

My Time in Australia

My time in Australia was one of the most life changing experiences, an experience constructed of endless fond memories. I think back to my time there every day, it just feels so surreal that BASET gave me this wonderful experience. I had a network of generous kind supportive people out there and I never once felt like I was not with any family, between Mrs Lee, my two families and James I always had somebody to turn to. I definitely felt the huge benefit of the long journey there being able to travel with James, so I am hugely grateful BASET generously funded for both of us to go there. My experience in Australia was amazing from the moment I touched down, it just felt so surreal that I was actually there, and to be greeted so kindly by Mrs Lee it didn't feel like I was in a foreign country with nobody but James.

My first family was the Le Maistre family between them all I cannot describe in words the amount each of them did for me every day and how they went above and beyond to make me feel comfortable in their home, it was an extremely hard goodbye when I left them. For the first week both myself and James attended the Haileybury Brighton campus which was an excellent school, with great staff, facilities and just a generally lovely school environment (somewhere you would want to go and learn). On the Friday we went to an AFL game which was probably the highlight of my entire experience, as I grew up playing a range of sports and going to games to have gone to a key rival match (Richmond vs Collingwood) at the MCG was mesmerising. Georgina who was the same age as me also took me on a tour of the city in Melbourne and all of its unique and wonderful attractions which was brilliant, also that evening we went to St Kilda to the end of the pier where we watched all the Fairy Penguins return to their nests in the rocks, they were beautiful. On a day she was at school James, Jack (her brother) and Sophie (my Australian mum) and I all went to Hillsville wildlife sanctuary which was incredible. There we saw a whole range of Australian wildlife including a close-up encounter in the enclosures of kangaroos, koalas and dingos! As an animal lover this was by far one of my most incredible experiences. In the evenings at the Le Maistres we'd sit and enjoy cups of tea or hot chocolate and biscuits while getting to know each other better.

At school I felt very welcomed by the community and met a lot of lovely people along the way. The overwhelming support and generosity of Mrs Lee in helping myself and James each day cannot be stressed enough and I think I can speak for both of us when I say without her we both would have been lost. Haileybury Melbourne's school facilities and community across the 3 campus' I visited were all amazing and unique in their own way. The one which blew me away the most was the city campus which was incredible, it stood 14 floors tall and at the very top was a roof garden with a BBQ area and a perfect view of the city. Again there we was kindly greeted by more Haileybury students who took us round with them for their school day, Alyssa made me feel so comfortable there on my first day at another school and we had a laugh and good school day together.

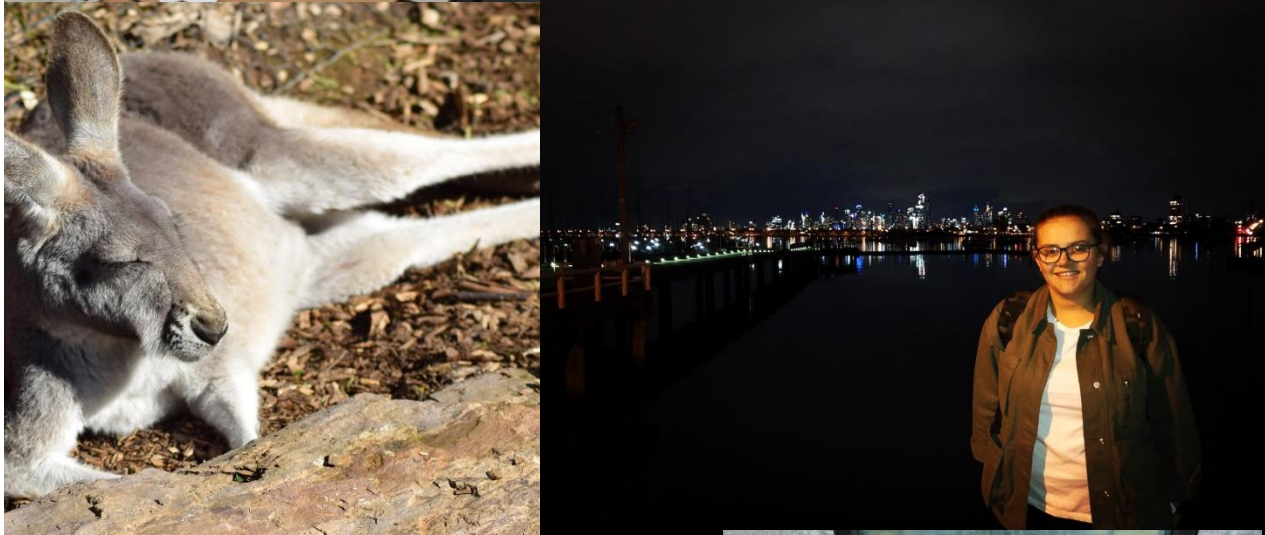
While I was out in Australia I was lucky enough to get on yet another flight to take an internal trip to Perth, which even though was part of the same country was still a four hour flight. When I was in Year 4 my best friend along with her family who were friends of my

family too decided to emigrate there, and now I have seen it for myself I cannot at all blame them. The quality of life there is to be had in Australia is unparalleled in my opinion and I can definitely see myself returning in the future, for how long I have not yet decided. There I got to explore yet another beautiful side of Australia which I thought was impeccably beautiful, the weather was a lot warmer there. I got to catch up with the family who were once my second home and it was so amazing to see them all, but very sad to leave. However, leaving Perth I was again excited to get back to the Le Maistre family for another few days before I moved to my next hosts. It was amazing to see them all again and for the few extra days I was there I made sure to spend time with them all, especially Freddie and Poppy their gorgeous cat and beautiful dog. I also went to Chadstone shopping centre which was unlike any I had seen or been in, with shops there selling brands I had only ever seen on celebrities. James and I went there with 'Nonna' Georgina's grandmother who was so caring and wonderful, she reminded me a lot of my own nan who I am very close with so going out shopping with her reminded me of many weekends spent with my nan. I spent the majority of my trip with the Le Maistre's and they truly were my family out there and I think about them every day since I've been home wondering what they're all up to and where they might be. I owe so much to them and I will be forever be thankful, I will make sure I definitely see them again.

The time come to go to my second family, I had met the daughter Abby at school and she seemed so lovely so I didn't feel to nervous, but still going into a strangers home and staying there for the next week and a half can still be daunting. Obviously, I had nothing to worry about the Paterson's were all so amazing and kind and I felt at home again. Once more, I had found myself in another beautiful home with lovely people and an adorable dog (Smudge). I went to school with Abby which was nice to meet some of her friends too as well as experiencing different lessons and teachers. On the weekend we went into Melbourne Gallery as there was a terracotta warrior exhibition on which was incredible. We also went into Jamestown and explored around including walking up the lovely pier. I had less time with the Paterson's and as I'd pretty much explored all of Melbourne by the last week I just spent some quality time with them all indoors when it was cold and raining outside watching a Lucifer a series on netflix we started together as well as some new blockbuster films which I loved. One day I went into a nearby town with Abby and her two best friends looking round and shopping which was nice, I made good use of my myki card catching trains. As it got to the Sunday my final whole day I couldn't leave without going back to see Sophie and her lovely family one last time, so I got dropped to their gorgeous house on Moffat street with James and said my goodbyes. It was so wonderful to see them all again and Sophie had freshly baked scones with clotted cream and jam as a final meal which was just perfect to me. I thanked them for everything and said my sad goodbyes. I returned to the Paterson's for my final night which was lovely and relaxed I said goodbye to them all the next morning and thanked them for everything they had done.

For me to put onto paper everything I did in those four weeks and all the people I met would be impossible, so you'll just have to take my word when I say this truly was the best experience of my life and if you are ever fortunate enough to find yourself in the position I was in back in February, go to Australia, I promise you wont regret it.

Maisy Hurst



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