



# LETTERS FROM ABROAD

2015

**Rotary International District 9800 Youth Exchange Program**

**Experiences and Images from our Outbound Youth Exchange Students for 2015**

[www.rotaryyouthexchangedistrict9800.com.au](http://www.rotaryyouthexchangedistrict9800.com.au)

**Rotary**  
District 9800



rotary  
youth  
exchange



**OUTBOUND  
STUDENTS  
2015**

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District Governor 2015 - 2016	Julie Mason
District Chair Youth Services	Gabrielle Morgan

## A Message From The District Governor, Julie Mason

An Object of Rotary is to promote International understanding, good will and peace and never has this been more important in our world. Whilst there are many programs that allow young people to travel, the Rotary Youth Exchange Program is one of the most recognized and prestigious youth exchange programs in the world.

Each year over 7000 secondary school students between the ages of 16 and 17 participate in this program worldwide. In District 9800 we have a proud history of successful involvement with 14 countries, whereby participants go beyond being a tourist and experience being a member of a host family, attend school and become immersed in the culture, traditions, language and food of the destination country.

When you consider the challenges that involvement in this program presents, it certainly requires a special type of person with special skills and behaviours. An open mind and heart, a sense of optimism, problem solving skills and resilience would seem to be necessary. The Rotary values of Service, Fellowship, Integrity, Diversity and Leadership are front of mind when students are selected for this program and accordingly these values are tested throughout the extensive preparation provided by the District 9800 Youth Exchange Committee in the months leading up to departure.

I admire the families who allow their children to take part in Youth Exchange because it is indeed life changing and requires an enormous amount of trust and generosity. I know from my own experience as a host mother and club counsellor that lifelong friendships are formed as day to day challenges are met with a smile and a solution!

Every year we send away young "Aussies" and then welcome back citizens of the world. I have no doubt that the students involved, the families and Rotarians who support this program are in fact forging a path for a better world in the future.

I am looking forward to reading the Letters from Abroad!

*Julie Mason*

District Governor 2015/16  
Rotary District 9800



## A Message From The Youth Exchange Chairman

Welcome to Edition 7 of our much acclaimed and valued D9800 Youth Exchange publication 'Letters From Abroad'. As we reflect of the 2015 Rotary Youth Exchange experiences, it is gratifying to know that our students have maximized each opportunity presented to them. It is pleasing to note that our students have been involved in numerous Rotary Service projects as part of their Host Club and District programs.

Many of our students will attest to the need to step out of their comfort zones, to manage a range of challenging issues. I convey sincere congratulations to our students for displaying courage, resilience and using the network of support and expertise offered by Rotary International. Each student has clearly shown a strong sense of responsibility and resilience, which in many instances has enhanced their overall overseas experiences.

As we are all aware, Rotary Youth Exchange is an educational and cultural Exchange, which provides opportunities for students to live with Rotary approved families, whilst regularly attending school in other countries. During their 12 months on long-term Exchange, the students become immersed in the Host country's culture and they develop tolerance and understanding, as they participate as volunteers in many aspects of Rotary Service. In addition, the students make lifelong friendships around the World, as members of our Family of Rotary. I urge the students to always stay connected with their Sponsor and Host Rotary Clubs and our D9800 Youth Exchange Committee, as we strive to promote peace, understanding and friendship in our world and continue to celebrate the accomplishments of Rotary Youth Exchange.

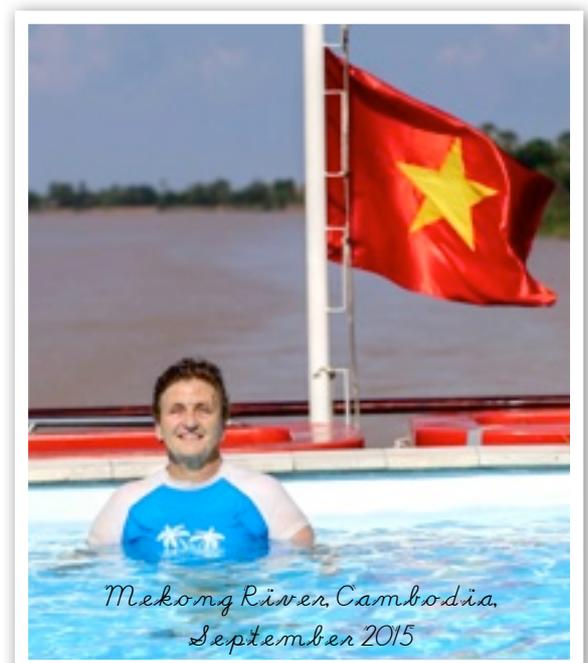
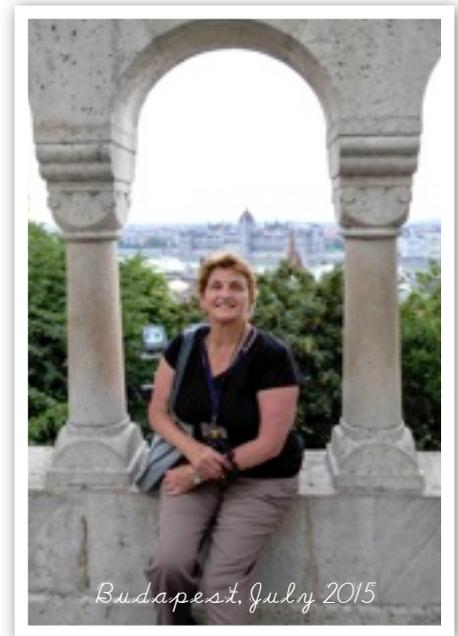
Thank you to our 2015 Outbound Students who contributed to 'Letters From Abroad' and I acknowledge their excellent work as ambassadors for Rotary International, Australia, their schools and their families. As you read their inspiring stories you realise that Rotary Youth Exchange is a life changing experience and it does promote international peace, goodwill and learning. Grateful thanks to our Sponsor and Host Clubs for your on-going support for D9800 Rotary Youth Exchange.

Congratulations and grateful thanks to our dedicated and hard working members of the D9800 Youth Exchange Committee. In particular, thank you to our 'Letters From Abroad' Team for their excellent work and commitment to produce such an outstanding annual publication.

Best wishes and good luck to our students and families in your future endeavours and thank you for your significant contribution to the Rotary Youth Exchange Program.

*Vanda Mullen*

**Vanda Mullen**  
**Chairman**  
**D9800 Youth Exchange Committee**



# Alexandra Pert - Spain

Sponsor Club  
RC of Glen Eira

With just under three months to go until I will be boarding three long flights back to Australia, I can't help but think back to the moment I said goodbye to my family at Melbourne International Airport. The departure gate seemed filled with Exchange Students with over 60 of us from around Victoria, South Australia and Tasmania travelling to Bangkok together for the first part of our journey. I remember looking around the International Departure gate and seeing the room overflowing with a range of emotions from excitement to anxiousness. There were Exchange Students and their families crying, smiling and laughing, and Rotary members giving hugs and handshakes and wishing everyone the best of luck for their year abroad. It felt very surreal to be at the departure gate beginning 'The Best Year of My Life' as from the moment I was accepted to be a Rotary Youth Exchange Student, I was counting down the days until my flight (over 250 days in advance) and the moment that I would *finally* be in Spain. Now, my countdown app is what I fear most, with the ever decreasing amount of days I have left in my home away from home.

It may appear that this year has been easy, and many people insist on referring to it is a holiday or a gap year. However, this year has come overflowing with challenges and opportunities to learn more about myself, Australia, my host country, and the people around me. My name is Allie and this year I have been living in Alicante, a beautiful



*Looking up the Camp Nou Fútbol Stadium in Barcelona*

Mediterranean city in the south of Spain. I have lived with the same host family for the year and have three wonderful host sisters, Lucía, Martina and Ángela who have made me feel welcome since the moment I stepped off the plane. My host parents, Alberto and Mages, have been wonderful throughout my year and have opened the doors to their home and their hearts. I am forever grateful to my family, and I know that without them, this year

'hola' (hello), 'adios' (goodbye) and 'gracias' (thank you), to now being able to hold a conversation, watch movies, sing along to songs, and pass exams at school is incredible and has been one of my goals throughout my Exchange, although at times it seemed impossible.

The struggle to learn Spanish and overcome what we refer to as the 'language barrier' is a goal that I set myself from the moment I applied for Exchange. This year has been a cliché roller coaster ride as I have had my up moments (*noticing a huge amount of progress in your language development, being able to make jokes, having conversations with people who don't speak English*), my down moments (*not understanding school, not understanding jokes/stories, not being able to explain yourself or a relatable situation*) and the moments of consistency where speaking and hearing Spanish seems completely



could not have been even a fraction as amazing. Together, we have travelled throughout the north-west of Spain, to Madrid and to small village towns throughout my province where my extended family lives. I have also had the opportunity to experience Spanish culture, eat delicious homemade Spanish food (nothing beats food made by your host grandma!), and learn to speak Spanish. Arriving in Spain knowing the absolute basics like



*My Australian family came to visit me in Alicante and met my host family*



*In Altea with Gabby, an Exchange Student from Tasmania*

*The streets of Altea, a small village an hour and a half north of Alicante (above)*



*'Hanging out' by the Mediterranean*

natural. It's well known amongst Exchange Students that 'The Moment' (when suddenly you're "fluent" and are able to understand everything and communicate) is when you have your first dream in your second language. Unfortunately, I'm not one to remember my dreams and I have been told that a more accurate 'Moment' is when you are able to watch and laugh along to a comedy in a foreign language. My Spanish is nowhere near perfect, and I can guarantee that I have experienced more awkward silences in the past nine months than the average person in their lifetime. However, I am very proud of my developments with the Spanish language and my ability to communicate with my host family, my friends, my teachers, and the locals. Many people find the thought of learning a second language and arriving in a country not being able to speak the local language very daunting but one thing that is important to remember is that we all smile in the same language.



*Experiencing the 'Cristianos y Moros' (Christians and Moors) festival in Alcoy (left) & with host parents and sister in Alcoy.*

Initially, one of the hardest parts of adapting to my new life was eating dinner at 10:30pm every night. After a long day at school, and constantly listening to a language I was trying to grasp, I was exhausted by dinner time. However, I quickly learnt the tip to survival — siesta! The habit of taking a siesta after lunch is something that will definitely be returning to Australia with me, and hopefully one day Australia will adopt the siesta and I will officially be able to schedule it into my daily routine.

When I first told people that I would be living in Spain for a year on Exchange, their initial reaction was usually, "a year's a long time!", or simply, "why Spain?". I can confirm, the past nine months have absolutely flown and this has been the best, fastest and most exciting year of my life. I remember landing in Spain and walking through airport 'security', or lack thereof, as though it was yesterday but it also feels a lifetime ago as I remember my achievements and highlights from throughout this year. As for 'why

Spain?', well that's a question that I am still discovering the answer to every day as I continue to fall a little bit more in love with this wonderful country. Everything from the relaxed and laid back culture, the food (paella, tortilla de patatas, jamón —Spanish ham— cheese, and seafood), fashionable people, beach lifestyle, the importance and value of family, and the diversity of the fiestas and cultural festivals has made my experience of Exchange so wonderful and positive and I am already planning my return.

I have an extensive list of highlights from the past nine months, one of them being 'Euro Tour', my 20 day trip around Europe. We travelled through ten different countries and visited thirteen cities; Paris, Belgium, Amsterdam, Berlin (including Sachsenhausen Concentration Camp, outside of Berlin), Prague, Bratislava, Vienna, Budapest, Postojna, Lido di Jesolo, Venice, Vatican City and Rome. Our trip was made up of



*Bike tour in Amsterdam (left) & Spain Rotary Inbound Students in Paris on the Euro Tour the 'Trip Of A Lifetime'.*



*Drenched on a gondola ride in Venice*



*Cracking boiled eggs on each other in a traditional Spanish Easter Monday celebration*



*Weekend trip to Rome*

70 Exchange Students from thirteen countries, five leaders from five countries and two bus drivers from one country. The awesome quality of Exchange Students is that after the first couple of days of the usual 'getting to know you questions' (what's your name?, where are you from?, and where do you live in Spain?), we quickly became one big family. My favourite city that we visited was Amsterdam where we went on a bicycle tour of the city along the gorgeous canals and over the hundreds of bridges. We also went to the Anne Frank House and learnt more about her life and experiences from the Second World War, before hopping into a boat and cruising along the canals. I also loved our time in Italy despite being drowned with rain in Venice and the entire group forking out five euros each to purchase an effective "I LOVE VENICE" poncho to stay dry. However, the best thing about Euro Tour isn't the places you go, the things you see or the food you eat (no matter how beautiful and delicious) but rather the people you meet and the connections you form. After the trip, we had to say goodbye to each other, which has without a doubt been the hardest thing I have had to do on my Exchange, and probably in my life. There were many tears shed and many promises of 'one day', which is hopefully sooner rather than later. When I returned back to Spain, my host grandmother said that she could tell that I had left a piece of my heart behind on the trip, and if you believe the saying "home is where the heart is", my home is now all over the world.

Although my Spanish may not be amazing, and I may still do things like a foreigner, I feel like I belong in Spain and definitely call Alicante, *home*. This year has definitely been the best of my life, and I am so grateful to Rotary, my host and real family, my friends and everyone else who has made this opportunity possible. I could not be more grateful for every single opportunity I have had this year and the people I have been fortunate enough to meet from around the world, all of whom bring a smile to my face, and tears to my eyes when I think about having to say goodbye in a few months. If you are considering an Exchange, I highly recommend it as it has certainly been the best experience of my life and I have learnt so much about who I am, who I want to be and how I want to live my life. I have also learnt more about the world (my geography has improved unbelievably) and the people who make up this world. If you are unsure on your country preferences, research the culture, language and Exchange opportunities in each country and follow your instincts, though I do believe that there is no country that is better or worse for Exchange, but that each is different and unforgettable in its own charming way. With three months to go, I think it's appropriate to remind ourselves,

"how lucky am I to have something that makes saying goodbye so hard". Again, thank you to everyone who has influenced my Exchange, and in effect has influenced and changed my life.

# Alyssia De Grandi Finland

Sponsor Club  
RC of Kyneton

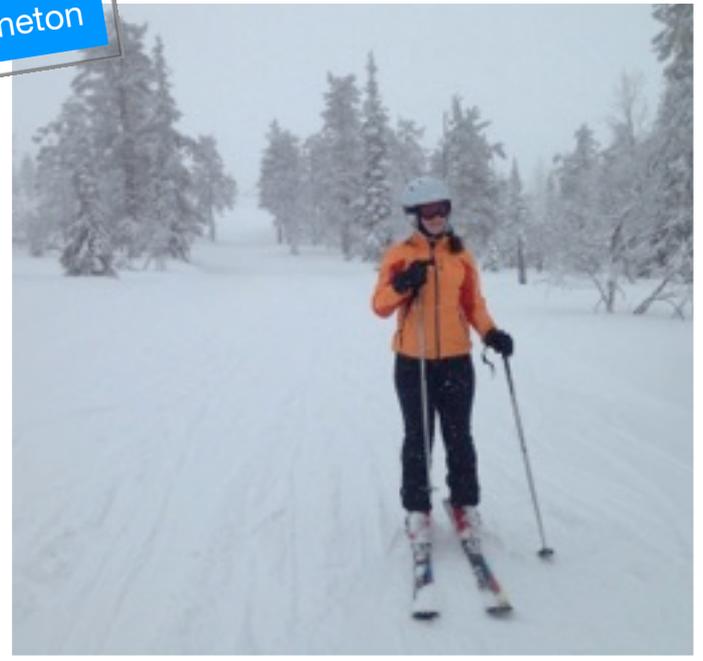
I think that every one of these letters starts the same way with the question 'How do I sum up my last 9 months in one short letter?' Well it's impossible to mention even a quarter of the amazing experiences each one of us has had so we just have to choose the most interesting memories to share with you that will make you want to be an Exchange Student.

When I signed up for Exchange, I didn't even know what I was expecting to happen or where I wanted to go, but after my second selection interview I was sure that I wouldn't make the cut and Exchange wasn't for me. It turned out that I did get selected and I was invited to the country selection camp in Axedale. I still wasn't sure of which country I wanted to go but I was thinking maybe Japan to help with my Japanese, because I had been studying it in school. There were multiple reasons why all of my country preferences were unsuitable for me but the Rotarians offered me a place in Finland. At first I was a little bit confused and I was asking myself "Where is Finland?" and "What language do they speak in Finland?" and other silly questions like that. However, I trusted the Rotarians with their decision and

accepted the offer. That could have possibly been the best decision I've ever made in my life.

To many Australians, Finland is a place in Northern Europe between Sweden and Russia, where it snows all the time, the people have reindeers and huskies as pets, they speak a crazy language that is impossible to learn and they are very focused on and good at school. This is what I was also expecting when I boarded the flight here. Boy, was I wrong! Luckily for me, I arrived in winter so there was snow everywhere but other than that all of my expectations and beliefs of Finland were extremely inaccurate (although the language is a bit weird). I once read a statement that said "Every cultural instinct and previous experience tells you that when you travel this far you should find, at the very least, people on camels". Now to tell the truth, this statement was actually talking about Australia but this is exactly what I was thinking when I came to Finland, except minus the camels and put polar bears instead. I am to this day still amazed of how two countries on opposite sides of the world, over 15,000km apart can have so many similarities. From fashion, to shops, to even most foods, most things have been surprisingly familiar to me. Although, in saying that of course there also is many differences between the countries and their cultures also.

I am living in a town, about an hour by train from Finland's capital, Helsinki, called Hämeenlinna. It is a perfect city for me with almost 70,000



*Meeting a reindeer  
in lapland*



*Crossing the Arctic Circle*



*Finally building a snowman*



*Feeling like a Princess before dancing the 'Vanhat' dances*



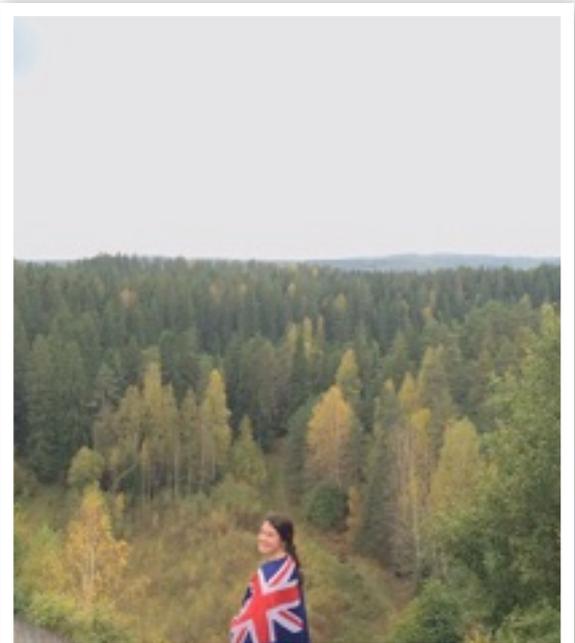
*Walking to school in January*



*Cruising on Host Family's boat*

people and it is most famous for it's castle which is one of the few in Finland. It is a great size for me because it's small enough to have everything in walking distance but it is also big enough to have enough shops, clubs and opportunities. I have lived with 4 families this year, which has been both a good and a bad thing in my opinion. It has been great for me to experience 4 completely different ways of living and get to know so many families but at the same time it isn't always easy to say goodbye to some people who have taken you in, cared for you and bought you ice-cream for the past 3 or so months. I have been extremely lucky with all of my families as they have allowed me to have so many opportunities and also been super generous and kind.

My school here is called Kaurialan Lukio and it is an upper secondary school with the Australian equivalent years 10, 11 and 12. I have really enjoyed school this year (most of the time) as I have made many friends, both Finns and Exchange Students, it



*Finnish forest in autumn*

gives me something to do everyday and best of all there is a free lunch every day. However, school is school no matter where you are on the planet and it never gets easier to get up in the morning.

Some of the highlights of my Exchange have been participating in Vanhojen Tanssit in February which was a school formal similar to prom or deb where we learnt about 10 traditional dances to perform to our family and friends. I was extremely lucky to have the opportunity to participate in this because I arrived about a month before the event and only had just over 2 weeks to learn all the dances, find a dress, a hairdresser and a date when most people had been planning these things for



*Australia & Finland - with a fellow Exchange student in Oulu*

most of their life. But it was an amazing experience because I made so many new friends which set me up for the year and I got to feel like a princess for a day. Another highlight for me was going to Lapland with my host family in April. This was an unforgettable experience as I skied all day everyday for a whole week and this was also my first time ever skiing. At the same time, I also got to do a lot of traditionally Finnish activities such as meeting Santa, seeing huskies and meeting (and eating) reindeers.

*With some other Aussies in Helsinki*



*Who new that there were nice beaches in Finland?*



*Seeing snow for the first time ever*

# Courtney Johnson Norway

Sponsor Club  
RC of Bendigo  
Next Generation

**Hei! Jeg heter Courtney og jeg har bodd i landet av vikingene for de siste 10 månedene!!**

So I'm guessing you most likely don't understand much Norwegian, so I will be happy to translate for you!

"Hi! My name is Courtney and I have been living in the land of the Vikings for the past 10 months!"

It's quite hard to imagine that last year I found out I would be travelling to the amazing country of Norway and living amongst the snow and mountains. It is sad to say that my Exchange year is nearly concluding, but not just yet! So let's start at the beginning!

On the 16<sup>th</sup> of January 2015 I left the 40°C Australian heat to the lovely -12°C chill of Norway. As I stepped out of the quiet airport, gripping my bags tightly I saw snow fall gently on the ground for the first time. It was a truly magical moment. Then, I realised how hard it is to walk on an icy path, slipped over, and the magical moment was gone.

My first impressions of Norway were too good to be true. I loved the food (probably a little too much), I loved the language and I loved the people. I live in a small town called Kongsvinger, located on the East side of Norway. Very different from where I live in Echuca, lots of hills, trees and it gets really cold! Kongsvinger is only one hour from Oslo and only 30

minutes from Sweden, so I have been to Sweden and Oslo many times with my families.

My first day at school was absolutely terrifying. It didn't really sink in that I would actually be spending my next year here until I saw my classmates excitedly staring at me when I nervously walked through the classroom door. Everyone in my class introduced themselves and I knew that every single one of their names had immediately been forgotten, but I tried my best. I am in a sports class at my school, which means I train 7 times a week and I study many sport themed subjects. I love my class so much, they have taught me so many things and we have been on some pretty incredible trips together. From downhill skiing on black tracks in the Norwegian ski slopes to climbing the tallest mountain in Norway over a glacier; my class has really put me out of my comfort zone. Throughout my year I have taught over six English classes at my school about Australian culture and language, being the teacher of the class. Also, I have taught two classes at my 9 year old host brother's school. The students were so happy to meet me but not so happy after I made



*My host sister and I on the Norwegian National Day*

them taste vegemite.

My host Rotary Club in Norway is Kongsvinger Rotary Club. I have enjoyed getting to know many of the members here and being involved with the club. I have presented many speeches at my Rotary Club, all in Norwegian and have also had presentations at District Conferences. I thoroughly enjoy going to Rotary meetings and I try to attend every week. I meet new members, learn about projects in the community and different issues facing society.

I have had four main Rotary Exchange Camps with the



*Making friends from around the world*



*The Norwegian Exchange Students on Euro Tour*





Exchange Students in Norway while I have been here. Firstly, I had the Introduction camp with all the new Exchange Students. We learnt about Norway's culture, language and history; as well as playing in the snow and making some new friends. The next camp was the 'Winter Ski Camp' in a place called Nesbyen. We spent a week with all of the Exchange Students, learning to downhill ski, cross country ski, snowboard and of course tobogganing! It was so much fun, although the Canadians were a bit better than us Australians at skiing!! The third camp was a month later in Oslo for the Holmenkollen ski jumping weekend, quite a national event in Norway. We cheered on all of the countries competing in cross country skiing and ski jumping and all of the Exchange Students were lucky enough to be put on national Norwegian TV! The last main Rotary camp we attended was our amazing two and a half week European Tour! We travelled with two Danish Rotary Districts, all of the Norwegian Exchange Students and one girl who was in Iceland on Exchange. Over 90 Exchange Students exploring the wonders of Europe. The countries that we travelled to were Denmark, Belgium, France, Italy, Austria, Croatia, the Czech Republic and Germany. Euro Tour was

definitely one of the best experiences in my life and I will never forget it.

While I have been on Exchange I have learnt so much!! I absolutely love my Norwegian classes at school, as my teacher motivates me to read Norwegian literature and understand the culture. Learning the language was a challenge that I took on with the help of friends, families and my teachers. I have also learnt to play handball, cook traditional Norwegian cuisine, ski (my new favourite hobby) and horse ride.

I had three loving host families on my Exchange, all very different and inspiring people. Who knew I would have 4 new brothers and a new sister on the other side of the world?! I have made a lifelong relationship with my families and they will always hold a special place in my heart.

Norway is truly a unique country filled

with kind-hearted people, beautiful nature and the best chocolate. I have seen the aesthetic nature in Norway from the rocky coasts, blue fjords, snow-capped mountains and sweeping hills. I am constantly staring out the window of the car and reminded how lucky I am to be here. Since I embarked on my journey, I have seen myself grow into a proud, confident person. I have established so much individuality and maturity whilst being here. I could not thank

Rotary enough for this amazing opportunity to become a Rotary Youth Exchange Student, and I hope to be more involved with Rotary in the future.

I know I will come back to Australia and realise how much I have accomplished in just 12 months and I will look back on how fast the time went by. Exchange is a gift that I have received from Australia and Norway and I will use this gift for the rest of my life.

***Tusen Takk for alle mine fine minner Norge! Du er min andre hjemme.***

(Thank you very much for all my great memories Norway! You are my second home).



# Brendan Mansell Turkey

Sponsor Club  
RC of Keilor East

My Exchange started on the 17<sup>th</sup> of January 2015, I arrived in Ankara, Turkey very late at night, I remember everything as if it were yesterday, just like how I remember everyday of my Exchange and how I will for the rest of my life.

When I think back to the start of my Exchange and especially when I look at photos from the start of my Exchange, I see how young, immature and inexperienced I once was. When I look now to see how much I have grown physically and most of all personally, I really simply can't believe it.

I am 100% sure that without this Exchange I would never have grown up to be who I am today, the reason for this is that Exchange no matter when or where in the world, is a "LIFE CHANGING EXPERIENCE".

Before this Exchange even came into my life, I never thought I would ever leave Australia; more especially I never thought I would get the opportunity to go to Gallipoli for the Anzac Day service for the once in a lifetime 100 year Centenary, but most of all I never once in my entire life thought I would be overseas at the ripe age of 16.

At the start and all the way throughout my year when times were hard I really wondered why I came on this Exchange and why I took the huge sacrifice of one year out of my education in Australia, but then when times were calm and more towards the end of my Exchange I really noticed the reason and the value in this unique once in a lifetime experience.

This Exchange is about education, but not in the normal type of school education; the enormous amount that you learn in such a short period of time, being your year on Exchange is more than you could ever dream of



learning in a year of normal school in Australia. The things you learn about are also vital life lessons, which usually only get learnt when it is too late and these will be priceless things that you will never ever forget.

I have grown in every way possible during my once in a lifetime Exchange, I won't say it was the best year of my life but I can say I am unable to show how grateful I am for having people encourage me and me pushing me to go through with this once in a lifetime experience. I have met the closest friends

I will ever have in my life on my



Exchange and learnt things I could never have dreamt about which will benefit me for the rest of my life.

I would love to say a Huge thank you to Rotary International, Rotary District 9800 Australia, the Rotary Club of Keilor East Australia, The Rotary District 2430 Turkey and the Aniteppe Rotary Club, Ankara, Turkey for giving me the opportunity to participate in this once in a life time experience from which I have learnt an unimaginable amount and that I will never forget.

Thank you for reading my entry, I hope you have enjoyed and most of all learnt something from my experience,

Cheers Brendan Mansell, Ankara Turkey.



# Joseph Limn Japan

Sponsor Club  
RC of Footscray



I will say it now, even though the year isn't quite yet over, that the result was well worth the journey. Remembering the vast number of adventures and challenges I've experienced throughout the past ten months is as much of a reward as I could have ever hoped. Last night I had a moment of peace and contentment as I lay in bed and reminded

myself of some of the many remarkable (and at time ridiculous) things I've accomplished while over here in Japan.

If you had asked me near the beginning of my Exchange, it would have been a completely different story. I was worried sick about whether I was the right person to make the most out of the year to come. I couldn't sit still thinking about how easily

I could just squander away my time here. I had thought that it had to be perfect and every day had to be amazing. But now I realize that what made mine and will make your Exchange special is that it wasn't perfect. And that every day wasn't amazing. That it had its ups. And it had its downs.



The year of growth that I have just about completed is one that simply cannot be expressed in words or pictures, but only in gratitude and resolution. And I am indeed grateful to all those who supported me and put up with my admittedly, a little hostile or indifferent personality. I do not mean this to be boastful, but as a person I feel greater. I feel like I have achieved so much. And can achieve so much more. I think this is the most important result of my year away, for which I am thankful. I feel much older now. My lifestyle has changed, as has my mindset, goals and motivation. It's an exciting moment when, with billions of people on this planet, you can step back and say, "I can hold my own."

It all sounds rather done, to say that life is like a rollercoaster. But through Rotary Exchange, your life is turned into the most literal sense of the phrase. One minute you're meeting the mayor, making speeches, and travelling around, and the next you're lying in your undies next to the window trying not to move as not to die from the heat.

I was always bad at analogies, but what I'm trying to say is Exchange isn't all glamor and amazing times. It will most definitely have its slow, boring moments. And that's what makes it so great. That's what makes it real.

So get comfortable, grab a book, and settle in for the long run, because boy is it worth it.



# Lauren Heading Germany

Exchange is so difficult to describe especially when you are thinking in two different languages and words cannot express fully the whole experience. A couple of years of German classes at school was my only exposure to the language prior to arriving here but there is no substitute to truly knowing a culture than actually living in the country and interacting with the locals on a daily basis.

When I arrived in Germany, my first thoughts were that this is going to be amazing. Not only did it meet my expectations but surpassed them tenfold!

I attended school at the Gymnasium Herderschule in Luneburg and living with a few different host families in neighbouring villages surrounding the school. The rich history and architecture of the country was so fascinating. For example, visiting the old production facilities of the Luneburg Salt works, visiting various museums and historical buildings, examining the territorial changes of Germany and the impact of significant events such as the bombing of Dresden, the remnants of the Berlin Wall and the influence of the Romans.

Forming new friendships is not always easy but in general everyone has been very welcoming and when you are considered a friend the bonds built are very strong.

There have been so many highlights from this year including the Euro tour which was a 3 week trip travelling to various countries including Austria, France, Italy and Holland.

I have met numerous Exchange Students from all over the world.



I have faced many challenges on Exchange and have had to cope with many things outside of my comfort zone.

Thank you Rotary for giving me this “once in a lifetime” opportunity. I am grateful to everyone who has made this dream a reality. In the process of discovering the world I have discovered myself.



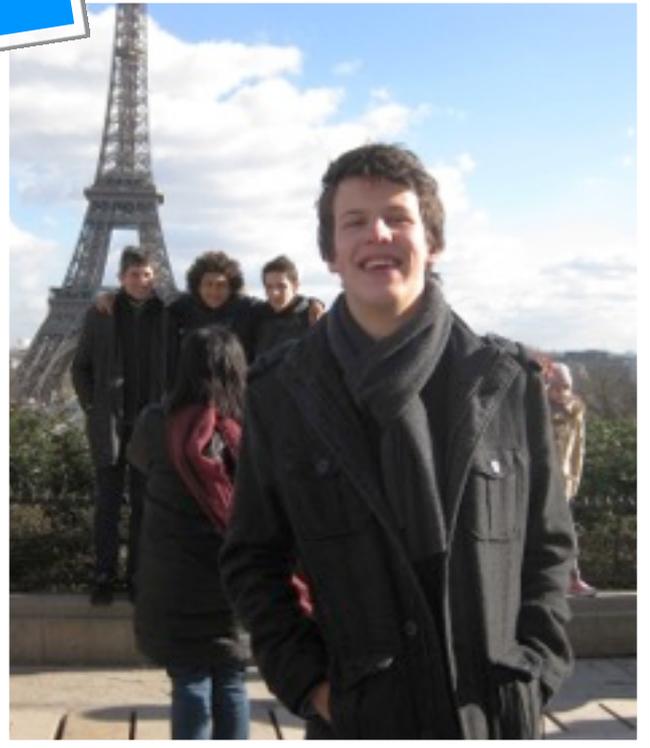
# Vaughan Riley France

Sponsor Club  
RC of Flemington

***“Exchange is an opportunity for opportunities.”***

This philosophy is something that I have reminded myself of everyday since stepping off that last flight into France. Getting off the plane and into a car with a group of people I had never met before was a nerve-racking experience. Suddenly, all the French that I thought I had learned over the course of the last three years just flew out the car window. Smiling, nodding and giving a gentle ‘Oui’ at everything my new host parents said to me on the way to my new house, the realization that I was in a completely different country with a completely different culture and language finally hit me. I had never felt so tiny in my life.

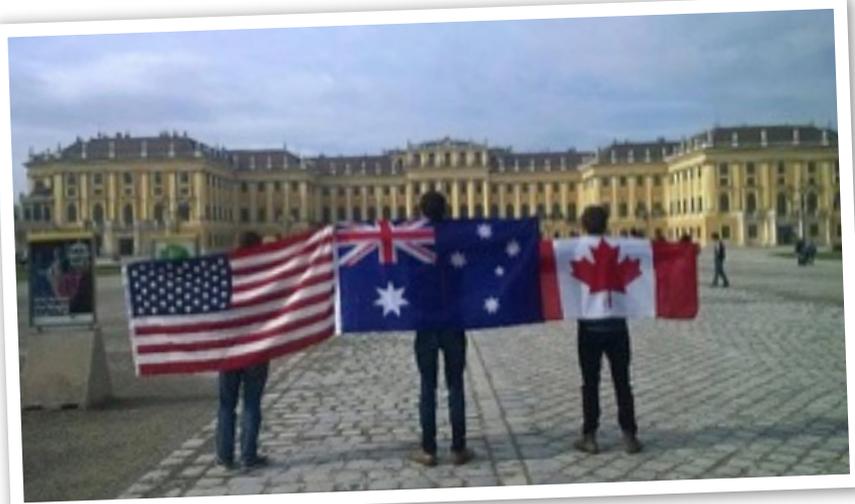
I’m currently nine months into my Exchange, living in a town called Colmar in Alsace, northern France and I wouldn’t trade it for the world. Even after the first month I knew that this would be the best experience of my life, and that has held true to this day. Leaving my home country was hard; I had no idea what was in store for me. But now I couldn’t bear the thought of leaving. The entire region of Alsace is a valley, with the mountain Black Forest of Germany on one side and ‘Les Vosges’ on the other, with the Rhine River splitting two regions apart. The Alsace region is sandwiched between France and Germany so there is a lot of mixing of cultures, making the culture shock about twice as big. I am so thankful to be living in such a culture-packed



part of the country. Going from a major city like Melbourne to a relatively small town like Colmar was a big change. For me, the culture shock was huge, not only the language but the traditions as well. However, as time passes, I find myself becoming more and more accustomed to the culture and history of this way of life. Colmar is a town with a lot of traditions mainly centered around agriculture – there are a lot of vineyards, which is one of the many reasons this little corner of the world is so beautiful. One of the main lessons I have learnt by living in such a beautiful part of the world is an appreciation of my surroundings. Not only do I pay more attention to where I am or how stunning every building or mountain is but I have also gained an appreciation for my own country – a land of beautiful places, packed with culture. This particular corner of France has captured my heart forever.

But I’ve learnt that where you are is only a small part of an Exchange. Arriving in a new country and having to adapt to a new way of life is a difficulty for every Exchange Student. At the start of an Exchange, not only do you have to start to learn a new language and a new way of life but also you have to learn to integrate yourself with a whole new family. I stayed with my first host family for about a period of 5 months where I had two little brothers and a little sister. At first, I felt out of place and lost. But now, if you asked me to distinguish my family back home and my family here in France I wouldn’t be able to. Despite having an irregular number of host families (five), the relationships that I have developed with every single one of them is just incredible. A host family is arguably the largest part of an Exchange. It is





with them that you will form some of the strongest relationships of your life. You spend nearly everyday with them; you go places with them and you share and experience new cultures together. I can't begin to put down in words the relationships I have built with my host families, except to say that we love each other like real families. One of my host families even gave me the house key to keep should I ever want to come back in a few years.

For me, the other Exchange Students in my District have been a sort of second family. As an Australian arriving in January, about six months into the European school year there was already a family community within the Exchange Students of my District. My first Rotary weekend was magical. Seeing real snow for the first time and meeting tons of new people from different countries made my weekend incredible. But most of all the feeling of family amongst the Exchange Students was what made it so magical. Since, the people that I met on that weekend have become my brothers and sisters for life. They had all gone through the same experiences as me and they were all more than happy to help me and talk to me and really make me feel a part of the family.



Being an Australian on Exchange in Europe really gives you quite a feeling of perspective. After my first six months in France, my 'oldies' left me, and I was by myself for about a month. Despite that being incredibly beneficial for my French, it was one of the hardest things of my Exchange. I have, however, learnt so much from that experience. A month after, my 'newbies' arrived. Having already been there for around seven months I took it upon myself to try to cultivate the same sort of family community that I had been so warmly welcomed into on my first weekend. I can already feel the 'newbies' getting closer and closer the more time we spend together. On top of that there are the bus trips. In France, I had two different bus trips in my first four months. The first from Paris to Barcelona and the second was called the Eurotour. They were both equally incredible experiences that I will cherish for a long time to come. I never thought I would see so much of the world; France, Germany, Switzerland, Austria, Czech Republic, Italy and Spain, all in the space of four months! I would consider the bus trips an 'Exchange within an Exchange'.



I absolutely love it here. My life has so drastically changed, and as a result - so have I! Looking back on the person that I was before I left doesn't feel like me at all. Exchange is an opportunity for opportunities, and I highly recommend taking full advantage of each and every one.



## **Rotary Youth Exchange A Chance of a Lifetime! Host Families Invited Now!**

Rotary Youth Exchange invites kind and caring Host Families within the community to assist local Rotary Clubs offer an outstanding exchange program to young people from all over the World.

A Host Family is a vital part of this cultural and educational exchange and typically hosts a student on a voluntary basis for a period of between 10 to 16 weeks. In doing so, a Host family officially becomes a Friend of Rotary International. The Host Family plays an integral role in offering the student the experience of a new culture and language, whilst at the same time learning about a different culture from a young leader. It is a direct window to the world for all members of a Host family. You not only share a young person's hopes and dreams, but more importantly, you make those dreams possible.

Hosting is the beginning of a lifelong friendship and connection with a student and family overseas. Whilst it can be challenging to help a young person transition to a new culture and ease into the surroundings, it is always fun and the rewards are immeasurable.

Host Families in the Rotary Youth Exchange program come in many shapes and sizes! Young children, older children, no children at all, extended families and older generations – all have been successful in hosting Exchange Students.

Please consider this amazing and rewarding opportunity now. Enquiries are most welcome.

Further information is available at [www.rotaryyouthexchangedistrict9800.com.au](http://www.rotaryyouthexchangedistrict9800.com.au)