



# Liam

from Mississauga West  
to  
Brazil

## *“A Deep Puddle”*

At this moment I’m wondering where do I even begin? I’m not asking if I should start somewhere other than the beginning but rather where exactly is the beginning? You could say it began when I landed here in Brazil, a paradise of a country or you could also say it began all the way back in the fall of last year. For me, it’s all kind of muddled, a deep puddle of events and emotions more so than a line constrained by time to a specific order. So in this moment I reached into this puddle and chose where I thought it was logical to call the “Start”, only a few days before my flight to what was promised to be the best year of my life.



The week leading up to my flight was not stressful or sad. I hadn't even really taken it in that I was flying to a completely different country for a whole year! Or maybe I had, I can't pick out the details very well, I can only tell you that I spent that week surrounded by my family and friends, the people who loved me and cared that I would be leaving them for an entire year of their lives. I wasted no time in that week saying goodbye to those who would listen. I spent the hours before my flight answering the

same question over and over “How do you feel?”. I always gave the same answer saying that I was nervous but more excited than anything. That was a lie. The truth was I did not know how I was feeling or how to respond to these people who wanted a genuine answer about something even I was unsure of, so I gave what I thought would be the most believable. I still don't know how I felt exactly but I think it was more me reciprocating the feelings of those around me and trying to sympathise with them.



*Photos of me and some of my family the day of my flight*

Flying was rather pleasant. I had another exchange student from America on my flight so that made it a bit easier. Arriving at the airport was the hard part. I got there and found my family immediately and was very excited. They were nice and welcoming however I felt they didn't really try to communicate with me. They seemed to talk amongst themselves more than try to get to know me, but then again maybe that was just me being tired. After a while I fell asleep until we got something to eat. I remember being confused as to how everything worked and what was going on, I was terrified. Once at the house it was quiet. I put my stuff in my room and went to see what was going on. From what I can remember we didn't really do anything until dinner where I met my host dad and brother. After this first meal I was excited to get to know them better. The next two weeks were filled with meeting new people and making friends. I got especially close with my host sister who then had to leave for her exchange in Germany. I met many people through her and her friends including a couple of other exchange students in my city. Since then the other exchange students and I have become a close-knit family who will be there for each other no matter what.

About a month into my exchange I had become accustomed to my homelife and was ready to stir up my life once again. Luckily for me it was about this time that my district had their Inbound orientation. Over this weekend I finally got to meet the people I had been talking to online in person. The weekend was amazing! We got to know each other through our time on water slides and in pools, singing, dancing and music. Finding passions in common and even if you didn't have anything directly in common there was always the food to bond us. This weekend left us wanting to see more of each other. This had us longing even more for The Big Trip that we would have in a few months where we would all be reunited for almost three weeks this time, but until then we strengthened our relationships with those in our city along with our family and other friends.



*Exchange students to D4510, Brazil, 2018-2019*

The following two or so months went fast but felt like they lasted a lifetime. Around this time I was having quite a few issues at school. I was really struggling to stay positive but after talking to Rotary here and working out an agreement we decided I would try a new school. Although it was a difficult hill to climb in my exchange, I grew a lot because of it. It forced me to become more resilient and outgoing. It also brought out a creative side of me that I really liked. I began writing and because of it I have improved immensely. Around this time, I also got to have my good friend Lucas, a 2017-2018 inbound student in my District in Canada come over. That was one of the best weekends I've had here. We went out with my other friends to a basketball game, we made pasta, well he made it, I just helped eating it. We ate peanut butter and listened to music, REALLY LOUD!

I had a couple of firsts during this time; I went to my first wedding, took my first domestic flight to Rio de Janeiro where I also swam in the ocean for the first time in my life. Although it rained the whole time I was there, Rio was definitely one of the highlights of my exchange so far. I was very lucky to have been put into a family that could and was willing to take me on that amazing adventure. While in Rio, I really showed just how much I have grown. My family and I went out for dinner and I overheard two ladies speaking English. I had this urge to go talk to them and for a minute. I was hesitant and not sure if I was going to be able to approach them, but then I just made up my mind that I was going to do it. I ended up having a good conversation with them and ran into them the next day as well. This is something I never would have had the courage to do at the beginning of my year here. I was so proud that I got up the courage to introduce myself, that I had never been able to do before.



*Basketball game with Lucas and friends*



*Rio de Janeiro*

Finally, it was time to go on our big adventure with all the other exchange students! We left at midnight and the day leading up to that night seemed to go on for eternity. When it was time to leave for the bus I was overcome with excitement! The other exchange students in my city and I waited anxiously for the bus to arrive. When it did, we all rushed to our friends, who we hadn't seen in months. Once on the bus, we all danced and sang to music almost all the way to the airport, a four hour drive away. As we waited for our flight it was a great opportunity to talk and catch up. The flight was quiet as most people slept after partying on the bus all night.

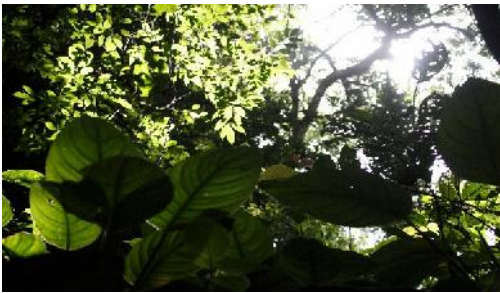
The first couple nights we stayed in a small town outside of Manaus which is the nearest major city. We went to rapids and lagoons for the first two days and then it was time to spend the next four days on a boat. Many people were not looking forward to being stuck on a boat with 44 other teenagers for four days. Being in the forest with blazing heat didn't help the thought that it wouldn't be the most enjoyable experience. Unlike most, I was very excited and ready to stay in close quarters with these amazing people. As I thought it would, it brought everyone closer together and although it was difficult to do certain things such as clean, it was a bonding experience like no other.

Unfortunately, many people got sick on the boat along with the following few days. Around 13 people had to go to the hospital due to illness. Once most people got over the severe sickness, we could do the activities we had planned. We did a lot of driving and going to many tourist spots.



We went to one town called Jericoacoara. Known for windsurfing and amazing sunsets, this paradise is in the middle of a desert and is not very easily accessible. We spent three days in this amazing place. In that time I witnessed the most beautiful sunset of my life, saw my first desert and got sand in and on everything. The next few places were just as beautiful. We spent a couple days in a self-sustaining community hostel where we went vegan for two days. All I can say is it was a different experience. Over these 20 days I took over 3,000 photos and over five hours of video. Obviously I can't put the videos in and I also can't put 3,000 photos in so here are a few of my favorites.

## *Liam*



*Leaves of the Amazon*



*Arachnid found while exploring a cave in the amazon*



*The Canadian in district 4510*



*Me and my Roommates for the trip*



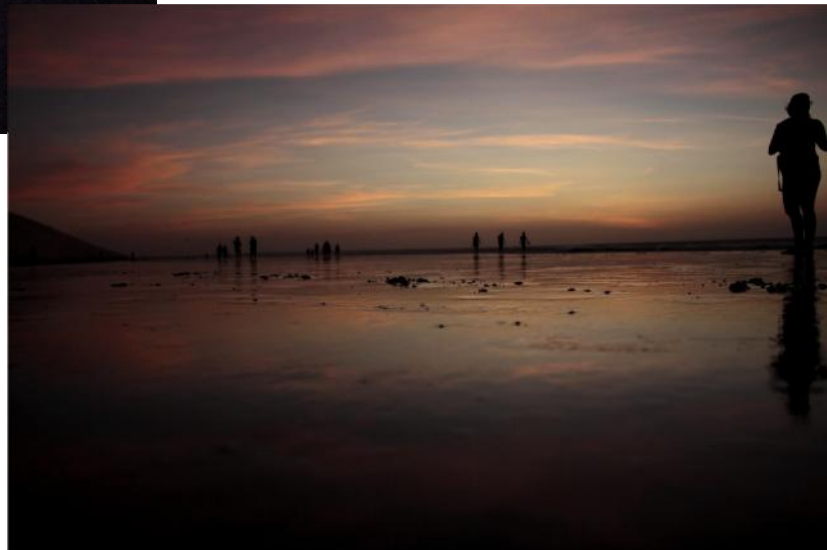
*Sunset from our boat*



*A mask from the indigenous tribe we visited*



*Lightning storm while on the boat*



*Sunset on the beach in Jericoacoara*



*Sunset while on our way to the beach by the Hostel*



*Jam session with percussion teachers in Salvador*