

Eric in Austria/France

-A traveler's story



Eric in Graz

At the beginning and Erik had a little apartment tour. In general it went pretty well, except for one little thing. As I proudly showed him our balcony, which is my favorite part of the whole apartment, I realized that something was wrong with him.

He looked at me and I could clearly see the confused expression in his face.

“What’s wrong with you?” I asked him. “Why do you grow these *weeds* in your apartment?” he asked, pointing at our raised garden.

“These *weeds* are herbs; don’t you have a garden or balcony at home?” I asked him a bit puzzled. I figured out that where he is coming from, it was not common for people to grow plants themselves, simply because nobody had space to do so.

As we continued our little apartment tour in the kitchen, something else caught Erik’s attention. The whole time he stared at our spice rack right next to him. The colorful glasses seemed to fascinate him. He stared at them as if he had never seen something so precious before, although they were just ordinary herbs in my eyes.

After he spend a few days with us I realized why he behaved so weird. I noticed that he barley ever spiced his food, not even salt or pepper. Of course it could be just a personal preference or he might not be used to such a variety of spices.

Speaking of which, I indeed noticed quite a lot of difference between us concerning food. For example, he did not understand the whole “organic food trend“, which is pretty popular here in Austria. I tried

to explain to him why we spent more money on regional food, which did not make sense to him. Food from all around the world is seen as some kind of status symbol in his home country.

Also the idea of separating waste to recycle it was totally new to Erik. By the day he had to leave he still mixed up the plastic and the paper bin.

Nevertheless, he was most confused about the fact that most of the adults smoked cigarettes. He couldn't understand why someone would pay loads of money for something so poisonous and deadly. However I cannot either. My parents tried their best to avoid smoking while he was around, which worked out pretty well most of the time. However, if Erik happened to breathe in some of the smoke he immediately started coughing, which made the whole situation even more embarrassing and uncomfortable.

Eric in France

For the last few weeks we had a student from abroad, called Eric, live with us for a while. After he left I found a diary, lying on his bed. This is what he wrote:

The first morning I went down the stairs to eat some breakfast. I asked for some bread and a tea, but then I noticed something weird. First, she handed me the tea but not in a cup like I am used to but in a small bowl. At first I thought that all the cups were in the dishwasher, however, every time I asked for tea or coffee a little bowl was placed in front of me. After a few days I figured out why they used bowls instead of cups.



“Now I know why he never ate something for breakfast. Nevertheless I love dipping my bread into tea, it’s simply delicious.”

I noticed that my host family dunked their bread in tea; this is why they needed the extra space. From my point of view this is not something I want to do with my bread, I tried it once but not a second time, the bread was just too soft for my taste



Speaking of extra space, I noticed that in France everything is way bigger than in my home country. Maybe because my country is mainly just uninhabited mountains, so there is not much space left. However, France is huge so is everything in France. One day we went to a supermarket, the word ‘super’ really fits. This store was huge, and you could buy anything you want Ed. There were clothes, plants, food... But when I said, „ This store is huge”. My host mother

responded, „ No this is actually rather small” I could not believe my ears but France is a huge country with a lot of space why not use it.

“That’s funny to hear. I never thought about this, but for me, this is normal. However, Eric is right his home country is basically just mountains. I mean you have to deal with what you got.”



The next afternoon my host family and I took some time to walk through the streets of Rennes, when something suddenly hit my eye. Next to a door there was a little touchpad with numbers on it. I thought that this building housed either a very expensive flat or some kind of an important office and with some fancy alarm system. However, after a while I noticed that next to pretty much every single door you could find one of these pads. From my point of view I would like to have one of these systems next to my door, it would make me feel a lot more comfortable.

“However, not everybody in France has one of these systems hanging beside their doors. For example we don’t have one.”

However, my favorite part of this exchange was that I got to know other school systems. The biggest difference between the French schools and the ones I am used to is the classroom design. At home my classroom seems pretty friendly and nice. There is a lot of light and maps and plants decorate the room. But French classes, at least the one I went to, are very dark and empty. I almost felt as if I was in a hospital. However, it might have just been my school.

“Unfortunately this is true. Here in France, especially this school in Rennes is quiet poor. We just can’t spend this much money on schools.”