

Aurora

from Brampton to Argentina

"To the most challenging 3 months of my life!"

Introduction

I was never one to shy away from challenges. They excite me and I am always looking for a new one to take on. When I heard about Rotary Youth Exchange I thought "what a cool opportunity to live in another country and experience another culture for a whole year." And nothing more. But, as I dove deeper in to what it really means to be an exchange student, my thoughts changed to "sounds like a challenge. Now bring it on."

My first 3 months has been the most challenging 3 months of my life. A new home, a new culture, a new language- needless to say, it has been quite the experience adjusting to Argentinian culture. It feels odd to say I live in Argentina and not Canada. A year ago, life was so different. I would never imagine I would be living the dream and I am so incredibly thankful to Rotary for making this dream a true reality (although it still feels like I am in a dream).

Saying goodbye to my family and friends and my life in Canada was challenge number 1 out of the 500 more I am inevitably going to face this year. With a year full of laughs, cries, fun, and not-so fun times ahead of me; I got on a plane and flew 8000km away from everything I have ever known to take on possibly the biggest challenge of my life.

Bienvenida a Formosa, Argentina!

After 22 hours of travelling I finally arrived in Paraguay and had another 2-hour drive through to Formosa- the city where I will be staying for my exchange year. I was greeted by my younger host sister, my host mom, and my host grandfather (who speaks 8 different languages!).



At the airport in Toronto saying goodbye!

Me with my younger host sister and host grandfather at the airport!



When I came through the airport gates my mother greeted me with a kiss on each cheek. Now that was something to get use to. Argentina is a very affectionate country. Greeting each other with a kiss on each cheek is a sign of respect. A few weeks after my landing, I had my first Interact event and might have forgotten to greet people with a kiss on the cheek. This was the first, of many, major cultural difference that shined through, it was a traditional custom I was not use to. I soon realized that I might have come off as odd or even disrespectful to some of the Argentinian people but I promise, I just did not know it was a sign of respect. 3 months later, I now know that I must greet everyone with a kiss on each cheek, even if it is a room filled with 50 people!

Como es tu español?

Prior to my departure, I had very little exposure to Spanish. Other than hearing "Despacito" on the radio constantly, I had no vocabulary in this language whatsoever. When I got here, Spanish sounded like gibberish. I had no idea what people were saying. In class one day, a classmate asked me if how many brothers and sisters I have in Canada and I responded with "yes." Now 3 months later, I am slowly but surely picking up on the language. I can ask the teacher to use the washroom and ask my mom if I can hang out with my friends. I can have very simple and short conversations with my classmates about things like what I did over the weekend, what type music I listen to, and what I had for dinner the night before.

"Vamos a comer!"

The food here took me a little bit of time to get used to. However, I am learning to love it more and more everyday. There are a lot of distinctions between meals in Canada and meals in Argentina. Firstly, breakfast is traditionally biscuits and tea. This is quite different in Canada as I usually have eggs, bacon, sausages, and toast on the weekends and cereal and fruit or bagels on weekdays. Breakfast in Argentina is very small however, I was lucky to be placed with a family who is incredibly understanding and buy me fruit and cereal for the mornings. Next, lunch is their biggest meal whereas in Canada, dinner is our biggest meal. Lunch usually consist of a type of protein like chicken or eggs with a side of some sort of pasta. My family also eats a lot of pumpkin and baked potatoes included in our lunch. Lunch is usually at noon or 1pm.

Finally, dinner usually consist of leftovers from lunch or something small like a slice of *Pascualina* which is sort of like a pie with a spinach filling and topped with boiled eggs and cheese. Dinner is usually eaten at 9pm or later here in Argentina and that was quite an adjustment. In Canada, dinner is at 7pm and rarely 8pm.



In between lunch and dinner there is the Canadian equivalent of snack time. Usually my family drinks Mate which is a traditional Argentinian drink that taste similar to green tea but a little more bitter, with biscuits or fruit. I tried Mate and I am not a huge fan (I know, I'm sorry!) but I do like Terere which is the cold version of mate. Argentina has a wide variety of different foods that I learnt to love very quickly.



Chiapas is another snack food in Argentina that consists of baked bread with cheese inside. I could go on and on about all the wonderful food here in Argentina but that would take me way too long but the food is incredible and just like any other culture- it plays an integral role in the culture here in Argentina.

And the Empanada, another traditional Argentinian food



Gracias para la vida

Every day I fall a little more in love with my new life. On weekdays I start my days at 6:30am and get to school by 7:30am. School finishes at noon and I come home for "siesta." Siesta is a collective nap time that last usually from 1pm-5pm. During Siesta, all the shops and stores also close down. After that I usually go for a run with my friend or go to gym class at school. Then I come home, shower, study Spanish or just relax and have dinner and then go to bed. Every weekend I am always doing something new. Whether it be travelling with my family, hanging out with friends, or attending an Interact event, I try to keep busy. A few weeks ago my family and I went to Santa Fe which is an 8-hour drive from Formosa, where I am staying. It is a beautiful city with a lot of history behind it. Even though it has only been 3 months, I have grown a very close and strong bond with the other exchange students in my city. They are like family to me and we often meet on the weekends to talk about our week. My first 3 months had been nothing short of exciting. All though it indeed presented itself with many obstacles and challenges, I have learnt to embrace them as they come. Exchange has taught me a lot but most of all it has taught me to be grateful for everything I have here in Argentina and back home in Canada. There will never be enough words to fully encompass this experience. I am beyond grateful I was given this opportunity. I am learning so much about the world and myself as the days go by and I hope to continue to grow throughout this journey.

Here in Argentina, we greet each other with two kisses and we also say goodbye the same way so,

Besos!

Aurora



My first Rotary meeting



With my younger host sister in Santa Fe!

At the beach with my friends





Enjoying pastelitos, traditional Argentinian desert