But aside for me being lost in this crazy American language and weird questions you get asked and the late night meat pie or Tim-Tam cravings, I have had an amazing year and yes the end is approaching very soon. I can't wait to see my mum and friends, but I am just loving the time I'm having with the family I'm with now, I feel such a part of their family, I feel like I have known them forever. We are going to new York soon to see the sites and go to a show on Broadway, but with that amazing stuff coming up the best moments and memory's I will keep are the ones were we spend as a family. Like the other night we sat out by the fire making smoores and

*" I feel so a part of
their family I feel
like I have known
them forever"*



laughing at my dad, he thinks he is Lord of the flame because he can light a fire with some twigs, and as he does a dance of victory as he calls it. The fire goes out and my mum falls off the chair laughing. Those moments make me think how lucky I am to be doing this. It's hard to think of what my year would have been like if I didn't go through with this exchange. I don't even like to think about it because I have learnt so much being away from my life. I'm better at school work and studying. I have learnt to plan and I use a date book to remind me about upcoming work and other things I have to do. I really appreciate everything this program has done for me. I'm a better student, daughter and member of my community. I can't wait to see the faces of my mum and family, my friends and the Rotary YEP Committee: I hope to make people proud of me.

Katelyn





Leah Sjerp - France

It's not a year in a life; it's a life in a year....

This expression has become my favourite saying and it sums up my year in France in the simplest but most beautiful way possible.

When I arrived at Luxembourg airport after roughly 30 hours of travel, I was a small blond haired, brown skinned girl who wasn't really sure what she had signed herself up for. I will forever remember walking through the International Arrivals gate and seeing a crowd of people waving a French flag and yelling my name. It was so unreal; so hard to believe that I was actually on exchange, which had always been something in one year, six months, three months, after Christmas....

The following week turned into a blur of signing school forms, meeting new people, starting school, meeting more people, learning French, and meeting even more people. But as the days turned into weeks and the weeks turned into months I truly began to appreciate the journey I was undertaking.

Your first host family has such an influence on your exchange. They are the people who help you settle into your new home, explain things to you when you don't understand, give you advice on your everyday problems, and introduce you to your new country and culture. Luckily for me my first host family was amazing; so were my second and my third! Now that I'm with my fourth and final host family I realise that I have been blessed with four incredibly welcoming and loving families that have taken me in and made it their mission to help me discover their beautiful French culture.

*"It's a chance
to discover yourself"*

The city where I live is in the north east of France and to me it will always remain the most beautiful city in France. Nancy is a city filled with cultural and historical sites; beautiful gardens, town squares edged with gold and filled with fountains, old churches with their bells ringing at eight am every morning. When I arrived there was a soft layer of snow covering the streets and





now the sun shines down on the pavestones and it's actually possible to get sunburnt if one is not careful.

I have done a lot of travelling throughout the last 7 months. With my numerous host families I have visited Paris, Normandy, the south of France – a small seaside town called Six-Fours sur les Plages, and all the north east regions of France surrounding Lorraine. But it's been with Rotary that I have had the most memorable voyages. Every month my district arranges a weekend out for all the Youth Exchange Students. All of our trips, no matter where in France, have been the best weekends of my exchange. It's not just where we are, it's the company we are in. Rotary pulls us all together; we are all having the same adventure, with the same challenges and the same highlights. We come from all over the world with all different kinds of backgrounds, but there's something that brings us together and no matter what our differences are, we are always the best of friends.

So with this in mind, I'd like to thank Rotary with all my heart. For the opportunity they have provided me with, and for all the work the Committee members and the clubs put in to make sure that this wonderful program continues to happen.

When I left Australia, my mum wrote me a letter. She said that exchange would be like a rollercoaster, but that I should rise to the challenge and ride the highs and the lows for all they're worth. She's right; it is an emotional rollercoaster that most normal adolescents would never have the guts to take. But this rollercoaster of a year is a chance to discover yourself, other people, and a brand new country completely different from your own. It's a gift that if accepted, becomes the greatest adventure of your life.

Leah





Libby Panther - Switzerland

For about 8 months now I have been living in Zürich, Switzerland. And what can I say? Exchange is one hell-of-a-year! It is the most adrenalin packed, euphoric, exciting year I have ever experienced. The memories and good times are ones that will stay with me forever. The moment when I received the call saying I had been accepted was the most incredible moment. I just wanted to hop on the plane straight away and start exchange right then and there.

While I was excited to depart, in the last few days it was tough. The emotions really hit me and it had me contemplating if I had made the right decision or not. I put these feeling down to fear of the unknown. Instead of thinking of the negative, I thought of these feelings as some of the first challenges of my exchange.

Departure was similar, the morning at breakfast I couldn't stop crying, but after I walked through those gates the excitement started to build. I cannot describe the feeling when I got off the plane in Switzerland. Even after more than 24 solid hours of travelling I was filled with energy and adrenalin. My first day I stayed awake

“the most adrenalin packed, euphoric, exciting year”

the whole day and immediately started exploring everything, we had a lovely breakfast, my host brother took me into Zürich and showed me how the trains worked, we saw some sights and I met most of my host families I would stay with for the year. All in my first day!

This year has been great, but I am not going to lie and say that there have not been times when I have been very down. Exchange year is a like a rollercoaster of emotion, you're up, you're down, you're upside down, you're everywhere. Exchange pushes you to meet so many new people in such a little time. It is a scary thing at the start. Going to meet a family you will be living with or your first day in school, all in a different language. But you get used to it, you adapt and with time you feel more at ease. I feel it has made me a stronger and a more resilient





person. I can deal with things better now and I am more independent. I have NEVER regretted my decision to come on exchange, it was the best decision I ever made.

The people I have met, the things I have seen and the carefree fun times I have had are all things which have made my year so great. The feeling of accomplishment I have when I think of all the things I have done that I never thought I would have the courage or be able to do. I have travelled lots, but still my favourite memories are mostly the silly fun times I have had with Host families, exchangers and Swiss friends. But in saying that being in France, Italy and different areas in Switzerland has been so cool.

Some of my favourite memories are: Seeing my first snow (while looking out the window in class) and running out of class to start a snowball fight. My friends' and my adventure days where we get on one of the first trains we can and see where it takes us and then explore the city. Singing 'Bohemian Rhapsody' with other exchange students in Paris. Travelling to Italy and eating my weight in food every day. Learning to ski and seeing the Alps. But most of all confronting my fears and meeting all these awesome families, travellers, exchangers, Rotarians and of course the Swiss.

Rotary Exchange is the greatest thing that has happened to me. I really appreciate how much effort and money Rotarians put into organising this amazing opportunity. It really is a life changing experience, and I am not looking forward to its end. I am however looking forward to the rest of my time on exchange, all the fun to be had, the people to meet and the sights to see and to go back home and see my family and friends once again.

Libby





Samantha Scott - France

France is definitely the country for me, as well as all the culture and food!! (yes I've gained weight! My theory is if you have not gained weight in France, of all places, you are not trying the culture ... this is what I tell myself anyway!). Contrary to the stereotype the people are very welcoming and kind.

My exchange has been a little unordinary because normally in France you have three or four families for the year, but me being from the Southern Hemisphere, my exchange starts in January so I stay in France for the summer (July/August). The summer for the Northern Hemisphere students happens to be the transition period between the two exchange years. So for the months of July and August I had eight families. When I say this I don't want to put anyone off doing exchange because having eight families is very rare in France. At the time it was hard changing families every one or two weeks and very really getting to know the families as well as I'd like but now when I think about having eight families I realize it was one of the greatest moves for my exchange. I had an incredible summer and that is thanks to all of my many families. I had the chance to go to the beaches in the south of France, hike up the mountains in the Alps, go sea kayaking around the cliffs in the Mediterranean and visit my biological family in England, all I would not have been able to do without my host families help.

When I left for my exchange, I didn't realize how big the world is but at the same time how very small. It's amazing how so many different people from all different countries are connected through exchange. An example of the 'exchange family' is on the flight over to France, the Rotary Chaperon was telling me about a girl who is on exchange in Australia being hosted by his Rotary Club and originally comes from Lyon (where I live in France). The Rotarian gave me the French girl's card and I walked away thinking I will never see this girl. Seven months later by chance I meet the same girl at a Rotary event and also as luck would have it we go to the same school as well. The network and friends you make on exchange are for life and I know that whatever country I go to I will always have a friendly place to stay.



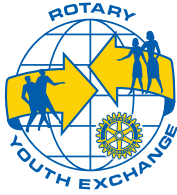


Of course there are some harder stages you encounter on exchange, like feeling like a child when you suddenly realise you've lost everything that was familiar and comforting. Learning a new language, navigating your way around school, making friends and even the simplest tasks like eating dinner has to be re-learned so that you can fit in to your new culture and way of life. There were tough times where I wondered if I would ever understand what people are saying or if I would ever make any of these other kids my friends? Then when you achieve a breakthrough like making a new friend at school or watching TV and actually understanding what is being said, the feeling of pride and satisfaction is like no other.

One word that pops in to my head as I recall the first half of my exchange is opportunity. I know this word opportunity is used a lot to describe Rotary Exchange but it's not until you are living your exchange that you truly understand the meaning behind the word. Your exchange is truly what you make it to be, and it's your choice whether you take those opportunities, learn about all the culture not only from your host country but the other exchange students as well and enjoy the roller-coaster that is Rotary Youth Exchange.

Samantha





Messages...

