

Interview with Charlotte, who came from Taiwan to spend a year in a class of 2°.

Is it your first stay in France?

Yes, I had never been to France before.

Why did you choose to come to France for one year?

I came with the Rotary exchange program ; you can choose the country where you want to go ; I wanted to learn French because I think that French is a very beautiful language. I had 3 host families, I changed every term.

What difficulties did you have to face when you arrived,

I didn't really miss my country ; it was really easy for me to leave my family and to adapt to France because I had already done an exchange program for one month in England; and the school system is similar to the one in Taiwan.

I had to speak French because my host families didn't speak English (the same with her friends in the class) so it was difficult at first.

What differences are there between school in France and Taiwan?

Well in Taiwan you can not go out the school and there is a lot of pressure from teachers; there is more freedom in France and you must be responsible for yourself (the teachers don't push you and you must learn yourself) ; in France people are more sportive (people go for a walk after lunch) and you have to talk to French people first but most people are friendly.

Did you enjoy the visits?

I was chocked that Paris is not clean ,I don't understand why Paris is the city of love ; people in the 'metro' are strange ; but it was nice to visit many museums, buildings.

Are you satisfied with this exchange?

Yes, because I speak better French; and my host families were very nice with me and showed me a lot of cities (Marseille, Paris, Avignon, Bordeaux...). I would recommend people to do an exchange if they want to learn a foreign language, because if you leave your country for another country it is easier to learn the language.

What are you going to miss when you go back to Taiwan?

I'm going to miss the baguette; I love French food (it looks fancy) but Asian food is healthier; I visited French cities and buildings (Paris, Marseille, La Rochelle, Bordeaux...) and I will miss the opportunity to visit more places.

I know that I will come back in France one day, even if I don't know when!

An interview with Vanessa, an Italian student who spent a year in a class of 1°.

Why did you chose to study for a year in France?

First I decided to spend a year abroad because for my studies it's really important to spend a year in a foreign country; at first I wanted to go to Germany, because I really love German; but then I spoke with my family, teachers, and came to the decision to come to France, as French is the language I mastered the least.

What was your integration like?

It was good with my host family, I get on well with them; I didn't have any particular problem, and now when they spot something related to Italy they mention it to me; My integration in the school and class was great, I thought I wouldn't make any friends but I did.

What difficulties did you have to face?

When I arrived people said I spoke good French, but sometimes I missed the vocabulary to say what I needed; also, I was a bit shy and going to meet other people was difficult; I only spoke to a couple of people, but then I became more extrovert and it was easier to make new friends; with my host family I had to discover how they worked, and I missed Italy; I still do! I had to get used to school here, the schedules...

Were you afraid before you came over?

Yes; before I actually came I was really scared because I didn't know how people would react, I was afraid I wouldn't get on well with my host family, that I would have to change families; I was afraid of being far away from Italy, and of missing it, as I never went back home, not even for Christmas.

Do you feel your French has improved?

I would say I improved my French to a B2/C1 level; I still need to improve my oral skills, as I still make mistakes as far as word order is concerned; vocabulary also is a problem sometimes, and when people talk to fast I have trouble understanding.

Do you prefer Italian or French schools?

That is difficult! The positive thing here is that you have 6 weeks of school followed by 2 weeks off; in Italy we have 3 months vacation in summer, and we begin the 12th or 15th September, to end on the 9th June. We have only a few days of vacation, 2 weeks at Christmas and 1 week for Easter; we can go for months without any vacation; I also like the fact that in France the classes change every hour; in Italy the students are always together in the same class for all high school. The last thing is that I like the fact that in Italy we have all afternoons off except for one. The days are long in France.

Did you visit any other places in France?

I cannot say that, as I visited mainly alsace; I also spend 4 days in Paris with the other exchange students, which was great.

Would you say this experience was worth it?

It was worth it, because I improved my language skills, and for the people I met; I gained in maturity; I feel more confident about languages; I had a few stereotypes about French people, for example I thought that French people would not understand my pronunciation and would remark on my accent; I also realized nobody in France would walk around with a beret and a baguette under their arms; in Italy there is a rivalry between French and Italian people, and in France I didn't sense this sense of rivalry.

Would you recommend this experience to other students?

I will certainly recommend my fellow students in Italy to spend a year abroad, to meet new people, practise the language, and fight stereotypes; it's important for your self-development.