

## My experience as an exchange student in the UK

Hi, my name is Manon I'm now 18 years old and I did my exchange year in Worcester, England. I decided to do an exchange year when we had 3 exchange students in my class, in Belgium. I spent hours talking to them, asking them questions about their country, their experience, their host family, about everything actually. Their adventure seemed to be perfect for me. I asked my parents about it and then started a lot of research. That is the moment everything started for me.



Obviously the moment to say goodbye to my friends and my family wasn't the easiest moment of my life but I knew that the year that I would have will be amazing and I had to do it. The only problem with the plane is that you have time to think and stress even if it is only a one-hour flight. Even if I emailed my host family a few times before coming, the first meeting is always a bit stressful. So when I arrived at the airport at Birmingham I was extremely stressed but my host mum, Tracy, and my host brother, Fin, were there to hug me with a big smile and help me with all of my bags. Then we simply came home where I could see the other part of the family; Mark, my host dad and Florence and Lilia, my host sisters. Julia, my host sister from Germany only arrived the next day.

I feel like I was really lucky with the host family I had, it is clear that living with 3 young children is not always easy. It is really noisy and you don't have that much time for yourself but they are really helping to make you feel like a part of the family, to keep you busy when you start to feel a bit bored or even to make you smile when you are a bit sad. And I think that I was even luckier to be with another exchange student in the family, Julia, she's a bit younger than me and comes from Germany. We get along really well and do so many things together. We are there for each other to share all of our worries, problems but also moments of happiness. It is just like the support of a real sister.



The English school system is quite different from the one in Belgium. In my school in Belgium we had approximately 12 subjects and started school at 8.15 to finish at 17.00 most of the days. Having only 4 subjects (English, Sociology, Interactive Media and Business for me) and going to school only from 9.00 to 15.20 seemed a bit light for me when I heard about it but it is actually quite nice as you go with more depth into each subject.



And I won't lie to you, the beginning of the year was definitely more tiring for me than the school in my country and because we have dinner earlier in England the day seems to have the same length even when we came home from school at 4 o'clock everyday with Julia. The first days at school were not that easy because even if English people are really friendly and welcoming, they won't come to you first. We took a few days to understand it, to go and speak with them but we finally did with Julia and we found an amazing group of friends.



The other positive thing about having another exchange student in your family is that she wants to discover the country as much as you do, so we did many day trips (Bath, Oxford, the Malvern Hills, Bristol, Cadbury World, ...) with Julia but also longer ones (in Edinburgh, Southport, Liverpool and London) in addition to the day trips that we did with the host family. I knew I liked travelling before but this year made me want to travel even more! This year also made me realise how difficult it was to go somewhere where you don't know anything but also how amazing it is to discover all these things you didn't know; places, cultures, people, language, ...

If you hesitate about doing a year abroad because you don't feel brave and responsible enough, I just want to say: do it, it might change you completely! I wasn't really responsible before coming, I had never taken a train alone for example, but this year completely changed me and taught me things about England but also about myself.

