

## Eric in Graz

We had a foreign exchange student stay at our house a while ago. We were all really excited to have him around and to show him all the cool things in Graz. We thought that he might like the great view from the „Schlossberg“ or a nice walk in the city center.

We soon learned that Eric, our exchange student, was a bit different to other foreign exchange students. He preferred the small things. It was the smallest detail that would catch his attention.



Sometimes Eric would make funny comments and ask us why we shake hands, when we greet each other. He also noticed that very often people would separate the bathroom from the actual toilet.

When we went to school by bus next Monday he was constantly hanging around the red buttons, which you push if you want the bus driver to stop at the next stop. Eric pressed them for anyone who wanted to get off the bus, while he examined its color and shape very closely.

Eric was from America, so he also found it rather peculiar that we ate a warm lunch most of the time and preferred cold meal for dinner, with dark bread and different spreads. He told us that in America people usually had a great hot meal in the evening to finish off the day.

At school he went from classroom to classroom looking at the back of chairs for their numbers indicating their size. And Eric was also always asking the weirdest questions, for example about the seeds on top of so many types of breads, why we ate dark bread or why we decorated it with weird-tasting seeds.



When we took the tram together he noticed that we didn't enter in the front door but preferably took the last or middle doors and didn't have to show our passes when we got on the tram or bus.

Once he even asked about our toilet paper and why it had all these fancy embossings in it to make it look nice. He thought, that it wasn't necessary to have fancy toilet paper, when it really wasn't for the fanciest cause.

He also thought it was very interesting that our TV was only on in the evening, while his TV at home was on full time as entertainment in the afternoon.

It went on like this for six full days. I would say he was really a very special student, but we liked him nevertheless and really enjoyed his stay. He taught us a lot about the importance of small things and how you can really live to appreciate the tiniest things.

I will still put up some pictures, and will be going to the city tomorrow where I will be able to take them.



## Eric in France

Last week a very good friend of mine Eric went to France on a foreign exchange student program. He told me that he had the time of his life and that it was really great. It was really funny to have Eric talk to me about his trip when he returned. One could say he has a rather peculiar way of seeing things and a special eye for seeing the small more subtle things.

He was very surprised by the fact that his host family liked to keep their doors open during the day. Even in the evening when most people would lock their doors and enjoy some privacy, the doors would never shut in their house even at night time.



*Picture 1: Here you can see Eric in France. He really enjoyed this part of the trip too.*

When he woke up the next morning he woke up to a rather small breakfast. Where he came from breakfast was really one of the most important meals of the day. He liked to enjoy a healthy two or three pieces of dark bread with jam on a nice plate. In France he usually sat alone for breakfast, which he didn't mind at all, because he was around lots of people all the time anyway. Everybody served themselves using napkins as plates. By the time everybody had finished eating the kitchen counter was full of breadcrumbs. He really wondered why nobody cared to use a plate and when he asked if he could have one for his pie, the host mom explained that plates were only used later in the day.



Sometimes they would also drink tea from a bowl and dip their breakfast in it. Eric had never seen this before, where he came from tea was drunk from a normal tea cup.



He said that there also seemed to be some kind of unspoken rule that plastic cups were primarily used for drinking juices and only water and alcohol, which was drunk very rarely, were served in glasses.

In the bus they always entered in the front and everybody acted very respectfully towards the driver. It was unlike in his country, where you entered the bus wherever you wanted and the bus driver was hardly ever even greeted.

Also in school the students payed the teachers great respect. This led to the class being very quiet and the students individually only participating by writing down what the teacher said, rather than raising their hands voluntarily to say something.



Anyway Eric also thought it was pretty awesome that school depending on your time table could start at different times in the morning. One time he told me, he could sleep in until ten, because school didn't start until eleven.



One morning when he arrived in school he found himself standing in a huge group of people in front of blocked school doors, due to a demonstration. But instead of panicking or trying to leave, all the students kept calm and waited patiently for the school to be opened again.

They later explained that demonstrations were quite common in Rennes and that they sometimes even took place every single week.



Also in France there were bikes everywhere. Especially in Paris. Everywhere you went you could depend on bikes that there would be some for a rent.

He was also very surprised by the fact, that the French people hardly ever used salt in their regular meals, but used a lot of salt for deserts. When he was in a café with his friends in Rennes the last day and ordered a mousse au chocolate he was given a salty brown mix of chocolate.

In the end Eric had a really great time and enjoyed it a lot. The stay with his host family was something he would never forget. Even if some things were a bit strange to him and he was a bit confused the first day, he soon adapted and spent a great week in France.