



Thomas
From Burlington Central
to
France

Colmar is a place right out of a Fairy Tale

Salut!

It has only been three months since I began my adventure here in France yet it feels like I've been here a life time, and it is so hard remembering my life back in Canada. Just a few months before I would of never guessed that I would be living in northeastern province of France. I have only heard of Alsace in history class about how it was just a region that Germany and France fought for during the world wars, but this land has been under dispute for hundreds of years with many Alsatian people having an identity crises. The city I live in; Colmar, feels like you are in Germany. Colmar seems to be right out of a fairytale. Every house is tall but narrow, extremely colourful and with designed wooden crisscross patterns all around the exterior. Before going on exchange it would have been impossible for me to believe such a place existed. Now I am living here for a year. After my first week here it was hard to imagine any other place I could call home other than Alsace. Often we go to Dijon for a weekend and on my way back we pass by a sign that says bienvenue à Alsace that's when I think no matter how nice Dijon was or any other place in Europe is, the only place I belong is here in Alsace.

While my French progresses, my English deteriorates. Nowadays I can barely talk or write in English without an error. Exchange students to France before me have warned me that school in France is not like it is in Canada and that I should consider taking the easier set of courses, but when it came time to pick my class I was put in première. This is equivalent to grade 11, and in France for every grade there are difficulty levels like Canada's academic/applied, but here its L=linguistics (easiest) ES= Economic Sciences (moderate difficulty) and S= Scientific (technically impossible). That day I was feeling overly confident so I decided to go for S because I have always loved sciences and maths....well lets just say it was a huge mistake. Normally everyday of the week I have around 5 to 7 hours of school but all spaced out throughout the day with breaks between classes, so that in total I have around 8 hours a day. On Friday I have exactly 10 hours of school with no breaks, I come to school and at night time and leave school at night time! This may seem like a bad thing but it has given me the opportunity to practice and study my French while building friendships with my classmates and teachers.

District 1680 has been doing a lot to make sure our exchange goes well. Every month they plan a weekend for all the exchange students to meet up and visit the area where we are staying. The first integration weekend was in Belfort (Franche-comte), Belfort is a very nice city and very Parisian which is unlike what we are used to seeing up in Alsace. On this weekend we met each other for the first time and we went through many presentations regarding the overall district, the rules, and bus trip information. The second weekend we had was in Strasbourg (Northern Alsace), there we walked around the city, went to a WW2 underground base, to a chocolatier and a pot making shop. The fun part was when we got back to our hostels we played ping pong and then had a dance put together by the Rotarians. These weekends are very important to the exchange students because for most of us we all live in Alsace and somewhat near each. Others live far away from anyone else down in Franche-Comte so it is wonderful for all of us to get together and meet up with people we haven't seen in a month on these weekends. The next weekend is December 5 and its going to be in Colmar (Mid-Alsace), Where I live !!!!!

It is a huge adventure living in the northeast part of France, there is always something to do and some place to be. From here I can travel to Belgium, Luxembourg, Germany, and Switzerland in less time than if I wanted to go to Paris. In fact every week I go to Germany for my Rotary club meeting, they all speak German and I have no way of understanding what they are saying. It's a great reason to learn an additional language. Thanks to this exchange I have met so many interesting people and done so many things that would have never been possible.

November 2014

I am super excited for the rest of my exchange and I hope it continues to be as fantastic as it is now!

Thomas Lapietra Garcia