

Nice Exchange

A group of twenty-three students recently returned from the French Exchange Trip after spending a week in Nice, South-East France. Several years ago, Huish Episcopi developed a link with the College Henri Matisse in central Nice. The 2016 student exchange to France left the UK on Sunday the 26th of September and headed away from the autumnal weather to the warmth and sun of the Mediterranean Coast.

Unfortunately, getting to Nice would require a full day off travelling, beginning with a 3am meetup at Huish. The flight was due to leave Gatwick at 9:40am so we watched the sun rise from the coach on our way to London. Owing to the change in time zones, the two-hour flight arrived in Nice at 1pm. The warmth surrounded us the moment we stepped out of the plane, a welcome change as the majority of us were still bundled up in our jumpers and jeans. Our first night in France was spent in the Hotel Brice, a small hotel a short walk away from the sea front.



The Monday was our first full day spent in France, and we were heading out to spend the day in Monaco, an hour or so journey by coach from the hotel. Our first stop was the Musée Océanographique (Oceanographic Museum) of Monaco, a museum of marine sciences. We spent the first half of our morning exploring the many rooms and galleries within the

museum, finding ever more colourful and beautiful fish with every turn. The remainder of the morning was spent exploring Monaco, as we were permitted to go off in small groups and do our first bout of shopping away from home. The surrounding scenery was stunning, a mountainous backdrop of the border with Italy on one side and the blue Mediterranean Sea on the other. Proving an ever more incredible day, our next stop was the Fragonard Perfumery, set high above the city in the village of Eze. It was here that many, if not all, of us splashed out our first large sum of money, won over by the wonderful odours and persuaded to buy something which would likely never be used again. That night, it would be our final time spent in the hotel, and a sense of trepidation hung over us- the next day we would be meeting our exchange families with whom we would have to spend the rest of the week.



We woke early the following morning, having packed and prepared the night before. Suitcases travelling ahead by taxi, the walk to the school was tough, uphill the majority of the way. Our exchange students were waiting for us, likely just as nervous to meet the people who would be welcomed into their homes. Thankfully, there didn't seem to be anyone who took a severe dislike to their partners, most of us delighted to meet them. We would spend the entirety of the day with them, taking lessons as a large group in order to get to know our correspondents better before going home with them. A school day in French schools ends at 5pm, so there was lots of space to fill in before the end of the day. We had a short session of volleyball,

something many of us had never played before but it was still a lot of fun. That afternoon, we left school with our partners, ready for our first night with them.

The next day, Wednesday, we met up as a group once more at the beginning of the school day, 8am. Our partners would have a full day of school, but we were taking a coach to Cannes, where we had a kayaking session booked in the surrounding sea. The journey was an hour, filled mostly with talk of our partners and our first night spent with them. Once at our destination



and prepared for the day, we were given a brief lesson on kayaking, which several of us had never done before. The island we would be heading towards is called Île Sainte-Marguerite, a thirty-minute kayak journey away from the beach we began at. The beach was little but relatively empty, the island only accessible by boat or air, so it was calm and peaceful. We ate lunch there, looking around the beach and sitting by the freshwater lake that's found in the centre of the island. Thankfully, there was a small amount of shade and we were allowed in the sea as the temperature beneath the midday sun was reaching up to 30 degrees, far higher than we were all used to for a day in early October. After lunch, we kayaked around to the other



side of the island, where we were allowed to get out of our kayaks and swim in the sea. Upon returning to the mainland a little while later, we were all coated in a fine layer of salt and still partially drying off, but the day was still far from finished. Again in groups, we could go out and shop in Cannes, whilst still drying off and a few of us with bad sunburn, but it was fun and a wonderful place to be. That night was our second with our family, returning to the school at 6pm and each going our separate ways from there.

The following day we again returned to the sea, heading instead to Théoule-sur-Mer for another day of incredible new experiences. That time it would be snorkelling we would try. Split into two groups, the more experienced, or those who had snorkelled before, went first. Each trip would take an hour, leaving the rest

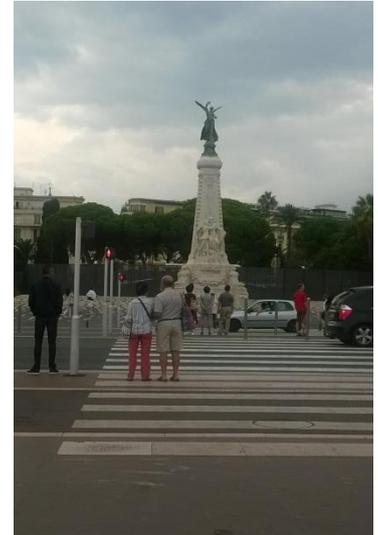
on the beach waiting for the others to return. The first group took a longer, harder course, as compared with the second which was mainly those who felt less confident or had never snorkelled before. Either way the sea was filled with hundreds of fish and other creatures, darting around on the sea bed as we swam above them. We had several hours to spare, which ended up as time spent relaxing on the beach between lunch and when the coach would arrive once more. Even after that it wasn't the end; we headed back to Nice, but with a stop on the way - Saint-Paul-de-Vence, a medieval town that remains one of the oldest towns on the French Riviera. Unfortunately, due to our return expected for 6pm at the school, we couldn't stay as long as we would have liked, but had enough time at least to explore a little of the old town. When we returned to our families, we were all



beginning to feel the effects of such busy days, very tired and worn out, but happy.

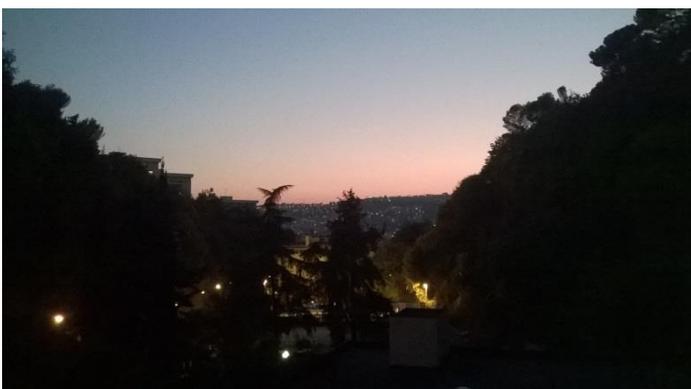
Friday would be the last day we saw any of our fellow English students before Monday, so we were all determined to make the most of our time together. Originally, the day had been planned for us to spend the entirety of it in the school, but it was changed at the last minute to allow us to spend the afternoon once more shopping in the city centre. For the morning, we remained with our partners, taking lessons once more and tackling the possibly controversial topic of stereotypes we had of the other. After lunch, we regrouped and headed down into the city, leaving the French students to their final lessons as we spent a few more hours together. What began as a shopping trip soon became more eventful, but we still returned to the school in time to return home with our partners. Later that night, we all met up with some of the previous year's exchange students who visited England, and went bowling together. We said short goodbyes to the Huish students, who we wouldn't see again over the weekend.

Over the weekend, we stayed entirely with our French families, who had planned something for us to do with them over our last two days we would spend there.



As always, the weekend passed far too quickly and it was the day of departure far too soon. The coach would be leaving the school, our meeting point, at 7am so another early morning would be essential. As we prepared to leave, several people got emotional and there were a few tears as we said our goodbyes. The coach journey to the airport in Nice was short, but very quiet. The plane was due to leave at 10am, and would return to the UK at 11am (once more because of time zones). A few of us fell asleep on the plane, tired after such a long week. Arriving back in the UK was certainly a shock, nothing like the lovely weather we'd experienced for the past few days; we'd barely even needed our jackets until stepping off the plane in London. However, it was still a long time before we would return home – a four-hour coach journey remained until arriving back at school for 3pm.

As a trip it was the best I have been on, I had so many new experiences and made new friends. As far as I am aware all of us are still in contact with our exchange students and miss the friendships we struck up with them. Even though it was only a week long trip I feel like it really helped to improve my learning and I would most definitely consider going again.



Rhea Score

Year 9