



Mackenzie

from Ingersoll

to

Australia

“I don’t speak Australian”

G’day mate! It seems like only yesterday I was saying goodbye to my closest friends and family for a whole year... but I have now been in Australia for four months and what a whirlwind it has been! I remember waving goodbye to my parents and sister for the last time, before stepping into the unknown. The plane ride here was very long, with having to fly around a huge storm while crossing the pacific, my plane actually ran out of fuel and we had to make an emergency stop in Sydney, before getting to Melbourne. I worked it out that I was travelling for a full 30 hours from the time I left my house, to when I arrived at my first host family.

I was welcomed by my first family with lots of hugs, but those greetings were short lived because as soon as I said hello and dropped off my suitcase, I was off to my first Rotary meeting in Australia. If I’m being honest. I don’t remember much from this meeting besides a few hellos. At this point I was so tired from travelling for so long, and the time zone change, I didn’t even know what was going on. One of the first things I noticed when I arrived was all of the slang! When I was walking out to my counselor’s car when she picked me up at the airport, she told me to “chuck my stuff in the boot” and I had no idea what she was talking about. It didn’t take me long to realize that I may speak English, but I definitely don’t speak Australian! When I first got here I found myself asking what a saying or word meant in nearly every conversation I had. Now that I have been here for a few months, I think I have almost got the hang of it. Once I finally got to what would be my first home, I fell right asleep. I was so jetlagged for the first week I was here, I slept almost all day every day. Once I was (finally!!!) back to normal, my counselor took me to get signed up for school, and to buy my school uniform! I was really excited about the uniform, because I don’t have one at my school back in Canada.

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Since I've arrived here four months ago, I have done so many new and exciting things! My first host family was nice enough to take me to so many new places. They took me with them to Melbourne for a few days, which was the first time I had been there since I came from the airport. My host mother took me to see all kinds of iconic things in Melbourne, including Victoria Markets, an art gallery, the Melbourne museum, and that's just to name a few. My favourite thing that we did in Melbourne during this trip was visiting the Shrine of Remembrance. This building was built to remind people of all the damage the war had done to the world, and to remind people to never let it happen again. Here we saw a lot of artifacts from World War Two, and I got to learn a lot about Australia's part in the war. It was really interesting to read about it from Australians point of view.

Since this trip, I have been to Melbourne a few times and done many other things, like the Eureka Sky Deck, which is the tallest building in Melbourne. You get to take an elevator all the way to the top and look out at the city. It is really an amazing sight, and you can see everything! I also had the amazing opportunity to go to the Melbourne Show! The show is like what we in Canada would call a fair, so I spent the day going on rides and playing different fair games. I also got some show bags, which are little bags that you buy filled with whatever you want. I got a Caramello Koala show bag, which is a show bag filled with one of my favourite Aussie snacks, Caramello Koalas! Since I have been to Melbourne a few times now, I have gotten to know my way around on the city trams. I am pretty confident in getting around the city, which means that now I get to go into Melbourne on my own to meet up with my friends! Some of my absolute favourite days in Melbourne have been when I got to meet up with other exchange students and just explore the city. One of my all-time favourite days in Australia so far was when I got to go into the city with a few other exchange students and watch the AFL (Australian Rules Football) Grand Final at Federation Square. Fed Square was full of footy supporters of both teams, and the atmosphere was amazing. It was almost like being at the live game!

I live on the border of Victoria and New South Wales, in a little town called Swan Hill. Although the town has a small population of twelve thousand people, there's always an event going on here. Swan Hill is surrounded by farmland, just like the town I live in in Canada, so it really reminds me of home. Although our towns are similar in some ways, Swan Hill looks nothing like Tillsonburg. Here the landscape is so flat, there isn't a hill anywhere near (despite it being called Swan HILL). It is also so dry here. The area I live in gets, on average, thirty centimeters of rain a year, so this has been a real change, compared to where I live in Canada where it is so green and lush almost all the time. Although it is really different, I absolutely love everything about it here. I have already made such amazing friends here, and I am so excited to see what else is in store.

I'd really love to thank all the Rotarians at home in District 7080, and here in 9780 for volunteering their time to help me get here and allowing me to have the best experience of my life. Thank you to my parents for letting me go on this adventure and thank you to all my host parents for opening your home to me and allowing me to become part of your family and showing me the Australian culture. I am so grateful to every single person who has been a part of this journey.

Cheers,

Mackenzie