

France - Rachel Dash

Rachel Dash
Angouleme France

July, August and September... the blissful summer months of the Northern Hemisphere...how I love them! These are the months where about 99% of the French population flee the city to holiday by the seaside... even at Paris, life slows down. Beach, parties, beach, parties and more beach... these words just about sum it all up.

July kicked off with the a Rotary organised student exchange boat trip on the 'Baise', one of the canals next to Bordeaux in South-West France. It was 'genial(!)', awesome, fabulous and any other word to describe one of the best weeks of your life! Nine southern hemisphere students, a house-boat, and plenty of beautiful French villages, wine tasting, and boat-parties! We cooked, cleaned, shopped, and *en gros*, fended for ourselves... but that just made it a hundred times funner and funnier. The afternoons were spent sun baking on deck, bike-riding through markets, steering (or neglecting to steer) the boat, exploring the countryside (and getting completely and utterly lost), going to *cabaret* shows, and of course stopping off at villages, decked out in red and blue, to support The Blues in the World Cup.... *Vive Zidane Toujours!* Needless to say that it was hard to leave the boat that had become our home.

The rest of the month of July and most of August I spent at Royan, a coastal town, with my host family. The heat wave in July sent us all running to the beach when we had the chance! Ugly brown jelly-fish infest the oceans, waves don't exist, and you have a tough time finding a place to lay a towel amongst all the umbrellas; but all that aside, it was wonderful to see, smell and feel the sea. And when the sun wasn't shining, we headed down to the golf course to practise our swing! There was always something new, interesting and yummy on the dinner menu: oysters, muscles, lobster, shrimp- I've never eaten so much seafood. I think at this point, I should also make special mention to my host family's home grown tomatoes and zucchinis- I've never had better! And in the typical french spirit of dining, always accompanied by a glass of wine!

While the French may not go out very often during the school year, they certainly make up for it over the Summer holidays! Back to back parties seem to roll on for weeks, music seems to beat out of every second house, and the *cafés* and bars that line the main street come alive. My host brother and sisters were wonderful in taking me out with them- we had some great *soirées* together. At the end of the holidays, I went to visit two Australian exchange students in Angers (in North-East France) who I met during Eurotour. We visited some of the *Chateaux de la Loire*, gorged on OREO's (yes! We found some in the international section of the supermarket!), shopped and burnt some calories (nowhere near enough) during BodyCombat and BodyBalance at the gym. Then it was back on the TGV to Angouleme- the end of three beautiful months of holidays.

La Rentrée...back to school second time round. However this time I was going into the senior literature class instead of the grade eleven science class... a minor adjustment! Eight hours of philosophy a week, four hours of literature, four of history and geography plus seven hours of foreign languages (five of them being English- I can't complain!)- a light schedule compared to the senior scientific classes! Most of my class have turned out to be lovely, and I feel a hundred percent comfortable there. In fact, it's sad when they start to talk about things that are happening in the second half of the year and each time I have to say I can't come because I won't be there.

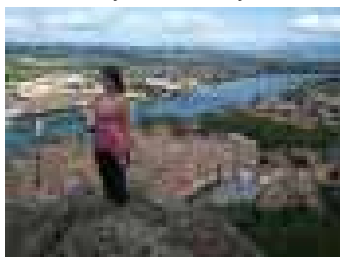
Even though school has gone back, the festive mood seems to have continued into the school year. Two weekends ago I was back at Paris at my host cousin's wedding, enjoying the fine food, bubbly and the company of my extended host family who are all just gorgeous. I also saw the collection of impressionist paintings at the *Musée d'Orsée* with my host mum- they are the most beautiful paintings I've ever seen. Last weekend was my second last rotary weekend ever at the beach at Royan. Like always, we had an fabulous time together visiting the Zoo and lighthouse, holding a mini Olympic Games on the beach, and of course giving a

concert to the Rotarians (how could I forget?). It's strange to think that now it's us who are the 'oldies'.

Til next time, *gros bisous*,
Rach

France - Tracy Kefford

On your eighteenth birthday, the last thing you want to be doing is an exam. On Philosophy. In French. For four hours. Starting at 8am. Unfortunately, on Wednesday the 20th September this is exactly the scenario I was faced with. However, to ease the pain, all you need are French boys who sing you 'Appy birzdey', French friends who hug you and wish you a great day, and other French friends who make you a chocolate cake from scratch, even if they've only ever made one other cake in their life. Although in France I haven't really known many exchange students (I only really know one, a Rotary girl from Victoria), and thus haven't been a part of the typical exchange student band, I wouldn't change that for the world- I love being a part of the French scene, having French friends and French jokes and speaking French! Yesterday was sadly the last official day of Summer in France, and really marked the end of



the holiday period. During those long, relaxing, fun-filled summer holidays I went to Amsterdam, Aix-En-Provence, Grenoble, Lyon, Montpellier...and spent an awesome week in a cottage towards the South of France with three French girls and one Tahitian girl, all of the same age as me; where we spent afternoons lazing at the waterfall, watched scary movies and experienced power blackouts, had hilarious arguments at the grocery store and went to the beach for a picnic- definitely an unforgettable week. ("But seriously guys, I just had a

horrible pig"...well I suppose you had to be there). However, three weeks ago, I found myself at the end of my three month two days holidays (the longest holidays I have ever had) and faced with the prospect of school- a new class, new subjects, new people (due to the fact that the people I was with before had all graduated and I was set to repeat the same year). In all cases, it has been much better than the first time- not only can I now speak the language and actually communicate, but I know what and what not to do- and so I'm having a fantastic time...well, as fantastic a time as one can have at school!

And so life goes on for me here in France and I have become very accustomed to the French ways- a bowl of coffee every morning, wiping your plate with a baguette slice after the meal, spending twenty minutes every morning deciding what to wear to school, the fact that EVERYTHING is homemade, writing with fountain pens on squared paper, and the horror that is the French public toilet system. I have also become très attaché to my town and its quirks- the luscious chocolate factory, the Café chez Roy where you can get the best cappuccinos and icecream sundaes ever, the café du theatre which is great for hanging out with your friends on a Friday afternoon and L'Hilarious, which is surely the smallest nightclub ever invented. Coming from modernized Brisbane, where a building from the 1950's is considered 'old', the history of my town sometimes makes the mind boggle- the castle which was once home to French royalty, the oldest continuously running school in the entire of France (not my school, however!), the oldest fair in France (always held on the 29th August) and the first double wire suspension bridge in the world (no longer existing, it was pulled down in 1980, which, as everyone says, is 'dommage' [a shame]). Then there is the fact that while in Australia, my home was an apartment building barely a year old, now in France, with my third host family I live in a castle built in the 1500's!!! And then there is the fact that I now communicate everything in a different language. Of course, sometimes it seems like I have two separate lives-one here and one in Australia. And I know that while soonish I will be going back to my old life in Australia forever, there will always be a part of me that stays a little French- I'll probably keep the fountain pen, every so often sneak bread slices onto the table with dinner, insist on mixing my own salad dressings. And of course STILL take twenty



minutes to decide what to wear every morning. In fact, if the luggage limit wasn't twenty kilos, I might try to smuggle the whole country back in my suitcase.

Seeya,
Tracy

France - Victoria Mukherjee

OH DEAR!! OH NO!!!

Only about THREE MONTHS LEFT!!!! I cant believe the year has gone so fast!! I mean seriously I am left a bit dumbfounded. You know cross-eyed with a serious sense of confusion?

Well lets see If I can recap my last three or so months for you in detail of course...

SO, lets start off at the holidays. The lovely long three month end of school year holidays which take place from July to September. In the beginning I was still with my second host family in Foncine, possibly my favourite family of all time. I spent a couple of weeks hanging out with my host brother Paul and the village kids doing all sorts of mischief of course as is expected of the Rotary Exchange students. In about the third week of these beloved holidays we went to Castellane, a gorgeous place in the south of France not too far from Nice. My host brother, his cousin and I had a great time white-water rafting, swimming in massive crystal blue lakes and making friends with a million Dutch people at our camp site.

I then switched to my third host family who live in a tiny village of four hundred people called Nozeroy. Of course the real charm of this village is not the near-nothing population, but its magical medieval architecture! Anywho, I spent a week in Bretagne, the East coast of France, swimming in the sea and living it up at a trad itional French Wedding!!! Then we trudged our way to Switzerland for a week of rock climbing. It was incredible fun and it turns out that I am a much better rock climber than I thought I was! About a week later we packed ourselves AGAIN into the camping car and trucked our way through Switzerland, Italy and ferried our way across to Corsica Island. :) Wow what a place, though its French you would seriously think it is Italian. Now I know you'll love this little piece of trivia...Napoleon Bonaparte was born in Corsica...the Island renown for beautiful beaches and lively nightclubs! We had so much fun that we kind of forgot that school was supposed to be starting soon and so we arrived at two am on the first stay of school!!! Of course we were lively ducks that day huh??

Its about my third week back at school and its been dandy. Its been good fun to see my school friends again and good friends they are. ^^

Well my lovelies I must be leaving you. Plenty to do plenty to do!! Especially being so close to the leaving date! (Jan 10th for me). Sure that might seem ages away but it really isn't considering how fast time flies!

Bisous
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