

Australia report – Mackenzie Dawes

I was able to spend the most amazing four weeks of my life in Australia thanks to the amazing people at BASET. It was the most surreal experience ever, even upon my return home I still couldn't believe I had actually been packed and away in the beautiful country of Australia. I am forever grateful to have been blessed with such a phenomenal experience that I will carry with me for the rest of my life.

As part of the award, I was in Darwin for three weeks. Darwin is located in the Northern Territory, better known as NT. First impression was just hot, very, very hot. British heat is absolutely nothing to the NT. At the airport we were greeted by the absolutely lovely Ian Smith. He looked after us very well throughout our stay in Darwin and I am eternally grateful for his kindness. We spent the three weeks in Haileybury Rendall boarding house, the international house called Madjirra House. It is their newest boarding facility and was so lovely to stay in. I was shown my room for the three weeks which was a single bed room with a shared bathroom. After such a long travel (about 22 hours there !!) I was able to take an obscenely long shower and get some sleep. After some rest, we were kindly shown around the facilities and introduced to more staff and students in boarding.

Our first day was a lot but so incredibly fun. We were taken to the school uniform shop after breakfast in the cafeteria and graciously given uniform to wear throughout our stay. We were even given caps and P.E gear with a house team. I was assigned Nganabaru, the purple house. Later on we were fixed with timetables to attend lessons of interest. I decided to stick to familiar ground and took Modern history, Psychology, Sociology, Health and Human development, Global politics and also mandatory English. I was shocked to find maths wasn't mandatory!! Throughout the next few weeks I was able to experience the Australian school system and see just how different it is to our home system. It was incredible to be able to be surrounded by such an amazing student body and equally amazing teachers and staff who made my experience all that better. The school day was a lot different to what I had grown used to with my A Levels so it was very tiring but absolutely worth it. We were assisted with school laptops to complete work and I was so thrilled to be able to be so involved with school life! Lessons were incredibly fun and especially informative with First Nations and Torres Strait Islander history and education. I came to Australia with very little knowledge on the Indigenous peoples of Australia, but left with what can be only described as eye opening knowledge after being so openly welcomed by the First Nations students and my curiosity of their culture and history received with a smile. Being able to listen to so many unique stories of family history and the 60,000 years worth of culture was truly special and I am forever thankful to have heard such amazing stories and generations of culture that has been preserved despite all. I quickly became introduced to some year 11s (our year 12 equivalents) who made me feel so welcomed and amplified my experience so much. I shared many lessons with these girls who were just so sweet and friendly. I actually had my 17th birthday in Australia whilst in Darwin and the group of girls who had basically adopted me during my stay were so kind as to give me a typical aussie birthday! I got a mud cake and "lollies" that we shared during lunch, as well as a few lovely gifts to remind me of my stay with them. Freya, one of the girls, had gotten me a very cute hand painting of some emu's, which currently resides proudly on my bookshelf.

On my final full day in Darwin, Freya and some of the other girls whom I became friends with, Ash and Ellie, kindly invited me out to brunch to celebrate my time there and to sadly say goodbye. We went up to Cool Spot in Fanny bay (...I was shocked too) and got some lunch before we all decided to head to the beach, in which I inevitably stacked it over in the mud near the shoreline. The beach was absolutely gorgeous, England's coasts must really up their game! There were many little caves we crawled into and tried "exploring". After that we decided to drive into Darwin city centre, which is surprisingly small!! Hailing from London, I was half expecting something similar to that back home, but it was very quiet and basically empty! We all decided to buy matching sandals from Ellie's

workplace which was very sweet and felt very true to Darwin fashion ha! After that, I was kindly taken around to some very beautiful spots like Dripstone by Freya's dad, Robert, an absolutely lovely man with a strong passion for getting good photographs. It was such a fun day to wrap up my time in Darwin, NT.

My final week was spent in Melbourne, Victoria. It was probably the best week I could've had in Melbourne. There are four Haileybury campuses in Melbourne, and I attended the Brighton campus. My stay in Melbourne was hosted by the lovely Ottey family! Fiona and Lee were the host parents, two of the most amazing people I've had the pleasure of meeting. Their two boys attend Brighton Campus so I was assisted by them to school every morning. I very grateful for the hospitality and kindness of the Ottey family, they made me feel so at home and comfortable. Whilst in Brighton campus, I was assigned two girls, Kate and Ella. When I arrived on campus I was very nervous but felt comfortable immediately after being introduced to Kate, Ella and the rest of their friends. I attended the same lessons as Kate throughout my stay, given I only had a week I wanted to gain as much as I could. Lessons were so fun, I was so thankful to have been surrounded by such lovely and kind people who wasted absolutely no time making me feel incredibly welcomed. Mrs Lee, the lovely maths teacher who oversaw our stay there was an absolute saviour. She was incredible in getting me settled in and ensuring I was where I needed to be always. She kindly gifted me some little souvenirs to take home, a little wallet with the imprint of the Brighton train system and an adorable Koala magnet which lives on my fridge with pride. Yet again, eternally grateful to her, she was phenomenal. In Melbourne, it was organised for us to be able to attend their winter formal, thanks to Alfonso's host family! After some initial last minute stress of finding a dress, (thanks to the help of Kate and some accessories by Elle and Chloe!!) I got to attend the formal at the Leonda after arriving in a limousine with the group. It was a very big formal, people from the three other campuses attending too. I got to meet so many amazing people that night. No other words to describe it but pure fun! We also got to attend an AFL game which was so cool. It was Geelong vs Collingwood. The group consensus was looking like Geelong cats but turns out most people went for Collingwood. Kate graciously explained the rules of the AFL game (I still don't know exactly what was going on) but I got involved with the cheering and booing very quickly. Unfortunately, Cats lost, but it was such a fun night especially since it was my very first sporting event! My time in Melbourne also consisted to a lengthy tour of the city and to experience Melbourne public transport. It reminded me so much of home, the city in general felt like home. It was so much like London, just a little quieter. I spent my last day in Melbourne with Elle, an absolute darling. We went to a couple of trendy brunch spots and spent far too much time finding matching keepsakes in the local "op-shop" (charity shop). I so wish I could have had just a couple more days in Melbourne, it really felt so familiar and I just adored my short week there. I keep very frequent contact with the friends I made there and I have every intent to get back to Melbourne very soon.

To be given the opportunity to travel to the other side of the world by myself was such an unbelievable achievement for me. I had never even been on a plane before and to have my first flights destination be Australia... absolutely unreal to say the least. I came back feeling so independent and sure of myself. I was given such a unique experience I could have only dreamed of 6 months ago. I hold the experiences gained close to my heart and carry lessons and knowledge learnt in Australia with me in my everyday life. I was so far from home but felt just so in place in Australia. It's a feeling I can hardly use words to explain in detail. I adored my time in Australia. I can move forward with important life decisions with acute confidence in my decisions I never would have been able to have in myself, like applying to university and pushing forward with my aspirations in life. I feel I truly understand the value of hard work, dedication and the importance of community and connections, the two things I now know will always carry me through to good times.

Just one more time, thank you to BASET, Haileybury Rendall and Brighton school, Ian and Mrs Lee and the Ottey family, all staff from both campuses, Dr Muller, John May, Sally Martin, and to the friends I made throughout my stay. To my incredible Economics teacher Mrs Shivalkar for truly being the backbone to the most amazing month of my life, I don't think I'll be able to thank you enough.

