



Frances

From Kitchener to Australia

*Skiing in Australia? I didn't think it was possible.*

I still find it hard to believe that I've been in the beautiful land of Oz for more than four months. I remember how nervous I was when I got off the plane in Melbourne. A million questions were running through my mind. Would my host family like me? Would I have any friends in school? Would it be awkward? All these worries melted away after I saw the group of people waiting to greet me. Amongst them was my counselor, her husband and my first two host families. They were so kind to me and treated me like I was already a part of their family. It would have been a perfect arrival except that the airline lost my luggage so for the first week I wore my host sister's clothes.

The first week of my exchange consisted of exploring Geelong and the nearby coastal towns as well as figuring out my banking details, school uniform (cringe) and books. Before I knew it, it was the first day of school, it was very scary at first but after the first week I really settled into the school routine and believe it or not I look

forward to going to school now. I know that may sound crazy but I even have come to love the floor length quilt and my navy blue jumper (sweater). In school I am currently taking English, Biology, Chemistry, Legal Studies, as well as German and Japanese.

I could go on forever talking about all the things I've done in the four months I've been here, but I will cover just the highlights. The first was the school Deb Ball. Basically a Deb is a coming of age ceremony where all the girls dress up in white dresses and the guys wear tuxedos and then they dance. It's a very old fashioned concept but it is really quite beautiful to watch. I was a guest and it was incredible watching all my friends looking so amazing and then there was a buffet dinner and we danced until midnight.

The next highlight was a four day trip to Ballarat with my counselor. It began with a trip to the zoo where I got my first good look at all the Australian animals including the Kangaroos which were so tame we could walk up to them and feed them. I also learned a lot about the history of Australia at Sovereign Hill which is a replica of what Ballarat looked like in the 1850's. We also visited all the museums and art galleries in the city. It was a really great trip but I was glad to be back in Geelong.

My next trip was soon after and it was five days of skiing with my high school at Mount Hotham. I still can't believe I went skiing in Australia, I didn't even think that was possible. We left Geelong at 2am and arrived at the ski hill at 10 am and spent the rest of the day skiing. This trip was great because I really got to bond with my school friends and my teachers. We spent all day skiing and snowboarding and the nights were spent around the fire watching ski movies. It was quite cold in the mountain so going back to Geelong where it was 25 degrees was very bizarre.

The last trip I went on which I just returned from was a week in New South Wales and three days in Canberra. I was taken on this trip

by my country person and his wife as well as the exchange student from France that they were hosting.

The first day of the trip was a ten hour car ride from Geelong to Batemans Bay all along the coast of Australia it was so beautiful. The rest of the week included bingo, mini golf, shopping, and swimming in the surf at all the beaches. The highlight was when we went to try surfing and it began to rain, thunder and lightning. The waves were massive and we could barely see in front of us because it was raining so hard but it was something I will never forget. The last three days of our trip we spent in Canberra, the capital city of Australia. We drove two hours inland and spent two days seeing the Parliament buildings, war memorials, the national art gallery and we even visited the Canadian embassy. It was phenomenal and I'm very fortunate that I got to visit Canberra because most exchange students don't get to see it.

The best part about exchange, for me, is the host families and I am already on my third host family. This has been great because over the course of this year I will get to have seven host families and I will get to experience all the different ways of living but it also means that I have to say goodbye to a lot of people that I have gotten really close to over the two months I've lived with them. I would like to finish by thanking Rotary for giving me this incredible experience that will change my life forever.

*Frances Jones*