

D9600 YOUTH EXCHANGE PROGRAM



Bounder

July 2007



Rotary International Youth Exchange Committee

D9600 Queensland, Australia . Papua New Guinea . Solomon Islands

Dear OutBounders

Warmest greetings and best wishes to you from a very dry, coolish Brisbane.

Can it really be true that half of your Exchange Year has already passed? Yes it is, and by now you are "old hands" at enjoying the delights and experiences of your Host country. Is this year truly "The Best Year Of Your Life"? Hopefully, yes; however, if it is not, have you considered why not and spoken to your Counsellor about this?

Remember that it is very important to discuss "The 35 Questions" with each new Host Family, so as to ensure harmonious relationships at each of your Host homes. Also, that School and Rotary Club attendances are a vitally important part of your Exchange Year.

The Bronco's are going through a very distressing time because of injuries. Coach Bennett is tearing his hair out about this. In Rugby Union, Eddie Jones, former Wallaby and Reds Coach, has spent some time in South Africa talking to Jake White, the Head Coach of the South African Rugby Union World Cup Squad. Many Australian sportspeople and administrators are not at all happy with this development. However, after the Reds' dismal showing in the "Super 14" this year, some people are (rather unkindly, I think) saying that this will improve Australia's chances at the World Rugby Union Cup Competition to be held in France next month! We shall see.

Remember that travel outside of your District requires appropriate pre-approval.

Please continue to conduct yourselves sensibly and safely, so that while you are getting maximum enjoyment from a fabulous Year, you do not put yourselves at risk. A moment's carelessness may cause a lifetime's heartache so do take care.

There is a whole bunch of people here who are rooting for you to have a really memorable year. Our new Youth Exchange Committee is working hard; please have a look at our website <www.youth-exchange.net> from time to time and read the March and June 2007 issues of "YEP Chat" our Quarterly Newsletter. Look out for our September Quarter issue.

We have recently farewelled the 2006 mid-year InBounders and welcomed eight new InBounders from Austria, Belgium, Canada, France, Germany, Japan and Sweden to join the two, from Brazil and Lichtenstein, already with us. Planning and preparations for the August Orientation Weekend (at Shaftesbury Community Centre, Burpengary, this year) are going full steam ahead for the Weekend of 18 and 19 August. We are also holding a "Certification Evening" on Friday 17 August at which the mysteries of District and Club Certification for the YEP will be unravelled.

The "Monthly Report to Chairman" is a really important link for me with you: many thanks to those **very few** who are continuing to Report. For those who are not – the majority, I'm sorry to say – don't be surprised to be "named and shamed," in the nicest possible way, of course, at the ReBounders De-Briefing And Graduation Dinner. Parents usually attend this function.

Please always remember - we love you and we want the very best for you, no matter what.

Kind regards

Yours in Rotary service

John D Cook
CHAIRMAN D 9600 YOUTH EXCHANGE COMMITTEE

Belgium - Laura Beddow

Hello Everybody,

When I was writing my last bounder report I was about 4 months into my exchange year and I was amazed at how quickly the time was going. But now I have passed the 6 month mark and the time has definitely not slowed down - and I am sure that before I know it I will be back on a plane headed for Australia - But all in good time. The purpose of this report is to tell you of some of the adventures I have had in Belgium and Europe over the past few months.

When I last wrote, I had just moved to my second family and had come back from my Easter holiday. Shortly after this I was invited to a Concours d'attelage competition with some family friends of my first host family. These friends are heavily into horses - and for this competition the horses are trained to pull these vintage carriages around obstacle courses. The competition was held in Cuts - a small town close to Paris. The competition ran for 4 days and was an international event - with competitors from England, Holland, Germany, and even America - unfortunately no Australians - but nevertheless it was a wonderful opportunity to meet people from all over the world.

After the weekend, I returned to Belgium for a few short weeks of school - before heading off on a rotary organised trip to Spain. The trip was organised for all of the exchange students in the three rotary districts of Belgium. We headed off from Brussels with a bus load of noisy exchange students - singing songs of each country and trading badges and having all sorts of fun - it was fantastic! We made our way through Luxembourg and all the way through the south of France...and at that moment most of us got a few precious hours of sleep...when we woke up, we had arrived in Barcelona! We spent the next four days in and around the city, exploring and sightseeing and swimming in the Mediterranean...the city was magnificent with so many beautiful cathedrals and gothic style architecture. The time went far too quickly as per usual - but all the exchangers got along so well - and it was definitely an unforgettable experience! So we all arrived in Belgium on the Wednesday, needing to catch up on our sleep - for the next voyage which was on the Friday...

The second trip was for 8 days - and was a voyage through the northern half of Italy, visiting cities such as Venice, Sienna, Florence, San Gioumiano and Pisa. What followed was 8 intensive days of sightseeing - and eight intensive nights of discotheques and exchange student dinners and parties. In my mind Venice lived up to my expectations of being completely breath-taking...We experienced mostly good Mediterranean weather - with the average daily temperature being around 40. We used the trip to Italy as an excuse to eat as much gelati, Italian ice-cream and pizza as was humanly possible! Absolute heaven; but we were brought back to reality when we all hopped on the bus - still laughing and singing, all the way back to Belgium. An incredible 8 days.

And that brings me to the 1st July - which is the start of the 'holiday' in Belgium...This was when I changed onto my third family - the change bought a mixture of emotions. Sadness because I was leaving a family that I was very close with, but also happiness at the prospect of meeting lots of new and different people - which after all is one of the purposes of my exchange year. I didn't have to worry about a thing - my new family automatically welcomed me in - and before long I felt right at home - There were 3 children who were close to my age, and 2 who were significantly older. But this allowed me to meet lots of other Belgians around my age. On the 5th of July - I headed off to Paris with some Belgian friends, to see the Red Hot Chili Peppers in concert - I can safely say that it was one of the best moments in my life. I loved the city so much, and was able to see the Louvre, the Eiffel Tower, L'arc de Triomphe, Champs Elysees, all in two days. Amazing!

When I returned to Belgium - I prepared my bags and made my last change of family. My fourth family didn't waste any time in taking me on a holiday to the north of France to a small village called Wissant, right on the coast. This was such a beautiful little town, and when I stood on the beach I could quite literally see the White Cliffs of Dover...It was an amazing holiday and I was able to try so many different types of Seafood, do lots of shopping, work on my tan!, I also got a chance to see one of the largest Aquariums in France - with amazing reproductions of the Great Barrier Reef in Australia. And that brings me to now where I sit here writing about all of my adventures. I am heading to the South of France in a few days - for another three week holiday - the fun never ends...But this report could go on for ever and ever - but I'll stop now - the rest of my adventures will have to wait until the next bounder...

Until next time.

Au revoir...Laura Beddow;

Regards,

Laura Beddow.

Brasil - Elizabeth Gavranich

Hey there all Outbounders, Inbounders, Rotarians, families, friends and, most importantly, those wishing to do exchange in the near future. These past three months have been a hectic but exciting ride in my first six months of exchange here in Brasil.

It started in May with the famous Amazon Tour. A short 10 days filled with so much fun you end up not wanting to go home. A little nervous, mostly due to the influence of a few significant films such as "Anaconda", and the stories we had heard about malaria, I and 60 other exchangers from all over the world headed out to Manaus, the capital of the Amazons, with enough insect repellent to protect an entire country from mosquitoes! But don't worry, I lived to tell this story didn't I.

The kinds of things we saw in those short 10 days included Indians, crocodiles, pink dolphins, piranhas, sloths, snakes, lush forests and the most beautiful river in the whole of Brasil. We spent the majority of the trip on two boats on the river, one for sleeping and relaxing and one for eating. We also had little canoes with which we visited different parts of the river, communities and, of course, animal spotting! Yay! My favourite part was sleeping in hammocks every night, and being rocked to sleep by the gentle sway of the boat, or in actual fact by those few game exchangers who liked to play dominoes with the rest of us. All in all, apart from the fact that we stank, were dirty and were staring to crave a normal house, we were in the Amazons and that was way cool!

The next big thing was of course the arrival of my 18th birthday, and with that my mother and best friend nicely wrapped in jet-lag and with suitcases full of presents for me! Okay, I'm kidding- just a quarter of a suitcase. We travelled to Rio De Janeiro where we saw all the famous sights, my favourite being the beautiful Cristo Redentor. I'm talking serious when I say that you walk away taking more photos of him than of anything else in Rio. We later returned to my town, Botucatu, where my mum and best friend stayed with my first host family. I was so excited because they got to see my new life here in Brasil. I got to show them around my town, to see my friends, my families and my favourite places to hang out. As was my wish, we celebrated the big 18 in my town with a nice dinner that included my two host families thus far, and my mum and best friend. Was hilarious because we managed to take photos of me with my three mums! The next day I had a small gathering of my closest friends so they could meet my mum and friend. The best memory being when my mum drove the car down the road to fetch some groceries and all 7 of my friends decided that they wanted to go in the car with her. Not only was it a new experience for her having to drive on the wrong side of the car AND the road, but she also had a 5-seater car packed to the brim with 7 Portugues-speaking kids. I personally enjoyed every minute of it! The day after this, we went travelling again to Foz de Iguaçu. One of the most beautiful places in Brasil, literally. We got to walk along and right up and under the falls where you couldn't help but return completely soaked. My best friend and I forgot for a couple of seconds that we were mature 18-year-olds and continued to prance around like a couple of 4-year-olds with ants-in-their-pants. Also saw the falls by boat and helicopter, neither of which beat the way you feel on top of the world when you are looking out and over the top of layer and layers of huge cliffs of running water. Simply divine.

After my mum and friend left, I had about 15 days of breathing before I was packing for the trip of a lifetime. Nordeste Trip July 2007. 26 days visiting some of the most beautiful beaches along the northeast of Brasil. 36 students, a really decent size, we had mostly hot, sunny days, stunning beaches and lots of sun-tanning. Souvenirs were plentiful, bikinis were cheap, the sun was free and our days were laid-back-what more could you ask for in a month-long holiday in Brasil!

So that's my news, and busy news it has been. I'm back home now and back at school, and here in my town it is so bloody cold I have almost died various times! But nonetheless I am happy as Larry to be back with my friends.

Peace out children, and- Eu amo o Brasil!

Canada - Zach Price

Well I am still on holidays and trying to keep myself busy. I'm one of two exchange students left in the district. The student from Denmark went home on July 5th.

Close to Cranbrook is a little old heritage town call Fort Steel. During the summer I went there. They have live theatre and activities happening all over the town. You can go to school, town meetings, musicals, panning for gold, shopping, church and learn all about Fort Steel. Some of my friends are working there and are in the musical. It was very funny and interesting to watch.

Last Wednesday I went to Perry Creek Falls with a friend and some of his family. To get there you have to do a 30 minute hike through some very nice scenery. When we go there we swam under the falls. It was VERY cold. The water was melted snow coming straight from the mountains.

Till next time,

Zach

Germany - Mia

Hello Everyone!

Well, it is Mia Schaumberg here again, reporting late... again.

And just to let u know exactly how late I am...I have just been to TESCO...and bought the last Harry Potter book, the morning it came out...In ENGLAND!! Yes, that's right, I am currently in Trowbridge, western England, where everyone talks with an accent like Hagrid and I newly possess and am using all of my willpower to restrain from reading, the last HP book. So I really better hurry, before it gets too much.

The last 3 months have definitely been very action-packed, with District Conferences, Eurotour, Donauinselfest, the arrival of my Mum for a visit, catching up with friends from Australia, the end of the school year and the 9 weeks of summer holidays looming to be filled! I'll just give a few brief overview points for you, as there is way too much to have written about in detail.



From the 11th – 13th May, where I last left you, was the 1920 Rotary District Conference, in Salzburg... Home of Mozart. We were involved in the conference, and didn't have much time to look around, but it was enough for me to meet the 'oldies' exchange students from the August group, and do a bit of sightseeing, but it was mainly a big build up for Eurotour, which kicked off 5 days later! Those 5 days were definitely long, and Eurotour finally began when we headed to Spittal am Drau for the 1910 Rotary District Conference. We left the next afternoon, two buses of 94 Exchange Students living in 3 countries, from over 20 different countries! It was really amazing, and those three weeks produced some memories to last a lifetime. We started in Spittal, and on the first day drove to Jesolo, the 'real' city near Venice. For many of us this was the first time we had seen the ocean in over 4 months, and especially for us beach kids, it was something we had sorely missed, so that afternoon as soon as we got our rooms, it was into the ocean, and that afternoon was the beginning of our Italian experience. Pasta with every meal, sleezy Italian guys that I won't elaborate on, amazing sights and history, and more beach and sun than what we had seen in the last 4 months in Austria. We saw Jesolo, Venice, Florence, the Leaning Tower of Pisa, Ameglia, and Cinqueterre (my favourite day from the whole tour where we hiked along the west Italian

Cinqueterre on the West Italian Coast



coast through 5 tiny traditional towns – absolutely AMAZING, no words to really describe it, you really just have to see it yourself!). Then it was to Monte Carlo in Monaco, one of the smallest countries in the world, but also one of the richest. We only spent half a day there, but were just on time to see the Monaco Formula 1 Grand Prix, which was sooo cool. We were in Barcelona for 3 nights, with huge days of sightseeing. We drove through Andorra (another tiny country) and then it was to France, the culture country, to Eze Village (perfume capital of the World), Avignon (where we all danced on the bridge), Bordoux, and finally Paris! Over two jam packed days, we did a bus tour, and night boat tour, the Eiffel Tower, The Louvre, and so

many other places that I definitely can't name them all. Belgium was one of the nicest places I have visited so far, and it was a great place to relax and slow down a bit. The next day it was to Amsterdam for a few hours (boat tour, city centre and red light district), and then Cologne (the cathedral), and after less than 10 hours in Cologne (including sleep), we headed on a long bus trip to Prague in the Czech Republic (countless churches, markets, and a gorgeous city centre), On our last day of the tour June 4th, we ended in Linz, where we said goodbye to many friends from all over the world, who we may not see again for a very long time, but who we had shared something really amazing with. We were tired, most of us were sick, we had no clean clothes left and not much money, but all that's fixed with time!

As they say... there's no rest for the wicked, and the righteous don't need it (you can choose which category I fall into), it was back into the swing of things in Bregenz pretty soon. My school friends missed me so much that in three days, I went to 9 friends' places, 2 music school concerts, sat 2 exams, and the whole time I was going (on the inside).... Nooo please, I just wanna sleep!

And just as life was getting back to normal, my Mum's visit was upon me, and I headed down to Liechtenstein, to stay with Beccy's family (current Inbounder) to pick her up from Zurich on June 17th. It was really great to see her again, and she was pretty excited too, and we spent a week in Liechtenstein with Beccy's family in true Liechtenstein style. We were a night in the mountains, climbed a peak higher than any in Australia, hiked in blistering sun one day and torrential rain the next, and saw some of the most rugged, but gorgeous countryside in Europe. I was back and forward a bit with school, rotary and other commitments, and on Thursday night I came home as we had a farewell party for our two oldies Roddy from Mexico and Nazre from Equador. The next

Julian Leigh and I in the Palace of Versailles gardens



morning Julian and I were up really early to catch a train to Vienna for the Donauinselfest – the largest open-air music festival in Europe, and it was the craziest 8 hour train journey I have ever experienced! The ticket was really cheap from everywhere in the country for the festival, so the train was completely packed, and there were people even crowded in the hallways (our trains are like Harry Potter trains with compartments), and they were drinking and smoking and singing football songs, warming up for the big party at night! We met up with about 10 other exchange students in Vienna and although it was terrible weather, we did go to the festival for a small time. I was also really excited, because as well as my Mum being over here (although still in Liechtenstein at that point) one of my friends from my little town of Maleny was going to be in Vienna the next day with her parents, and we were really looking forward to meeting up. That day came pretty quickly, and although all their baggage was lost in Heathrow airport, along with 11 000 other bags (travel tip: never fly through Heathrow), they were in one piece and about as excited as me! Then Mum arrived in Vienna the next day (I tell you, Vienna was the happening place) and we spent a week sightseeing, going to galleries and museums (and shopping for necessities lost in

Heathrow). I really enjoyed being the tour guide, as I had already seen most of Vienna through my school trip, and also being the interpreter with my now practically fluent German. Another big highlight of the week was when we caught up with a Rotarian friend Peter Simpson from Buderim Rotary. We went out for a meal together as he and his wife were stopping in Vienna on a River cruise, and we were very lucky to catch up! On the 28th June it was goodbye to the Olivers and Vienna, and back on the train to Bregenz.

During the next week Mum met up with many of the people who are important to me in my exchange, including my host parent (past, present and future), my councillor, and many of my other new friends here. We spent the week catching up with people and sightseeing in between the last of my school commitments (including the last day of classes, our Schulabschlussfest, and sports day where I was on the table tennis team!) and then it was summer holidays at last!!



Aussie BBQ – yes that is Pavlova and Lamingtons!

To kick it all off Robyn, Julian and I (3 exchange students in the area who happen to be Aussies) put on an Aussie BBQ for our host families, with steak, Wurst (because we can't get plain sausages), grilled corn, meet pies, salads, sushi, pavlova, lamingtons, Anzacs, anything Aussie we could cook, and to set things off we had backyard cricket, a water fight, Aussie music classics such as 'Red-back on the toilet seat' and 'Waltzing Matilda', and we gave our Austrian family a real taste of Aussie Summer life. They loved it, and we will definitely be doing it again soon!

Mum and I left for some of our own travel to Holland, on Monday 9th July, and travelled by train to Zeist to meet up with family. We spent the week, catching up with family and friends, and we had a really wonderful stay. Last Monday 16th we left Amsterdam for Bristol, England, where we are now also staying with family. We have been meeting relatives I didn't even know I had, and doing all the touristy stuff in



Western England, including the Avebury Stone Circles, Stonehenge, Bath and the Roman Baths, and Abbey, Farleigh Castle, Bradford on Avon, Avon Cliff Aquaduct, and the quiet, but amazingly beautiful country areas around Trowbridge where our family lives. We have also been here during some of the worst flooding in history, with rivers over 5 m above their normal level! It has been an amazing few weeks, and to top it all off, I am off to London in a few days to the World Scout Jamboree where I will be working at the adventure site for about 3 weeks. It is the 100yr celebrations of Scouting and the event will even be bigger than the Olympic Games, with over 40 000 scouts from around the world taking part, and I am one of them!!

So, that is my next few weeks, and although there is plenty more to tell, I must admit, the pull is too strong... the temptation to great... Harry Potter calls, and I cannot resist any longer! Talk to you all again soon!

Mia in England!

Germany - Sam Bain

Ok my fellow Aussies! Its time to get your reading glasses out and find yourself a comfortable seat!

And here I am, writing my half year report on a version of Microsoft Word which tells me that every word I write is incorrect, due to the fact that the default language is German...and to tell you the truth, its become apparent that I'm really needing Microsoft's help here...In fact I'm getting an American guy to proof read this as I go...

I am really having trouble figuring out where the last 6months went, and after reading the other reports I'm not alone on that one! Before I start narrating my last half year to you, ill just put down something's which may help those of you who are looking to make an exchange in the future (as I know I read pretty much all of the reports before I left to pick up tips!).

Firstly, before I left Australia I really only had two worries; learning a completely new language, and living with another family who I didn't know...for a long time!

For those of you who have learnt a language at school, you know it is not a relatively easy thing to do, and will probably as it was for me, be a daunting task knowing that your expected to be fluent in it! This point was a little worry of mine. (haha it was not so little actually!) Now unfortunately, the truth about this is that the first 2 or so months may, or will be pretty frustrating...or very if not many people you know speak your lingo (presuming you haven't learnt the language before, as I hadn't)! During this first 2 month period I found that I spoke a lot of English, although trying very hard to say a few sentences here and there, and proving to myself just how damn good I was by being able to count to a thousand! At about the 3 month mark I found I didn't need to think about all of the easy stuff anymore (all of the formalities, a small dictionary of small sentences, numbers etc.) as they came automatically. Understanding one-on-one was getting quite a bit easier too, but I was still having trouble understanding most of what was being said when I was with mates or in a group. It was at the 4 month mark that something seemed to click (it quite seriously seems like over night), and I found I was able to participate in conversations. This was also the point where I almost stopped speaking English (unless the meaning of a misunderstood word couldn't be explained using German that was...or this weird sign language which you become pretty accustomed to using being an exchange student). The 4th to the 6th month was filled with learning new words and sentences, forgetting old ones, re-learning old ones, and finding that you can go whole days on end with out even uttering an English word (that includes swear-words!) Also I found that by now I was dreaming a little in German, well more of a mish-mash between German and English (we call it Denglisch here :P). It goes the same way with thinking...which can be weird...and confusing...

Now I did take a language course here for my first month, which did help a little. But my rate of learning was increased by 10 times when I went to school. The only way to learn the language quickly is to speak it!

I've had great luck here with my two host families! I've recently moved to my second and final family, and as I felt with my first one, I feel like part of the family already! It really is one of the best things about this exchange. I was very easy to get attached to my first host family by doing exactly the same things as I would when at home; hugging my mum, working with and listening to my dads 'Dad Jokes' and mucking around with my sisters.

Now to my year so far! It's been pretty damn good I've got to say! Although it may sound like it, my half year so far hasn't been completely taken up by learning a new language! The year started with getting into the little German things that work a little differently to the Australian things. This included always being home at 2pm to eat lunch (being the largest meal of the day, and a lot more practical I think!), going to school only when you have class, riding a bike everywhere, realising that I cant wear thongs everywhere I go, and learning what to do with a jacket, mittens and a beanie! I'm living in North Germany, not too far from Denmark and within a stones throw from Holland, in a small little village



called Schiffdorf which sits in the state of Niedersachsen (or Lower Saxony). Although quite a small little place Schiffdorf is with its 14,000 inhabitants, it borders with a much larger city called Bremerhaven, with a population of a little over 115,000. It is Bremerhaven which provides us with most of our cinematic, shopping, schooling and clothing needs! (unfortunately little Schiffdorf just isn't big enough :P)

School having not yet begun in my first month, and not being able to speak German were serious barriers to a social life! So I was more than glad to hear that there would be a welcoming party for all of the new exchange students during my second weekend in Germany! I was met by 2 other exchange students who lived in the same little town as myself, thrown onto a bus, followed closely by a train, and then waa-laa! I suddenly knew every exchange student in the district (about 50 of them!).

Once school had started it was a little easier to keep myself occupied over the weekends. Although this was mainly done with the other exchange students, as my German was fast non-existent, which still labeled me as 'The Exchange Student'. But as time progressed, and along with it my German, I got more involved with my non-exchange student social life.



Showing my true colours on our way to Venice!

Definitely a high-light for the past half year was the Europe Tour. An absolutely unforgettable tour through France, Switzerland, Italy, Austria and Czech Republic, which was spent with about 40 other exchange students from my district. Switzerland was undoubtedly the most beautiful place of them all, but Italy took the top spot as favourite! You just can't beat the food there!

Since Euro-Tour, a lot of time has been spent at school... Maybe not the highlight of the year so far! But when school only goes for 4 or so hours a day (sometimes much less!), you've got two periods of sport (one more than anyone else is allowed :D) and can spend the whole day speaking German with the other guys instead of doing any real work, what's wrong with it?! Yes school here in Germany is quite a bit different to school back home. I would probably explain it as the stereotype we have of American school's from TV. You go to school when you have class, and go home when you don't. Simple as that!

I've also started boxing here in Germany (to beat that exchange student bulge!!), and so far I've had one fight. And I'm also very glad to be able to tell that I didn't get my head knocked in! In fact I won from a TKO in the second round, which I must say was a great feeling :D!

My half year so far has been amazing...I have been able to do so many things here whilst on my exchange that just would not be possible to fit into one year in Aus (well so far only half a year!)! Other than boxing, school, partying with mates and touring Europe, I've also been able to travel to two islands in the North Sea, I've seen a heap of live bands (which include Iron Maiden, In Flames, Marilyn Manson, Pearl Jam, Incubus, Placebo, Queens of the Stone Age, Snow Patrol and Jet!), I've met an uncountable amount of awesome people and learnt a new language! This exchange is definitely the best thing I've had the opportunity to, and I regret nothing!

Bist zum nächsten mal! Viel Spaß!

Sam



Italy! Such a beautiful place!



At a \$1000 a day, they were a little out of our exchange pocket money range... (we were sitting on a dock there...not in a boat)

Japan - Alex Beath

Hello again all!

Well it has definitely been a busy few months. The first thing that comes to my mind to tell you about would be that the North American exchange students have gone back home. It was definitely strange seeing all of them leave and watching how they handled it. It was a very strange feeling knowing that my exchange was only half over when it feels like I have accomplished so much in the past 6 months. This also came with the realisation that the exchange is in fact, half over. The exchange continues to fly by. I'm continuing to make the most of the last half of the time I have. I've improved my study habits and it has had amazingly positive results. I have more confidence now that when I make a comment it's roughly in Japanese. This has helped me achieve closer relationships with my friends and host families. Being able to just talk and laugh together has just made me love this country all the more. My newest host family that I have changed to is fantastic. Spending time with them is always enjoyable, whether we are launching fireworks or hiking above the clouds into the mountains it always seems to be incredible.

As for school I continue practicing kendo (the Japanese form of sword fighting) which has constant practice and luckily an amazing coach. I am starting to love the sport more and more with every "OUS" (a loud noise you make is seems every 5 minutes). After practice I usually manage to spend time with my friends that always prove to be interesting. Though our conversations may not be at all times comprehensible we always seem to get the point across which to this day still amazes me. My friends are unendingly patient with me whether I can't find the right word or have just made a huge mistake and did not realise it because I still haven't fully come to understand Japanese Culture. They are generally a rather funny group of students.

As for news on recent events, that would have to be the Tanabata festival, which to other cultures may look a little strange at first but turns out to be incredibly beautiful. The legend revolves around the queen and king of the Milky Way and how the gods had ruled that they should only allowed to meet once a year. And when they meet they grant wishes. So we tie our wishes onto a tree branch in the hopes that they will be granted. The trees are also filled with beautiful coloured lanterns that at night give the streets a soft coloured glow which will be hard to forget!

Hope all is well back down under.

Yours sincerely from Japan,

Sayonara,

Alex Beath

Japan - Lana Stirling

I'm turning Japanese, I think I'm turning Japanese, I really think so...

I don't quite know how to sum up 3 of the best months of my life in just 2 short pages. No words could possibly explain the satisfaction you feel when you suddenly realize you've got a basic proficiency- in the case of Japan- in the language and in the culture. I think for me the moment dawned when I found myself laughing along to a joke in reference to the maths teacher being 'the devil'. But not only has this new found ability to understand group conversations left me with an enormous satisfaction- it has also made life alot more interesting. I have been blessed

with extremely kind host families who have exceeded the expectations of how much care they should offer me. Now 1 week into my third host family I have had so many more amazing opportunities and met some awesome people.



I've been in a local sports carnival, helped my school friends loose several games in volleyball, walked with other exchange students through monsoonal rain, watched a professional baseball game, watched Japanese Opera (interesting to say the least), cheered on the school baseball team and so much more!! Two of the bigger highlights of the last two months would have to be the farewell weekend for our American/Canadian friends, as well as the trip I took to Tokyo with my host family.

The farewell weekend was held at a local hotel called `Runesu` and it definitely lived up to the expectations the Americans/Canadians had set of it for us. Basically when you enter the hotel you are presented with a band and told that anything you want to eat will be paid for by Rotary. Not wanting to `waste` all the potential `free food` all of us did very little other than eat from 6pm until 3am in the morning... then we slept for about 2 hours before getting back up in the morning only to eat more. I would hate to think about how many soft drinks and ice creams were ordered over a few short hours!! The hotel also had karaoke and waterslides so in all it added up to an absolutely awesome weekend. Being the farewell weekend it also had a scarier part attached, It's unbelievable that half of our time has slipped through our fingers already.



Then there was the trip to Tokyo only a few weekends ago. We spent the whole week watching weather reports because our scheduled trip was the same day that the Typhoon was scheduled to make its way to our prefecture. Despite my host mother panicing and a warning that bad weather could force us to return to Ishikawa without ever landing in Tokyo we made it, and the rain was at a minimal! The first day we saw Harajuku (picture perfect with all the umbrellas), Tokyo Tower and Tokyo's aquarium. That night we head down to Yokohama City which is prides itself on the fact that it is home to Japan's biggest China town. Sunday morning we went on a 5 minute cruise and rode on one of Japan's many Ferris Wheels before heading to the China town for lunch. We also saw the maritime museum and even still had some time to squeeze some shopping in before our flight home. Tokyo and Yokohama are so different from my `hometown Ishikawa` and whilst for a trip it was an absolutely awesome experience- I couldn't help but smile when I found myself back `home` amongst our rice paddies, where you can actually see a few stars each night! (Quite rare in Japan)

The summer holidays which are more than welcome. Rotary have generously organized a 3 day trip for a few weeks time and in the meantime I've had a chance to catch up on some sleep, get to know my new home/family and catch up with some of the other exchange students. Some of the best friendships I have made from this program have definitely been from the other exchange students from my area.



With only a little more than 5 months ahead of us here, there are so many things that I'm looking forward to. School continues to go well and I've almost completely memorised my Taiko (drumming) pattern for school. I can't begin to thank Rotary enough for this amazing opportunity. I trust that the other exchange students are having an awesome time and know that I'll be seeing you all again soon... maybe a little too soon for my likings!!

Until next time... またね !

Lana Stirling (D2610 Ishikawa Japan)

Sweden - Micheal trotter

I know this is going to sound very stereotypical, but where has the last six months gone?!

Tomorrow morning my parents will land in Kastrup Airport (Denmark) and for the first time in six months I'll see them face to face!

The last three months have been just as full throttle as the first.

After coming back from Åre in the northern Sweden things got pretty quite as far as trips went though my social life started to take form. It's really exciting to watch ones relationships with everyone grow as ones Swedish grows!

I've become capable of participating in school to an extent, which is also very exciting.

Just before we went into summer break we had a big party, festival, public holiday here called Mid summer. It's a tradition that has been passed down in Swedish society through generations.



In the morning all the children help the adults go out and collect wild flowers and leaves which are used to decorate a giant Christian cross looking structure decked out with two matching rings on either pole.

The pole used to be in the shape of a giant male genitalia which would be inserted into a hole into the ground to symbolise refertilisation of the farming lands.



After this is all done, with the new and improved family friendly summer pole all the Swedes gather around it and sing songs about foxes sliding over ice, small frogs which have no ears or tails and worn out boots!

After all the festivities are over as far as the pole is concerned all the town folk drive back to their summer houses and get stuck into the schnups which is also a very big part of the tradition. Before taking each shot of schnups they sing silly songs which have also been passed down through many generations.

Another major part of the Swedish summer is student. Which the Swedish final year students graduating from their version of high school. All the final year students gather in the main school building and sing many songs and cheer and chant before each class runs outside to where all the students families await them holding massive pictures of them as babies.

Just when you thought it was all over, all the students then proceed to pile onto the back of tractors which parade around town playing loud music. At the end of the day all the students gather with families and celebrate the beginning of life with taxes.



On the same day that the Swedish kids graduated, I had a little graduation of my own! I turned the magical 18!! WOOT GO ME! The Swedes really know how to celebrate a birthday. At the early hours of the morning the family parades into the happy birthday persons room, armed with a cake, presents and any family pets they can gather. During the procession, the whole family sings JA MÅ HAN LEVA! Which is the Swedish version of happy birthday, though it is completely different. One eats Strawberry cake for breaky, for lunch and again for dinner! While at the same time celebrating it with every member of the family!

So, with space running short, I'll leave you with a couple more pictures of Europe and the fun we are having here!

See you in pictures!

Mike