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Girl Meets France

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Published: Friday, February 5, 2010

Updated: Friday, February 5, 2010

Bonjour from Antibes, France! Glad you joined me today as I begin my journey abroad this semester. It has been a whirl-wind adventure so far, and to think I have only been overseas for a few days. Nevertheless, I am here in Antibes on an exchange program through Western Carolina University's International Programs and Services department. After weeks of planning, a lot of paperwork, and an acceptance letter I am here in France.



I first want to start by explaining my purpose for this piece and what I hope you [the reader] will end up learning. For starters, if you think that studying abroad seems like a difficult and tedious process that only an elite few can partake in, you are right... to an extent. It is a long process of filling out paperwork, gathering information, and filing for specific documents, but the reality is anyone can do it. Let me say that one more time, anyone can do it. It might take some time, but the end result can be worth your while. Secondly, I want you to see that adjusting to life in a foreign country is hard, but you learn something new on a daily basis that a textbook cannot teach you. Lastly, I want you to venture out of your shell and see that the world is there waiting for you to grab it and travel. But enough about what I want you to learn let me tell you a little bit about what it has been like for me.

It was Dec. 31, 2009 and I found myself sitting in the Atlanta airport, in the international terminal, waiting for my flight to begin boarding. It was ten till eight and in a matter of minutes I would begin the first part of my 8 hour flight to London, England. I felt every nerve in my body tingling, every thought raced through my brain, I was leaving the United States and I would not be returning for 4 and a half months. I kept repeating that over and over again in my head. What was I doing? How did I get myself into this? The questions just kept coming. Suddenly it hit me; I was going to France to take classes. I was going to France to enrich my international ideas, to learn a new language, and to broaden my horizons.

Those remaining few minutes seemed to pass pretty quickly, as I was on the plane, in my seat, ready to take off. When you get on an airplane for your first international flight there are about a hundred things that pop in your head. I was nervous, I was excited, I had every emotion one could possibly feel. My flight was 8 hours long, mainly because of the time change; it's a six hour difference to be exact. I flew British Airways, which has to be the best airline to fly. You got free drinks, alcoholic and non-alcoholic, they serve you two meals, dinner and breakfast, and they had the friendliest staff I have ever encountered on an airplane. With all of those factors in play I became less nervous, and extremely calm. The biggest problem I had with the flight was not being able to sleep. Sitting straight up, in between two people, is not an easy task. I would highly suggest that all you future flyers ask for either a window or an aisle seat, they seemed a lot easier to stretch and lean against. I made that a mental note to myself.

I landed in London Heathrow airport at 9:45 a.m. London time, which was 4:45 a.m. Eastern Time. Heathrow

airport, if you've never been, is a mix between a large airport and a shopping mall. It is massive. Everything in the shops were duty-free and you were allowed to purchase everything from makeup to alcohol. From London I had one more flight to Nice, France. After I walked around the "shopping mall" it was finally time to finish the last leg of my trip. Only two hours, with another time change, and I would be in Nice.

I finally landed in Nice, France on Jan. 1, 2010 around 6:30 p.m. Keep in mind it was New Years Day, and the only celebration I took part in was a sip of wine and saying "Happy New Year" to myself. It was a bit upsetting, but once I looked out the window of the airport that quickly changed. I lucked out and found a driver to pick me up at the airport, had I not there were about a hundred cabs just sitting outside waiting for passengers to grab one. The driver picked me up and we headed to my new apartment. On the way there, even though it was the evening, I could still see the waves crashing up against the shoreline, the lights that were still up from Christmas and the New Year, and the realization that I would be living here for 4 and a half months. Could life get any better?

It has been six days now and all the happiness and excitement slowly diminished as I became homesick rather quickly. The one thing I would recommend to everyone before they leave the states is to make sure you have an international calling plan with your cell phone company. I thought I did but once I arrived in France my cell phone had absolutely no service. This issue was the primary reason the homesick bug latched on to me so soon. Even being homesick I am keeping my head up and my mind open for a better tomorrow. I was so excited on the way here, and I know it will eventually come back to me. After all, this is a once in a lifetime opportunity and I am doing it. Not only that but I am in France. It is like the great Forrest Gump use to say, "Life is like a box of chocolates, you never know what you're gonna get."

I'm curious to see how classes over here are going to be set up. It should be interesting. Keep your eyes peeled for my next issue, to see what kind of adventures happen next. Hopefully things here on the other side of the pond will get better as the semester continues.