

Erasmus report

Hi! I'm Giovanni Paolo and I'm a guy who left to go on Erasmus for a week in France more or less about two weeks ago. When I found out that I had been chosen to go on Erasmus I almost couldn't believe it and I was very happy to be able to pack my bags and leave. We stayed for a week precisely in a school (Lycée de la Venise Verte) in Niort, a town in New Aquitaine. Although I didn't know the city before Erasmus, I found it really nice and welcoming. The stereotype of the grumpy Frenchman is completely false! The French people welcomed me very well and I stayed for a week at the house of a French girl called Anaël. She and her parents Amélie and Lionel welcomed me really well and I immediately felt at home. Their house is very spacious and they left me the room of their brother who is now studying at university in another town. They even have a dog called Una. Luckily I was hosted by a family who spoke English quite well, even the parents. In fact, it can be a bit scary to go and live in a family where no one speaks English because, as a student in a classical school, I only know how to speak English. I actually studied French in middle school but I don't remember that much. In reality this obstacle is only temporary: once you are totally immersed in a new culture you need some time to learn the basics of the language but then you get used to it! As for the activities that the French offered us, I must say that I really liked them and France, although we didn't see much, is really beautiful. We did several excursions and tours to other cities including La Rochelle, Marais Poitevin and Niort. When we were in La Rochelle we visited the Maritime Museum, the city center and even went on the Ferris wheel. The guys were really nice to accompany us throughout the city and let us try the local specialties. I liked it a lot because despite being a historic city it still has lots of modern attractions and shops and is really pleasant to visit. When we went to Marais Poitevin we took a canoe ride on the river and in the canals built on site. It was my first time canoeing and I had a lot of fun also because we weren't experts and we often crashed into trees. Finally we went to Niort to visit the center and above all the market which sells many typical local foods. For example, from the market we bought the delicious Tourteau Fromager which I honestly didn't know and which I would never have tasted if I hadn't come here. The funniest part of all was when, on the last day, we all dressed up in masks; they called it *déguisements*. In French schools, before the April holidays, they always get "degused". The thing that amazed me was that everyone was dressed up, even the teachers and the headmaster, and the costumes were really fun! I was dressed as a prisoner, a costume that a classmate of mine had lent me for the occasion as I didn't have one, but the other guys had very elaborate and wonderful costumes.

Although I have made some trips in my life before this, the Erasmus project gave me the opportunity to get to know and learn new things. This was the first time I went to live with a family and compared to other trips abroad it was definitely very different and more realistic. When you go living with a family you realize the true lifestyle of a people and you get used to their ways of doing things, something you don't do by staying in a hotel with other Italian guys you know. It's a much more stimulating experience because you're always forced to talk to people you don't know and you never know what to expect. In fact, if I had gone to a hotel I would have learned much less than what I learned at Anaël's home. I'm so happy to have spent a week in France and I also really miss the people I met. I hope to be able to return there in the future. I am grateful to have had such an experience and I recommend everyone to have a similar one.

Logbook

Sunday 7 April 2024:

Today we finally left for our Erasmus in France. I spent the first part of the morning finishing my suitcase and my luggage, which ironically turned out to be slightly heavier than allowed, and then me, Rosetta, another girl from the same school I attend, and another friend of hers were went for a coffee at the bar to chat a bit. After having lunch, like every Sunday at my grandmother's house, I returned to my house and waited for the right time to arrive to go to the airport. To optimize time, Rosetta, Greta and I went in her mother's car and we arrived at the airport. Since the flight was around eight o'clock, at half five we were all at the airport ready to do the usual checks. After waiting a while we had dinner in front of our gate and as soon as it opened we boarded. Among other things, while waiting, I also learned that I had been accepted for a piano project in Toscana that will take place in July and this news made my day a lot better, as if Erasmus wasn't already enough. We arrived in Bordeaux and after an hour and a half by car we arrived at the hotel around 1.30 am. The hotel wasn't even bad but we were very tired and after washing we went to bed.

Monday 8 April 2024:

After a wake-up call at six thirty in the morning and an excellent French breakfast of croissants and pain au chocolat we went to catch the flibus at around ten thirty which would take us to Niort. As much as I would have loved to visit Bordeaux, I was really happy to be able to meet the family who would host me and therefore I was very happy. Arriving around half past one, we finally met our correspondents and some French students took us on a tour of the school. The French students were really nice and gave us a warm welcome. As for the school, however, I must say that it is really great! They showed us dozens and dozens of classrooms, laboratories, the enormous library and the area intended for students. Not to mention the sports area which seemed to be used for truly professional players and not for high school students. There was even a small music room with a half-broken piano which I played anyway. The thing that struck me most was the fact that the students had a huge space just for them with lots of games and lots of sofas where they could relax. However, I find it excessive that they leave at 5.40pm in the afternoon: they have an hour and forty lunch break and five minutes every hour to relax and change classes. Compared to the ten minutes of Italian recreation it is much, much more! However, I prefer the Italian system because leaving school early allows you to have more free time in the afternoon, if you know how to manage your homework well. Anyway, we took a biology lesson in the afternoon until the bell rang and then together with our correspondents we went home. The journey to school from the house where I lived was about thirty-five minutes. In fact, I was sleeping at the house of a French girl named Anaël who lives in a small village called Mauzé-sur-le-Mignon with three thousand inhabitants. The girl and her friend Charlotte often went to and from school together because they live very close by. That day Charlotte's father accompanied me home together with Anaël and as soon as we arrived home I was welcomed by her parents, Amélie and Lionel, and her little dog, Una di lei. They were very very welcoming and really appreciated the dry sweets that I brought them from Italy in my suitcase. After eating they were all very tired and went to bed early. After a refreshing shower I did the same.

Tuesday 9 April 2024

Today we went to La Rochelle, a large seaside town that I loved. As main attractions we visited the Maritime Museum which traces the entire history of the navigations carried out in this place. There was also a large ship set up that we were able to visit. Afterwards we visited the city and to do so our English teacher decided to propose an activity that the French students helped us do as they had an application that we did not have. In practice it was a kind of treasure hunt and in the end the treasure was nothing more than a pin that everyone took. This treasure hunt allowed us to visit the entire city which we explored by solving fun riddles based on what we saw. After finishing this activity we headed towards a large square where we had our packed lunch. In fact, the family who was hosting me provided me with a packed lunch complete with sandwiches, dessert, fruit and many other things. However, we wanted to try something typical and the French students advised us to go to an ice cream shop and buy some ice cream because, according to them, it was really good. Having bought this ice cream I can confirm this, but Italian ice cream is much less dense than French ice cream and is much creamier. In fact, I suppose that in the French one they don't put as much milk as we do. After the ice cream we went for a tour of the shops in the city and the thing that surprised me the most was that La Rochelle is both a historic and commercial city. In fact the city was full of shops, even very difficult to find in a historic city in Italy. For example, I found a really nice shop, where I purchased a Funko Pop, superhero, anime and manga item that would be truly impossible to find in Italy! The city, in fact, is full of very particular shops that sell very particular, expensive and beautiful products. We even went to the Ferris wheel! I would have liked to stay longer, but we had the return train to Niort and so we were afraid of being late. Back in our little village we went to the bakery where we bought some snacks which we ate for our *goûte* (afternoon snack). We then returned home where we had dinner after a snack. Amélie's cooking was very good. In fact, before coming to France I was afraid that French cuisine might not be very good, but I must say that compared to Italian cuisine it is not too different and they also know how to cook quite well. After dinner we went to bed because almost all of us were tired. Unfortunately I didn't spend much time with my correspondent today because she had an exam and so she wasn't able to come with us for a tour of the city but she stayed at school. You will have more tests both tomorrow and the day after. In fact, you are in your final year and for this reason you have to take the final exams required for your course. Furthermore, today my correspondent's father left for work reasons and apparently he will return on Friday, so I, the correspondent and her mother are left in the house.

Wednesday 10 April 2024

Like every morning here in France we woke up at 6:30 and waited for them to pick us up in the car so we could go to Niort. We went to a small village called Marais Poitevin. The place was really characteristic and there was a large river with several canals that we crossed with the canoe in the afternoon. In the morning, like the previous day we did an activity that allowed us to better explore the surrounding area. After the activity we went to get the boats and split into some groups and I personally was with Greta, a girl from the same school as me who went with me, and other French students. We did the canoe activity which was a lot of fun, because being inexperienced we often crashed into trees. Once we finished the canoe we went to get the car together with Anaël and her friend Rachel who took us back to Mauzé-sur-le-Mignon. Rachel was often with her correspondent Tommaso who will come to sleep with me on Friday because she is part of her. Together we took a

long walk in the village which, despite being very small, is really cute and has some really beautiful villas. When we returned home, exhausted, we ate and went straight to bed.

Thursday 11 April 2024

Today we went to Niort. Finally I was able to see the city center where the high school where we attend is also located. The city is very similar to La Rochelle, but it is smaller. There are many shops but since we went in the morning, most of them were closed and we didn't see much. We stayed all morning walking around the city center. We saw the market in particular which is a place where there are many local products, including sweets, cured meats and cheeses. We also took a tour in front of the castle called Dungeon. The castle has medieval origins and unfortunately we were unable to enter. We continued our tour but then immediately returned to the bus because we had to have our lunch in the cafeteria. In fact the school has a canteen/cafeteria called where students can stop and have lunch as they stay until 5:40 in the afternoon. In the afternoon, however, we gave Italian lessons to the French students. It was very fun because we had to introduce ourselves in Italian, using very simple words. Thanks to these lessons, I realized that when I speak in Italian I tend to speak very quickly and very often the French cannot understand what I say. We also did the opposite experiment: the French had to introduce themselves in French using very simple words. However, I often struggled to understand them because they really speak very quickly. We have also explained the typical gestures that Italians use while speaking. In fact, many of these were not known to the French who had various stereotypes towards us which we however have dispelled. Once the lesson was done we went back to Anaël's house and we were very happy because the next day we could dress up. In fact we started taking our clothes and wearing them to see how we looked. She was dressed as a cowboy and I was dressed as a prisoner, so we were matched! After taking a shower I immediately went to sleep because we were quite tired.

Friday 12 April 2024

Today is a day of celebration because it is dress-up day! In fact, in France there is the custom of dressing up extravagantly the day before the end of school. In fact, they have a lot of holidays, many more than we do because they work longer hours and organize them differently so that they can have more days off. For example, in April (which we don't do) they have a two-week break in which many people go on trips. My correspondent had booked a trip to Rome right around that time Anaël and Rachel were even happier because today is Rachel's eighteenth. In fact she dressed up as a birthday cake. Since we woke up at 6:30 we waited for Rachel's mother to arrive to take us to school. We arrived at school and there was a festive atmosphere. They were all dressed extravagantly. even the teachers! In the morning I took an advanced English course and the professor wore a unique Polynesian dress. Continuing the day I went to the music room because, having some free hours, I wanted to spend them playing a bit also because I haven't played for a long time. After having lunch in the cafeteria we went outside the school where there was a huge party and all the students were dressed extravagantly, dancing, running and having fun. In the afternoon we continued to have lessons in Italian. This time the kids were older and there were some kids who managed to understand a little more than last time because they were third year kids (which in Italy would be fourth year kids). We continued to have lessons until 5:40 when the bell rang and we went home by train. It was really nice because it's something that we are never used to doing in Italy and therefore when we see it abroad it seems very strange. I really enjoyed myself and I hope everyone can have an experience like this at least once in their life. In Italy, on the last day there are often no people at

school either because everyone drops out or because they leave early and therefore the party atmosphere that I actually found in France is lost. It was truly a wonderful day. Finally, Tommaso came to live at my correspondent's house and so we share the house. He's a good person and he's nice so I get on well with him.

Saturday 13 April 2024

Today was a bit of a special day. It was a bit sad because I knew we would have to leave the next day but I also quite enjoyed it because we spent a lot of time together in the morning. My correspondent's father took us to the center of Niort where I bought the last souvenirs. Since there were no elections, not all the students and teachers participated but only those who cared most. This excursion was truly beautiful. Unfortunately the castle was closed so we did a sightseeing tour of the city and then in the afternoon we went to the shopping center at the trampoline park. It was really fun, although not just a very sporty person and so I got tired of it before long. We went home by bus. We first had dinner and then made popcorn which we ate while we watched Fast and Furious 1. At the end of the film we went to sleep sleepily.

Sunday 14 April 2024

Today is our last day in France. We woke up quite late (around half past nine) and then went to have breakfast. I wrote a little note in French to the family that I tried to read in the language without too much success, but it was fun. Then the mother accompanied us to the flixbus stop where she left us the last time. One guy even went to buy some sweets that we ate on the bus. After we said goodbye the flixbus took us to Bordeaux and then we went to the airport by train. We had the train at half past five and so we were already doing the checks at three. We arrived in Italy around eight o'clock and from there Rosetta's parents picked us up and accompanied us home.