Bounders Report - 31/07/08

Sarah Gavranich – Austria

The end of July is here and I past my 6 month mark on the 20th of July. It seems that only a few months have past or not even that, since I first set foot on Austria's luscious green ground. At the moment I am in my summer holidays, which is 2 whole months! It will be hard starting back at school again in September seeing as it will also be a new school year…the last school year for my class. Throughout the summer holidays so far, I have been taking the opportunity to travel around Austria with the wonderful summer ticket youth can get that only costs 19euro and allows free travelling all over Austria during the summer. It's great for all the exchange students as we can travel to see each other practically for free compared to the usual expensive fare we would normally pay. So of course that means we have met up with each other when not travelling with host family or busy with other things.

Today our last 'oldie' leaves Austria, which therefore means our winter group will become 'oldies' and we will soon meet our 'newbies' and teach them the ropes and guide them in their first scary months of exchange (remembering what it was like for many of the students in our group fitting in and struggling with homesickness though luckily never having a problem with that). We are all very excited to meet the new exchange students from all over the world. It's hard to believe the chance we get to meet so many people from different countries throughout our exchange year, and create special exchange friendships with them, which can never compare to other friendships made from back home.

I feel as though I have lived in Austria all my life – it now seems like home to me and I take pride in this little country of beauty and culture. Walking through the city, it is hard not to be amazed at Vienna's beautiful buildings and the cleanliness of the streets and the safety you feel. I know I will terribly miss Austria, for one, it's amazing public transport system and the atmosphere of the city filled with music, horse-carriage rides and lots of people. With my host family I have been able to experience many 'very Austrian' cultural things like bike riding in Burgenland, music performances and skiing in Tirol. They have also been very kind to me with my German encouraging me and every now and then correcting me though they say most of the time I'm not too bad and I even don't sound foreign, in other words I don't have an accent! It feels amazing talking in German and being able to understand most things. Vocabulary is one of the hardest things to build up to eventually be able to talk about everything and anything but unfortunately I'm not up to that stage yet, hopefully it will come before my exchange year is over.

For the time being, I am enjoying the summer and the heat before autumn kicks in. Significant change in seasons is something most of us Aussies don't get to experience back home and we are definitely enjoying and appreciating living four seasons in Austria.

European Soccer Championships, Austria V Germany & Bike riding around Burgenland

I can't believe how fast time has gone! It seems like only yesterday that I was counting down from a hundred days until I left for Austria now the time has nearly come to start dreading the fact that I only have a hundred left. The last few months have been nothing short of a continuing flow of exciting and new adventures.

Starting of in May with a trip to Paris to visit my cousin Charis and her two little girls Ines and Estelle who have both grown up so much since I last saw them. Paris was of course beautiful as always and I am yet to spend a day there were there isn't something new to see or do…including Celine Dion and Sarah Jessica Parker who were departing the Four Seasons as we were walking past.

After this short visit to Paris I returned to Austria to commence my Eurotour with Rotary..90 exchange students, two buses and one Rotarian later we left from Linz and headed towards Croatia for our first stop in Zagreb. For the next three weeks we toured around Europe visiting Italy, Spain, France, Holland, Belgium, Germany, Monaco, Andorra, Czech Republic and finally ended back in Austria. To try and sum up what I saw and experienced in these few weeks is impossible and would take more than a novel, but the friendships made and the experiences had will never be forgotten.

June/July was also the months where Austria and Switzerland hosted the 2008 Eurocup for Soccer. Despite the fact that Austria has only ever qualified once before…they were allowed to play in this years cup as they were the hosts. In what was to be Austria's final chance at making it through the first heat, they were playing against Germany who ended up being this years runners up. So in true exchange student form 15 of us set off to Vienna to watch the game inside the official 'fan site' which just about took over Vienna. It was a great night as we were all dressed in Austrian colours so fitted into the crowd very easily, the atmosphere was almost surreal and even though we lost 1 – 0, it didn't make the night any less fun.

It wasn't long upon our return from the busy past month that I set sails to Munic for the long awaited family reunion. Even though it had been six months, it was like nothing had changed except for my little sister was not so little anymore.. She seemed to have grown 6 inches in 6 months. We spent a couple of days in Munic before heading off to hometown Weitra to bring my two worlds together. Not long after showing my family my new life we headed off to Germany to begin what was probably the most painful week of my year….The Danube Bike Trail.

The 400km Ride…I don't really think anything else needs to be said. We experience rain, hail, shine, stinking hot sun as well as freezing cold days and although the days seemed to last forever the end of the week had arrived before I knew it. It was a beautiful scenic ride with most of it being a lot of fun, except for the bike seat which seemed to be getting smaller and smaller everyday…either that or my backside just was becoming number and number as the time and kilometres passed.

Every year my Rotary club hosts a Summer Camp in which they invite 18 youth from across the world to come for a two week camp where we have a mixture of German lessons, Cultural Experiences and Outdoor Activities. The two weeks were incredible I met so many new people from across all different backgrounds of life and learnt so many things about different countries. The many activities that we were able to join in ranged from a White Water Rafting Weekend to Rock-Climbing to Trips to Vienna. The two weeks flew past and in no time at all we were having our farewell party that along with white water rafting was one of the highlights. The farewell party was an amazing mix of the Austrian cultures from the traditional dress, the marching band, the dancing and of course the food.

Its been an incredible 7 months and I cant wait for the next 5.

Phoebe