MUSING OF A BRIT ABROAD

Chris Aikman

I think I’m just about used to America now. It was a weird feeling, about two weeks after my family left me in Buffalo, New York, to finally realise where I was. And like I said, it is growing on me.

Of course, like in any other foreign land, there are things that I just won’t get. Such as an American students’ ability to wear tie-dye in almost any circumstance, regardless of the fact that it has never been in fashion, or their love of American football, a game so loathsome that the idea of watching a Ben Affleck movie-marathon seemed appealing in comparison. Maybe I’m missing something, but somehow I don’t think so.

Anyway, as this is in the travel section of this illustrious newspaper I feel I should talk about some of the travelling I’ve done. I started my American adventure in New York City, one of my favourite places I’ve been (after Berlin and San Francisco, in case you were wondering) but the stay was a short one. I did however get to see a couple of actors from one of my favourite television series, 30 Rock. I walked past Judah Friedlander and Rachel Dratch with a look of pleased bemusement before running off with giddy satisfaction to tell the rest of my family.

After New York City came the town of Amsterdam, New York, where we stayed with some friends, jet skiing and playing bingo for a week before heading off to the last stop on my trip, Buffalo. Buffalo is very different to Leicester, in many ways. One, it is much bigger.

My accent has drawn a lot of attention from people (as I assumed it would), and it is nice to feel special because of it. In spite of that, sometimes the special feeling is cancelled out when someone asks you a question so stereotypically stupid you are left dumbfounded, such as:

“Where are you from?”
“Near London.”

“a nice grant to boot”

American woman who works in the dining hall said I had a ‘sexy accent’. I’ve never been flirted with by a person 40 years my senior, but I have to say, I didn’t dislike it.

I’m coming to the end of my article so I shall be brief. I’m having a great time here, people seem interested in me and I can confirm that American Football sucks. I hope to write more in the future, but first I’m off to see Kofi Annan speak. Bye!

C’EST LA VIE

Emma Howard

It has always surprised me that there is not more competition for the limited spaces on Erasmus schemes. It is not for everyone, but for me, the offer of a year studying abroad, a chance to learn a foreign language, a free pass to an international circle of friends and a nice grant to boot, was a no-brainer.

Yet, this is not to say that my time thus far at Strasbourg University has been a piece of cake; or as the French say, les deux doigts dans le nez, ‘two fingers in the nose’. It certainly did not seem that way stuck in a Masters Class today, attempting to keep speed with two hours of rapid French teaching, surrounded by native speakers who specialised in subjects I was not even aware existed. Moreover, I was not very amused after six hours trapped inside my own apartment on a glorious summer on Saturday, unable to make contact with a French landlord who was neither interested in my plight nor prepared to fit a lock that actually functioned.

Undoubtedly, the main challenge has been the language barrier. The university did their best to ease this with a free two week language course before the start of term. Admittedly, in the most part this consisted of going on free excursions in the name of practicing one’s language skills. This I did, but I can’t say that the prospect of summer parks, traditional French meals and a boat trip around the city’s charming channels was especially discouraging either. Still, not for everyone, but somebody has got to do it. C’est la vie. Or, to be precise, it’s the Erasmus life.

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**COACH SURFING NORWAY 2009**

Courtesy of Mr O’Leary’s single moment of generosity I was sitting in seat 1A on Ryanair flight FR1249 from Oslo (Torp) to Birmingham International at a fraction of the price for a university lunch back in Leicester. In two days, I had experienced more than I could write about in several “Dearest Mum and Dad…money please…” letters home. Turning to my right I saw that my best friend had yet again passed out over the lady in 1C. Honestly speaking, I’m not sure whether it was from the alcohol or the narcolepsy so naturally I ordered myself a drink costing twice the price of the flight.

“As if I’m going to give away any of my own beer”

Two days previous Riyad and I were being frisked in Birmingham for apparently smuggling peanuts and a fuel-less zippo through airport security as we headed for our flight departure gate. The flight as expected, was pretty standard, no television, an awkward silence and a pilot who went by the name of Sigurd yet who mysteriously spoke with a Midlands accent. We landed in Torp around 17:00 local time and were greeted by our Couch Surfing host Jenne, a 31 year old Swedish lifeguard; she is indeed blonde if you’re wondering. If you’ve never heard of Couch Surfing perhaps you should spend a little less time Facebooking in the library and a little more on Google!

Jenne drove us to meet her fiancé Atle at Sandefjord’s harbour, historically famous for its involvement in the Norwegian Whaling industry. Within 60 minutes of landing we found ourselves sitting on Atle’s 42ft “vintage” sailboat drinking 65NoK (£6-7) cans of cider and sampling the best of Norwegian cigarettes. The 23rd of June marks the Norwegian Midsummer solstice and we had arrived just in time for it. Two thousand boats from the local area had launched into the fjord and were sailing out to sea in one vast convoy. Fireworks were being set off from the tops of masts and cheering people threw cans of beer and cider to passengers on other boats in celebration. Catching a can of Kopparberg thrown from a pre-teen I duly threw back a can of coke. As if I’m going to give away any of my own beer after spending near £20 on a six pack, I’m a poor student for goodness sake!

As the evening set in and boats went their separate ways we dropped anchor on a small island a few miles out to sea where Jenne and Atle introduced us to friends of theirs who had invited us to join their BBQ of freshly caught prawns, fish and lobster. They told us that we could take a ferry to Sweden first thing in the morning for £12 return, not too shabby for a three hour trip each way to another country! The night continued with us sailing to a nearby port, to venture into the local bars. I paid £8.20 for a beer that night and I swear I’ve never made a pint last longer.

Tickets, check; passport, check; a year studying in the USA, check!

I have just embarked on my journey to the state of Louisiana, my new home for the next nine months. I arrived here nearly a month ago and so far, I am absolutely loving it. As an American Studies student, I felt that an exchange in the US was a must and where better than a state that is so culturally different to any other. Firstly, the weather is unbelievable – a far cry from an undoubtedly wet and windy Leicester. As for the food, everything here is deep-fried. (I even tried deep fried alligator last week!) What’s more, the people of Louisiana are so incredibly friendly and as soon as you open your mouth and they realise you are from the UK, they will do anything for you.

As for lectures, or ‘classes’ as we call them out here, they are quite different to what we’re used to in England. So far, we seem to get more ‘homework’, but it does seem to be a little easier as they are so heavily reliant on textbooks. Believe me, I used to live in David Wilson Library and I haven’t even seen the library here! So, if you’re not a library person, come and study in the US. Whilst I’m out here I plan to do a bit of travelling too, so be sure to follow my column as I venture to some of the cities around the area, including the Big Easy: New Orleans! So, it’s goodbye for now.