Unforgettable Experience!

Shuqi (Nikki) Zhao, ASSE Exchange Student (China) describes her unforgettable experience as an ASSE Exchange Student.

The most important thing I have learned these past months is to appreciate. This opportunity of being here, living with my amazing host family, making lifelong friends...this whole experience makes me feel thankful, to everybody, every day.

I remember the first day I got here, after that endless flight; I received two huge hugs from my host mum and sister. "Life is such a saint!" is what I was thinking at that time.

I played volleyball and lettered in it and now I am playing basketball. Being part of a sports team is a brand new experience for me. We do everything as a team, we win as a team, and we fight as a team. The day of my mum's birthday, the whole team sang happy birthday to her. I made it as a video and sent it back to China, "That's the most special birthday gift I have ever received," my mom told me.

-Shuqi Zhao

Nikki's host family had adopted their daughter from China as a baby and they chose to host Nikki so their daughter could get a taste of the Chinese culture. Nikki and her host sister, Aisjha, have become close, and definitely are enjoying the cultural exchange.

Nikki has maintained a 4.0 grade point average while participating in both sports and fine arts such as Jazz Band. Nikki is also involved in a Music Tech class at Inman High School and through that class she composed an arrangement of 'What Child Is This' for piano and violin. Nikki played the piano part, while her host sister played the violin part at the high school's Christmas concert.

ASSE Area Representative Sandra Isom describes Nikki as a delightful young lady. Sandra says, "Nikki's excitement for life is contagious. I've really enjoyed seeing her bloom in the time she has been here, and will definitely miss her when she goes back to China at the end of her exchange year."

Nikki's host mom, Darcel Miles tells of one of her favorite times with Nikki. "It was the night we brought her home from the airport. When she got out of our Jeep, she looked up, saw the stars and was amazed saying she never had seen them like that before. Our daughter, Aisjha and Nikki grabbed some pillows, laid down in the back yard and watched the stars for a long while. That's when I knew how different our small town in the middle of Kansas was going to be for her. Nikki's drive and talent has helped her to experience some new fun things and meet some lifelong friends. Everytime I look up at the stars or see an amazing sun set I will think of her fondly of her."

-Shuqi Zhao, ASSE Exchange Student (China) and her host sister Aisjha enjoy a visit to Joshua Tree National Park. Nikki's host family had adopted their daughter from China as a baby and they chose to host Nikki so their daughter could get a taste of the Chinese culture. Nikki and her host sister, Aisjha, have become close, and definitely are enjoying the cultural exchange.
ASSE is very grateful to receive so many photos from around the ASSE and World Heritage world! Enjoy the following examples of all of the fun!

FLEX – Future Leaders Exchange, U.S. State Department Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs sponsored Exchange Student

CBYX – Congress Bundestag Youth Exchange, U.S. State Department Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs sponsored Exchange Student

YES – Kennedy Lugar Youth Exchange and Study, U.S. State Department Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs sponsored Exchange Student

ASSE Exchange Students Iryna Zaporizka (*FLEX Ukraine), Teresa Bouza Hernandez (Spain) and Enis Petersen (Denmark) ready to greet families at Knightdale High School in Knightdale, North Carolina, USA.

ASSE Exchange Student Kim Bucher (*CBYX Germany) on the left side in the photo prepares with her team for performing at the State Festival in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, USA.

“I tried out in December and got chosen with 11 other people (out of 16). The play is about a girl who is worried about her “what ifs...” and the play shows how the rest of us are comforting her. Most of it is in Shel Silverstein poems."

ASSE Exchange Students enjoy a visit to the Champs-Élysées in Paris France.

Left to right is Karla Joanna Aguilar Angeles (Mexico), Emma Golden (Evergreen, Colorado, USA), Ivana Lucho Beltran (Mexico), Kseniya Shulga (*FLEX Russia), Raina Young (Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada), Anni (Norway) and Helene (Denmark).

Ivana Lucho Beltra, ASSE Exchange Student (Mexico) says, “...in these few months I have not just learnt a new language but I have also met scores of incredible people, discovered another form of life, some delicious food and discovered a magnificent country that doesn’t stop amazing me. I have also discovered myself. This is an experience. I would definitely do it again.”

Amanda Seymour, ASSE Area Representative in southwestern North Dakota says, “My students loved ice skating and just having the opportunity to get together and be silly! I think most all of my students were first time skaters with the exception of Ella from Finland.

They are a great group of kids!”

ASSE Exchange students, left to right: Sydra (host sister of Nodoka), Thibault Deray (France), Jacopo Valentini (Italy), Camilla Cattaneo (Italy), Ella St. Clair Stevenson (Finland), Tiana Weghorst (Germany), Malin Eckel (Norway) and Nodoka Okuno (Japan).

ASSE Exchange Student Connor Artman of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania USA experiencing his dream to spend a year in Italy says this photo describes his year so far.

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ASSE Exchange Students enjoyed the opportunity to share about their countries during the ASSE Area Representative Training Meeting in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, USA.

Malika Alenova (*FLEX Kyrgyzstan), Alisia Gaffanova (*FLEX Russia), Annika Haverkamp (Germany), Timia Hightower (Germany), Fabio Erede (Italy), Malin Eckel (Norway) and host brother Eric.

ASSE Exchange Student Connor Artman of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania USA experiencing the dream to spend a year in Italy says this photo describes his year so far.

“Connor (in the lower left corner) says, “I haven’t really gotten to know any of the people of Fabriano, but they really make me feel welcome and are happy to help me get through this exchange. I’ve made a lot of friends and had a lot of fun with everybody. This picture highlights how everyone is closer and so much more fun than it was a few months ago.”

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ASSE Exchange Student Kim Bucher (*CBYX Germany) on the lift ride in the photo prepares for performing at the State Festival in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, USA.

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Opening Doors

Stephanie Hildelbrand, ASSE Exchange Student from Puebla, Mexico expresses the difference being an exchange student has made in her life, "An academic exchange opens many doors to a new culture as well as to the language. Especially it opens the door to meet people like in the photo and learning and experiencing new things."

Each of us live different experiences in the exchange. Being an exchange student changes the way you see the world. The group spent hours in two museums, took advantage of many photo ops and enjoyed trying new foods including Chicago Pizza with a stuffed crust.

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Taking Advantage of New Opportunities

By Dorothea ‘Dora’ Wendroth, ASSE Exchange Student (Germany) spending her exchange year with the Bell family in Jasper, Missouri, USA

"I wasn’t involved in poultry and I didn’t have a special interest in it before I came to the U.S. My host family is in 4-H and when we came back from one of the fairs, the idea came up that I should show poultry, too.

We started to look into what I could and wanted to show. I chose to show a Bantam Gold Laced Sebright hen, named Goldie that my host sister had at the grandparent’s house. To prepare for the show, I had to learn the basic parts of a chicken and what they should look like, reasons for disqualifications and a detailed description of my chicken, the breeds and classes. I also learned how to hold a chicken properly and how to put it properly in and out of a cage. My host sister taught me all of it in two months. She knows a lot!

Then we went to the Oklahoma State Poultry Federation Show. There were thousands of birds in a huge barn! This spring I will compete in Springfield, Missouri USA. Besides poultry, I help my host family with 4-H in goats, sheep, gardening and I learned to ride a horse.

At school I’m in choir where I’m also going to compete as a solo and in a trio, and I play the vibrasophone in the percussion section of the band. At school organizing different events.

I am looking forward to going to Prom, and enjoying all the activities available to her while she is in the United States. Kathy says, “I believe that Pauline is a very special girl!”
I will never forget the 27th August 2014 the day I arrived in China. It is a different country with a different culture and a completely different language. For the first time in my life, I left my family, friends and my home behind me for not a week, not for a month but for a year. Not only is the country on the other side of the world but also many of my relatives and friends are not familiar with China and do not know much about the country I am leaving for. Therefore, it was not surprising that with China and do not know much about the country I am leaving for. However, I need to admit that many people were confused when I told them that I would go to China for one year. “Why China?” was always the question, to answer this question, which I heard many times, was extremely hard because I did not know the answer. “I want to learn Chinese” was my standard answer to satisfy them, however, it is only one part of the truth. The fact that there is something more inside me, a fascination that has grown inside me for this country since I first came to China two years ago. Ever since, I had the deep desire to experience the Chinese Culture and the way of living in China. At Linyi Airport, I was picked up by my host father, Mr. Zheng and host brother. They all welcomed me and I felt extremely happy. The way to their home was a little adventure for me not knowing where we would go and seeing the different landscape and houses. It was a thrilling experience. Arriving at home I met my host mother and ate my first Chinese dinner together. Even though, I could not eat much because I was completely exhausted, I greatly enjoyed the meal. Ever since I feel extremely welcome and I extremely appreciate the help and support that I get from my host family.

Three days after my arrival, the moment of truth finally arrived. My first day in a Chinese school. At first I was shocked, having the first day of school on a Sunday evening, could not mean any good for the future weekends. However, when I entered the school this was quickly forgotten because I was overwhelmed when I saw the headline on the television screen saying Welcome to our school Patrick. Everything I experienced on this very first day was different, my classmates, my teachers, the classroom and especially the school schedule. After a little bit more than a week, my stomach finally got used to the Chinese food. In the beginning it was a huge change due to Swiss food lying heavier in one’s stomach with all the sauces, cream and cheese. However, I need to admit that I enjoy eating Chinese food with its huge versatility. Even though I might not like everything, especially in the seafood section, my doubts about whether I would only eat very few kinds of food were vanishing the longer I stayed here. I ate a lot of food that I would not even dare to look at back in Switzerland. My whole eating habit changed from only eating what I love and know to try out almost everything that people offer me. So far this method is a great success I discovered a whole new world of food. I keep tasting new things to experience as much Chinese food as possible.

Drill Team Dream
By Mariam Ghilenti, ASSE Exchange Student (FLEX Georgia)
spending her exchange year In Montesano, Washington, USA

I had no idea what a Drill Team was before I arrived in America. I saw them at our first football game performing on the field and I was blown away by their routines and moves. I’ve always dreamed of dancing with pom poms and wearing the uniform, so when I heard about the auditions for the Competition Drill Team I tried out and got selected. I started in November getting up at 5 with practices starting at 6 and lasting until 8 o’clock. I also practiced in the evenings in my room to improve my moves. My drill sisters are really supportive and they always help me out when I need it.

For the competitions our coach, Kelsey choreographed two dances for us; military and pom routines. She also chose two songs for us. Military dance is based on military drills. Comparing to the pom routine, military is performed without pom poms and the moves are clearer, sharper, and faster when doing pom. Some teams use flags and rifles in the military drill routines but our team does not use them.

Pom routine is more an energetic dance. We use pom poms to make the picture of dance more visible to people. We also use more gymnastic moves like splits, kicks, toe touches, and somersaults. Both of the routines are usually really fast and energetic.

January was my most successful month in my whole exchange year! I had 2 competitions with the Drill Team and took 1st & 3rd place twice in both routines and in both competitions! I am amazed by American people! I love the way they aren’t scared to show off their pride and beliefs. I adore the way they are always here to help community and make a change. The American society is a great example for me, when I get home I will use my experience to make a difference.

One of Our Own
By Nancy and Norm Brown of Nebraska City, Nebraska USA who have hosted 13 ASSE Exchange students.

The best part of being a host family is seeing the friends that our students make with the local students here in Nebraska City and the special bond that we make with each student. My dad Rev Ed Brown hosted seven foreign exchange students from 1995 until his passing away in February 2000. Nancy and I were told we could never have children so we started talking about hosting foreign exchange students. After much talking with ASSE Area Rep Jean Morrison of Nebraska City High School Principal Marc Adler we decided we would host Alexander Ebersgen from Cologne, Germany. He arrived in time for Homecoming Weekend in October 2000 and our adventure has continued for 14 years. We treat the kids as one of our own.

A few ‘Words of Wisdom’ we offer to first time host families is to treat the exchange student as one of your own kids. We have a set of rules such as be home by curfew when they are out with their friends. If something comes up that our student won’t be home by curfew, they call us and we are about staying out longer. Our students have chores as any child in our home would do.

We do also fun things like going to KC Royals baseball games, visiting the Omaha Henry Doorly Zoo, explore the Offutt Space Museum, plus we do a family night activity once a week.

We encourage our students to get involved with school activities. Most of our students have tried athletics and have done very well. The boys play soccer in the spring and have tried football, basketball or wrestling. Some of our students have joined the choir, have been in the music products and have been involved with FCCLA (Family, Career and Community Leaders of America). Through their activities they have made good friends with students and teachers.

Our current student Kilian Keetz (CBRX Germany) calls us Mom and Dad and our 12 year old son Nicholas enjoys having a big brother or sister every school year. Our other students have been Nele Bartisch (Germany), Nadine Buse (Germany), Frida Ricketts (Germany), Aja Pavacova (Czech Republic), Michael Roehrer (Germany), Natalia from Brazil with another exchange program, Valentin Kiel (Germany), Imke Ahlen (Germany), Tannis Dahlman (Germany), Imke Wuhler (Germany), Andreas Fuchs (Germany), Tom Brunschen (Germany). ASSE values the dedicated support and opportunity that the Brown family has given to so many students over the years!