**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 of 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 of 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.