Martha Hume – Denmark

We've now reached the half way point of our exchanges. It seems only yesterday that we were setting off in our lovely green blazers from Brisbane Airport. The old cliché is true, time really does fly when you are having fun! Every day in Denmark seems to get better and better, and so much has happened since our last reports!

I completed the first half of the school year. Danish school completely baffles me, my class is studying something as complicated as Freud and psychology in their English class (pretty complex in a second language some of the questions confuse me!) but at the same time something as basic as Pythagoras in maths. I'm very lucky to have a really sweet class at school. They still think its exciting to have an exchange student amongst them, and on every new subject the teachers love to ask me for a comparison to Australia. I'm not allowed to read, write or speak English in any of my classes (except for English of course) so school really is helping me to pick up Danish quickly.

in late May and early June Denmark's 150 exchange students packed themselves into 3 buses as we went on our 'Eurotour'. For 18 days we travelled from Copenhagen to Berlin to Prague to Vienna to Lido di Jesolo to Venice to Verona to San Remo to Monaco to Cannes to Avignon to Paris to Bruxelles to Amsterdam to Arnhem and then back to Copenhagen. Not surprisingly it was the best 18 days of my life! the weather was close to perfect most of the time, everyone got on well, we visited some of the most beautiful sights of Europe and we had 2 terrific chaperones and an idiosyncratic tour guide who went by the name of 'Papa Feel Good'. We were his 'delicious nutella pieces' and he really made the trip for us, singing to us when we were bored, getting us through customs, providing useful if slightly bizarre information on everything, finding us toilets and generally keeping us entertained.

Although I relished every moment of Eurotour there were certain standout highlights for me. Experiencing Prague, the golden city in the rain and going slightly crazy at the yellow market. Lying on a beach in the moonlight in Lido di Jesolo with Argentinians playing the guitar and singing things that I couldn't understand in Spanish. A gondola ride down the grand canal in Venice. Spending 3 days in stunning Paris with some of my best friends in the world, going up the Eiffel Tower, seeing the Louvre, and walking along the Seine in the moonlight.

Almost immediately after we got back from Eurotour the Rotary International convention began. For the first time ever the event was held in Scandinavia, and for the first time ever it was held in two countries, Denmark and Sweden, in the cities of Copenhagen and Malmo. That was made possible by the Øresundsbroen the bridge that connects the two countries. This year the theme for the Convention was 'Bridging the World' and the symbol of the convention was Øresundsbroen which I thought was quite cute. 20000 Rotarians turned up to participate the convention and for a week it seemed like everywhere you looked in Copenhagen you saw an American or a Japanese Rotarian with a map looking generally confused. Kate, Cameron and I all got roped into helping out as volunteers at the Convention. Our job was to make thousands of gift bags for the Rotarians to take home. It sounds pretty easy but each bag had 20 something heavy books and brochures and it ended up being quite exhausting work!

The Convention was quite a lot of fun (when we weren't working at least). So many of the Rotarians were just so interested in the Youth Exchange students and excited to talk to us, and it was really nice to hear about all the different projects different clubs are undertaking all over the world. Some of it was pretty exciting. However the absolute highlight for us Aussies was to see Prince Frederick and Princess Mary from only a metre away, as they came to the Opening Ceremony. I can truly say that Mary is beautiful, but she doesn't have an Australian accent at all!

My host family is now setting off for a week of camping at some beach North of Copenhagen. They don't have a car (almost unimaginable in Australia, but in Denmark the land of the bicycle its pretty common!) so we are setting off in a hired bus! Should be a bit of a laugh, as most things are with the Danes. Take care wherever you are in the world, I'm

enjoying the fact that for once we are warmer here in Denmark than in Australia!

Kate Condon – Denmark

It's finally summer in Denmark… but I'm still wearing a jumper! Although we have had some hot days (24°C), the average temperature is 20°C during the hottest hours of the day. But I am assured hotter days are on their way!

I have managed to completely indulge myself in my goal of seeing Europe and all that it offers. Compared to Australia's vast open spaces, Europe has a billion people all living on top of each other within a seemingly small land mass. So far I have been fortunate enough to visit Greece with my school, Edinburgh with my brother, and from the 20th of May to the 4th of June Rotary Denmark placed sixty exchange students from the greater-Copenhagen area onto a double-decker bus with four leaders, and sent us around Europe! …And we drove: Copenhagen – Berlin – Prague – Vienna – Lido de Jesolo – Venice – San Remo – Verona – Monaco – Nice – Cannes – Avignon – Paris – Brussels – Amsterdam – Arnhem – Copenhagen. We jumped from one hotel to another, visiting some places for only for half a day, and other places we stayed for one, two or three days. I have no favourites from the trip, only millions of fantastic memories and wonderful experiences in each city – an everlasting photographic memory that will be in my mind forever!

We started our trip by driving from Copenhagen to the bottom of Denmark, where we sailed to Germany. In Berlin; we stood in awe in front of the Berlin Wall and Checkpoint Charlie, our minds contemplating issues of the past. In Prague; we 'shopped-til-we-dropped' in a town full of untouched architectural wonders. In Vienna; we saw the most fantastic showcase of talent in a black-light-theatre performance. Then it was on to Lido de Jesolo in Italy, where we slept for three days in arm chairs on the hot, sandy beach. In Venice, we sailed gondolas amongst a living community of antique houses, restaurant and boutiques built on streets of water. We visited Juliet's balcony in Verona, and wondered the impeccably clean streets of Monte Carlo, Monaco, the most expensive city in the world. We bathed in the Mediterranean Sea at the beaches of Cannes before sampling perfumes from small French villages in the south of Province. Later we sang 'Sur Le Pond D'Avignon' on the bridge of Avignon. Paris contained an endless tale of events. We started our first night in a very lively and festive Greek restaurant. Afterwards we floated slowly down the River Seine and shopped in every boutique on the Avenue des Champs Elysees. And of course, as all tourists must do… we climbed the magnificent Eiffel tower and explored the endless corridors of Le Louvre! After three nights in Paris it was on to Brussels where we tasted the finest quality chocolate and Belgian waffles, whilst exploring a busy market place of fine jewellery and antiques. In Amsterdam we sailed the peaceful canals and explored the outrageous tourist shops. Then after a night in Arnhem, it was back home to Copenhagen.

As you can imagine, the limited sleep we had over these very, very busy 18 days meant I needed a little bit of catch-up sleep upon my return to Copenhagen… But after only one day of sleep, it was time to start a new cycle of busy and long days on my feet. From Thursday 8th June – Wednesday 14th June, I was volunteering at the International Rotary Convention along with twenty other exchange students living in Denmark. We started packing 15,000 Convention Gift Bags on Thursday, and from Friday until the end of the Convention we greeted and handed out the bags to every last Convention attendee. Among us we could speak Spanish, Italian, Thai, Portuguese, Taiwanese/Chinese, French, and of course English and Danish, as well as be able to understand Swedish and Norwegian. This meant that anyone with a question about anything would come to us, and the Sergeant-At-Arms found themselves without jobs!

At the Opening Ceremony on Sunday afternoon Crown Princess Mary & Crown Prince Frederik attended as honorary guests. After the Ceremony an Australian representative presented an Opal pendant to Mary. As Australian exchange students we were fortunate enough to be able to join them at the presentation where we were introduced to her as a group and gave her the traditional ‘Aussie-Oi’ shout out. It’s not every day that you’re standing next to Royalty!

The school holidays have just begun and the high school graduates are driving around the local streets yelling and partying on the backs of decorated, old military trucks and buses. The holidays also welcome more travel. My parents will arrive from Australia soon and we will venture to Norway, Sweden, Spain, and of course Copenhagen. I will also attend a Danish music festival on Langeland (Long Island), where I will stay with two Rotarian families from my Club here in Denmark. I feel very fortunate in the many opportunities of travel I have been given so far this year. I am also looking forward to starting school again with new subjects and classes. When the school year starts I will also be joining the local basketball team. Joining the team will be a good way of making Danish friends outside of the school, as well as just having fun and keeping fit – maybe I’ll lose those extra couple of ‘exchange-student-kilos’ I’ve gained!

One thing I have learned here is to really understand the stresses of parents. Before this year I couldn’t imagine having to be so organised that you always know what every family member’s schedule is. Well, become an exchange student and try to keep up with five different family’s schedules! However, this in turn is actually a positive thing, because it’s wonderful to have four loving families here that I can spend my time with. I feel that I have really ‘fallen on my feet’ in my community here in Denmark. The members of my Rotary Club (Dyrehaven) are always excited to see me at meetings, and extend invitations to me. My class has been constantly welcoming and always up for some fun. I also have the other exchange students living close by, who can be just as confused as me at times and are always there when needed. If I ever fall I have the biggest safety net in the world, and it will catch me.

It’s coming up to the half-way point of my Rotary Youth Exchange, and over the next two weeks our ‘oldies’ – the exchange students that arrived six months before us – will leave Denmark and return to their home countries. This marks a significant, as well as a sad time during our exchange, as we say goodbye to our friends that have guided us this far through our exchange. Soon, our ‘newbies’ – the exchange students that arrive six months after us – will be asking us for advice! Although myself and the other exchange students hitting the half-way mark don’t feel ‘old and wise’, we have in fact learned so much already about ourselves, others and just about how to be happy! Now, I am really looking forward to the next seven months in Denmark: my home away from home.