Finland - Amanda Layther

Well, it's time to take a break from my life in Finland to tell you a bit about it, and how it is going for me. Of course, it has been amazing, time has been going too fast, and I just want to reach out, wind back the clock a few months and then hit the pause button. I'm beginning to realise that as each day slips by, there is one less day left of my time in Finland, and that is really a very scary thought. Because, while I love all my friends and family at home to death, I also now have a new set of friends and family over here, who I know will be so hard to leave, I don't even want to contemplate it. So I'm trying to get as much out of my time here as possible, meaning that these months since my last report have been as action-packed as it is possible to be.

The summer holidays after Eurotour were incredibly busy. They involved a couple of trips to Helsinki and other towns to say goodbye to oldies who I still miss so much. Those trips were basically trying to cram more memories of wonderful people into this year. Then, my mum and sister arrived to visit! My dad unfortunately couldn't be here because of work, but nonetheless it was great to see my family! I introduced them to my host families, and on one day, when we were with my first host family who don't speak much English, I had to act as the translator all day, and I was actually surprised by how much I could do this. I also showed mum and Wendy around my town, and then we went on a trip up to Lapland with my second host family. This was amazing, we only went as far North as Rovaniemi, but we did go into the artic circle, it was sunlight the entire time and we were able to visit Santa Claus!! That was very cool, and it was also fantastic to spend time with my mum and sister while seeing the country. After not seeing them for so long, simply hanging out with my sister and talking about the thousand things that only she understands was just awesome.

Then, my sister returned home and my mum and I went on a trip to Greece and Germany. That was just phenomenal. I loved Greece so much, the weather was perfect, the food delicious, the people friendly and the history fascinating. It is one of the countries that I have always wanted to visit and now I can't wait to return there, someday. Then we travelled to Germany and stayed with Lisa, who lived with us during her year in Australia. It was great to see her again, because she really was family while she lived with us, so now I have a sister in Germany. After spending some time there I returned to Finland and my mum went back to Australia. The whole trip was something out of a dream, seeing them again. And once they had left, I actually didn't miss them more or less than before they came, because, throughout the whole year, I have maintained the mind frame that the people that really care about me will be there when I get back, and I owe it to them to have the best time I can while over here.

The rest of the holidays were filled with meeting the new exchange students, and in the process officially becoming 'oldies'. This involved a trip to Helsinki where we scared them plus a trip to Tampere where we scared them some more. I also moved host families in this time and that was actually very hard for me, because I had been with my other family for 5 or 6 months so I was very attached to them, and they were so awesome to me. However, once I moved and settled in, I loved my new family as well so it is great. In my current family, my host sister is a returned exchange student from the Sunshine Coast, and my parents don't speak much English, which is a really good combination, as I am learning Finnish with the help of someone who has been through something like it.

I have been camping with my host sister and some friends from school, which was a lot of fun, went to a car rally with my host family, and, of course, seen a lot of my exchange student friends. One of the highlights of the past few months is when I returned to school for the first time, and I saw some of my Finnish friends for the first time in a while, and I was really glad to see them, and they were really glad to see me. That meant a lot to me because I really want

to make Finnish friends as well as exchange student friends over here. However, I also want to make new exchange student friends, and last weekend that is what I did. We had our district meeting, so I met all of the exchange students from around my area. We talked, played with a hakky sac, ate junk food, talked some more, played cards, went for a walk in the forest and got lost, talked, had a mini Olympics (which my team won! yay!) and did a bit more talking. It was just a great weekend hanging out, having fun and doing stupid things that only exchangies can understand, like seeing how many people you can fit into a very large bag. The answer is 5, though a few of us are convinced we could get 6. Also this term, I have finally been able to start some out of school activities such as kick boxing, which is so much fun and I am loving it! I have also started some out of school Finnish lessons, which so far have been really good too.

So that's it I think, keeping busy, and trying not to think about how little time I have left. I am making the most of the different seasons of Finland, just finishing summer now and experiencing my first real autumn. The leaves are starting to turn yellow, and I can't wait until they are all yellow. Then I have the first snow, the Lapland trip, and my first white winter!! I have so much I still want to do; can anyone make this time go slower and faster simultaneously? I would appreciate it!!

From Finland, with love
Amanda Layther

Finland - Jozef McPherson

No Moi, Moro, Hei, Heipa, Morjens, Terve, Hallo….

Yet again bounder time…now it is really getting harder to write as I feel like I have lived in Finland for lifetime! So I will fill you in on what I have been up to…

…following mid-summer I still had six more weeks of holidays. For much of the holidays I spent in Finland travelling around and spending relaxing weeks at my host parent's summer cottage. Cottage lifestyle is so different in summer compared to winter. You have no real sense of time as the sun does not set, you never feel tired as you are powered by the sun, you can sleep when you want and go anywhere 24 hours a day. My second host parent's cottage was on a river flowing from Russia, with a rather strong current and many rapids, and one day we went white water rafting which was awesome.

In between coming home for a few days at a time, we had a few small trips away in southern Finland visiting the many summer towns and family. I also had a few days in Estonia, which was amazing. Estonia has the oldest 'old city' in Europe, and an amazing 75% still remains. It is amazing to go from the new part of town and step back hundreds of years, experiencing how life was then. Estonia became independent only 13 years ago from Russia, and now there are masses of buildings been built. It is as if they are starting again, in fact some of the main streets in the centre of town are completely closed while they are rebuilt.

I moved to my third host family in August and with 2 weeks of holidays left, I spent time with friends and going to cottage. We also visited a huge discount shop in Finland, and also went the biggest theme park in Finland in Tampere.

School started back on the 15th of August, the day before my birthday…for my birthday I had a small party at home for all my host family in Finland and I got many traditional Finnish presents, which was really nice.

Other than that, I have been living a normal Finnish and study more Finnish, so now I can proudly say that I speak only Finnish at home, unless I don't understand of course! But I love learning another language, not only does this help me understand the culture better, but the English language makes so much more sense now. However, last month when I met the Prime Minster at the Petrol Station, I froze with excitement and could not speak Finnish,

nonetheless we had a joke…it was so great…as when I saw him again in the supper market (as he lives in the same town) a month later, he remembered me!

No niin, nyt mina menen kotiin…[well now I am going home]…

So live the life you love and love the life you live!

Jooseppi Suomi…

…no sitten Moi moi, Moro moro, Hei hei, Hei sitten, Heipa, Morjens, Nähdään, Näkemiin, Hyvasty…

Meeting Prime Minister Matti Vanhanen.