

It is more than a year in your life; it is a life in one year

A few weeks before my departure, I couldn't realise that I was leaving my country, my family, my friends and my habits. I knew I was going to live something new, something big; but I didn't know what to expect. The day before I left, my friends came to my house for a pretty emotional goodbye, even though, I was still not sure what was going to happen.

I finally comprehended the day of my departure, when I had to leave my family at the airport, on a sunny day of August. I traveled with another French girl and before getting on the plane, we checked a last time our passports and boarding cards. Whereas everything was alright for me, she started panicking: her passport wasn't there anymore! We decided that she would go back to the boarding gates and I would have a look in the toilets, where she went earlier. I found it, she came back, the little book drew a smile of relief on her face, and we jumped on the plane to our new adopted country.

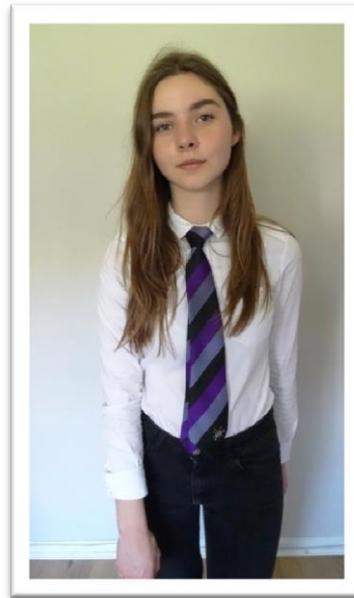
At the airport, my host mother and a friend of hers were waiting for me. The other exchange student found her family and we exchanged our last French words. On the way home, my host mother's friend was speaking all along the 30 minutes journey and I couldn't understand a word! I felt completely lost but, as we arrived home, a warm welcome made me very comfortable. I met my host sister, Aroha and the German student, Sandra.

The day after, my host father and his daughter showed us the surrounding and the way to school. But being in a new country and in a new environment, I was looking to everything around and forgot to memorise the way to school. Fortunately, our host father rode with us for our first day of school.

Over the year, I learned to live something new. I had to meet new people, to discover a new culture and to speak another language. The main difference was probably to go to a different school. In France, school is very particular: schooldays are long and we are used to have many pieces of homework in our twelve different subjects. I always knew that educational system and I was used to it. However, I found out that we could learn in a completely different way. In England, I had to pick four subjects and I had the opportunity to choose more artistic and creative subjects, which don't exist in France. I then took English, to strengthen my learning; Health and Social care, as it was new to me and seemed interesting; Photography and Textiles for the creative part. I can simply say that this was the best decision I could make!

Also, in my school, I discover...the uniform! Yes, like in Harry Potter, we have uniforms; houses and we had beautiful purple ties! I was very excited to live this year as the typical British student. However, I still struggle with having to wear a tie every morning and I take it off as soon as I got out from school!

With my school uniform; amazing tie, isn't it?



Of course, the first days were quite hard as I had to find my feet but after a week, I got used to my new life and felt part of the family very quickly.

Being quite introvert, I don't naturally go to people. However, I quickly realised that my schoolmates were used to seeing foreign students and that I would have to go and talk to them. After a few weeks, I finally met incredible people that quickly became my friends. As I was learning their culture, they were also very opened-minded and interesting in discovering some French traditions and they seemed very happy when I invited them over to cook some French crêpes!

Going in England for me meant meeting British people, but what I didn't know was that I would also met amazing foreign students, just like me. In my family, I was with Sandra who came from Germany. We had so much fun together all over the year. During the first meeting with all the foreigners, we met Martine and Pauline. It is so gratifying to know that you can share your experience and discuss about what your daily life is like with people who understand what you are living –and it can very helpful!



A great day spent with Martine, Sandra and Pauline. The head coming from nowhere, that's me!

The first trip I made was to London with my host sister, a friend of hers and Sandra. It was in December and it was...magical! All the shops had decorations and even though I had already been to London before, I was discovering a new city and Sandra and I, literally, fell in love with it!

Our family trusted us and let us free to discover as many towns and cities as we wanted to. Thus, we went to Birmingham, Bristol, Bath, Cardiff and several times to London.



London, Debenhams, Christmas, the iconic double-Decker.

Taking an interest in the new country I was living in and in people I was living with, helped me to overcome homesickness. Of course, you will face it and it's normal but that's also part of the game.

Everyday I realise how lucky I was to meet those amazing people - my friends, my family - and I will always remember this fantastic year lived with them.

Before I left, I didn't know what to expect from this year, but now I can say that it was the best decision I ever made and I wish you to enjoy it as much as I did. I wish you to enjoy discovering a new culture, meeting people but also to enjoy living away from home and discovering more about yourself!

Barbara, High School 2014-15