Switzerland – Tom Rix

I know it is a cliché and almost all exchange students say it, but I really can not believe I have been here for over 4 months. I am stuck in the middle of the worlds banking and finance capital, being Zurich, and I absolutely love it. My first few days were the hardest of all, with my host family all out at school and work and me being at home alone not knowing what was going on. I found out when I started my language course 3 days later that I was not the only inbound who considered calling a cab back to the airport in their first couple of days. The language course that I attended was with 13 other exchange students, a Kiwi, 2 Brazilians, 2 South African's and 9 Australians. Oh yeh and I think I should mention that of the 42 new inbounds in Switzerland, 26 are Australian and 31 are female, leaving me in a very pleasant minority, with much talent around. So the language course was a great experience and the last time I saw half of those exchange students, but I kept in contact with a few. We managed to find an Australian Pub to celebrate Australia Day, which happened to fall in the middle of our course. By the end of the course I was feeling much better about being in my host family and I had made some friends.

Straight after my language course was over, my host family at the time, which consisted of the 2 parents and 2 children (2 girls and a boy) all of whom are younger than me, took my up to the mountains for two weeks of skiing. The family own a chalet in Klosters, which is about 20 minutes from the more well known Davos. However Klosters is the ski village of choice for Prince Charles. After an amazing two weeks in the mountains it was back into Zurich to start school. I was a bit apprehensive about starting school, but it ended up being pretty good. I am in an art school which is quite awesome, I do not have to many demanding subject. Basically all that is required of me currently is to attend school. After a few weeks at school, it was great to see Mia, who made the journey from Bregenz, Austria to see me for a weekend. It was really good to see a familiar face, and I almost felt as though I was showing her through my home town. We had a lot to catch up on and it was a very nice weekend.

It is now that the regularity has set in. But this won't be for long. My summer holidays are coming up and if I make a successful application, I could be attending a 2 week Rotary summer camp, which will give me a grand total of 9 weeks holiday. This is also a chance for me to see the rest of Switzerland, which is not much. As an exchange student to Switzerland most inbounds are given a GA (General Abonnement) which for all intensive translation purposes is a ticket which lets you on all trains, buses, ships, cable cars and trams for nothing and some for half price. This is perhaps one of the best parts, as it enables you to see as much as Switzerland as you want. My GA had paid for itself about 2 twice now. Being in the German speaking part of Switzerland is really great, but once you have been immersed in it for months on end and you travel to places like Lugano in the Italian speaking part or Geneva in the French speaking part, all you want to do is get home so that you can hear German again. It is a very odd feeling, when you leave all you want to do is be with your friends and try and speak as little German as possible, but you are always wishing to hear by the end of the day.

I have also been busy in the last 4 months playing rugby for RC Zurich. I am in the second team which plays in the Swiss 3rd league and plays in tournaments all over Switzerland. I am currently the run on hooker for the second team and have been on the bench for one first team match. All matches the matches are played at an open mens level, so no U18's for me. And due to me losing just over 6 kilos since being in Switzerland and becoming much fitter due to a lot more exercise and gym work, I have made the North Switzerland representative rugby teams in both 7's and the full 15-a-side versions of the game. The games and tournaments are a lot of fun and there is a real sense of community and belonging as a member of the club. The road trips to Neuchatel and Ticino are the most fun, with a lot of singing and various other shenanigans. All in all my exchange year so far has been amazing and quite eye opening. And I can not wait until my up coming trips to various other parts of Europe including Italy, France, Czech Republic, Austria, Germany and England.

Until next time,

Tom