

6 months down under

My name is Jasper Schröder and this month is my 6th month in Australia.

I am originally from a little town named Hörter, quite central in Germany about 90 km South of Hannover. In the beginning of 2018 my dad first informed me about the Rotary Youth Exchange Program RYE. My first response was very positive and I wanted to do it nearly instantly. I obviously had to hold a few conversations with my parents and the local Rotary Club, before I finally could hand in my application.

The next few months went pretty quickly and I was excited to start in my adventure and get out of my pretty boring daily life as a student. By the time I realized the magnitude of my decision I was attending my first outbound meeting in autumn of 2018, where I could listen to the experiences of the rebounds from exchange years before. It was the first time that I asked myself if it was the right decision (today I know: it definitely was!). A few more outbound camps and meetings followed, and until 1 week before departure to Australia I felt pretty insecure after seeing all the other exchange students who seemed so confident in managing this year with no problems. So I started in my exchange year and was very unsure if I could handle it while I was flying towards Dubai. These thoughts soon disappeared after I arrived in Dubai and managed to find my way through that huge airport to my next gate. I told myself that there are so many exchange students in the world and most of them handle their exchange with no problems, so why should I not be able to manage it?. With that mind setting I went into my flight to Brisbane, and I think that thanks to that (and to the fact that I was pretty tired after nearly 25 hours of traveling) I managed to remain calm after I was helped up in customs and missed my flight to Rockhampton.

The first days in Biloela I stayed at my Counsellor's house, here I could recover and get over my jet lag as well as getting the administrative things (like bank account, mobile phone and debit card etc.) organized. 4 days later I met my first host family and started in Biloela State High School. The first weeks weren't easy, I could not really find a good connection to my host family even though they did what they could and the kids in school did their best to make me feel welcome. I realized that my

mindset "I have to through this" would not help me to socialize. After a few weeks I decided that I had to make a change and started talking more to the people around me because I decided that I do not just want to get through it. I wanted to make this the best year of life and for that I needed to work on myself. I first looked into a few surprised faces because many people thought that I did not talk to much cause I basically could not speak English to well. But I think they realized quickly that I just needed some time so get used to my new home and my new school. After my first two months of school the school holidays started. My host family gave me the opportunity to travel with them around and they showed me the Sunshine, Gold Coasts, Hervey Bay and Tannum Sand. It was a really good time, and I am really grateful for this! I also got the opportunity to meet up with other Inbounds as well as with friends from Biloela.

After the school holidays, I started playing Touch Football to try something I have never done before in Germany, even though it took me about a month for me to get used to the rules and the ball. In the following months I started to get a good relationship to my host family and gained some good friends, but also had to handle home sickness. Luckily I have good contact to other RYEP Outbounds from my district 1900 who are in a similar situation like me, so I could talk to them about it and got over it pretty fast.

When we had one week left until the summer holidays, I had to change from my first to my second host family. This time, to start living in another host family was much easier, thanks to the fact that I got much more confident in talking English since I came to Australia and because I am not the first exchange student they had.

The holidays were amazing, we had a big exchange meeting and were able to stay one week in Hervey Bay and got the opportunity to visit Frazer Island. It was a once in a lifetime experience and I am very thankful to RYEP District Chair and my parents that I got that opportunity.

After that, the Christmas time came on and I was very excited to celebrate Christmas in summer (in Europe; December is wintertime, sometimes even at my place with snow) I celebrated Christmas on

the farm where my host mother grew up, and I had a really great time and got other than expected not homesick. Now the holidays ended and I look, thanks to the Rotary community, forward to more trips and amazing possibilities.

I want to say Thank you to every Rotarian that supports the Rotary Youth Exchange and especially to “my” Rotary Club of Biloele for hosting me and giving me this amazing opportunity!