

May I firstly thank the Alliance Française for facilitating the wonderful experience which I enjoyed in New Caledonia. It was truly a special and enriching experience. This trip was made particularly special due to the fact that I was able to stay with the Bon family for six nights. Not only did this give me the opportunity to speak a lot of French, but also to truly see how people in a different culture live their daily lives, and to become part of their daily routines. They were a lovely family who welcomed me very warmly and contributed enormously to my unforgettable experience.

I would also like to thank the Alliance Française for planning the trip so meticulously enabling the whole trip to run smoothly and for the inclusion of a wide variety of interesting activities that enabled the group to experience the many and varied aspects which the island has to offer. Meeting the other winners from the other states was an enriching experience as we all got along so well, and shared a lot of aspects of our education.

On the first day, we went on a tour of the island, then visited the library which I found very interesting as not only was I able to read some classic books in French, but also to look at some text books and see the similarities to those in English. The library also offered the opportunity to meet some local students who were studying at university. I met a particularly passionate theology student there. Later that day, we visited the maritime museum where we learnt about the lighthouse at Amédé which we would later visit on the Friday. That evening we met our host families. I could not have wished for a more delightful family. They welcomed me so sincerely, and immediately made me feel part of the family, a feeling that endured for my whole stay. We still correspond via e-mail and they are anxious to keep in touch with me and I with them.

On the next morning, we visited CREIPAC, which taught us about the history of the island. That afternoon, we visited the Tjibaou cultural centre where we were shown the Kanak artwork. One facet of this centre that particularly interested me was that it emphasized the fact that the traditional culture is very much alive today and this vast collection of traditional and contemporary artwork, for me, was most impressive.

Friday, we visited the island on which the lighthouse at Amédé was situated. It was a relaxed day which enabled us to appreciate the natural beauty of New Caledonia, which includes the beautiful coral. In the midst of swimming and observing the marine life, we were treated to a buffet lunch accompanied by some traditional dancing. The day was also a great opportunity for the group to interact a little more and feel more comfortable still in each other's company.

The weekend was easily the highlight of the trip as the entire time was spent with the family. On Saturday morning, the family and I climbed a small mountain, from whose summit one could see most of the island. Later that day, we visited the aquarium and saw some very rare species of fish, and after dinner I played a game of French scrabble with the hosts which was both entertaining and educational. On Sunday, the family was kind enough to take me out on their boat and give me a taste of one of their usual weekend activities. We went about twenty minutes out of the bay where the father tried to harpoon some fish, however, was unsuccessful and I was content to swim among the vast schools of fish and explore the colourful beauty beneath me. We went to several sites where I was able to enjoy snorkeling and then had lunch on the boat. Later in the afternoon, we searched for sea turtles and were fortunate enough to catch a glimpse of a few before heading back home.

On our last day before heading back home, we went to the Lycée Blaise Pascale and were able to part take in the lessons with students of our age group. They learnt, for the most part, the same things as I did, however, it was interesting to part-take in a philosophy class as they do not teach this subject at my school. Fortunately, despite its abstractness, by the end of the lesson, I had

managed to get my head around at least some of Sartre's words. Finally, we visited the SLN Nickel extraction facility, which was an unique experience and interesting not simply due to the controversy it caused in New Caledonia, but also due to the fact that we were able to experience through five senses, the ways in which metals are extracted. I was able to learn the importance of this plant to the island's economy.

I must reiterate, that this trip was more than simply a holiday. It was an entire cultural experience that opened the doors of New Caledonia to me in terms of the cultural, natural and linguistic senses. It was an opportunity to live and breathe as a local and experience the seemingly small, yet important parts of the culture that one would not usually be able to experience. This trip has greatly enriched my life and will remain as one of the highlights of my youth. Having had this wonderful experience, I hope that many other students can avail themselves of this unique and life changing experience which the Alliance Francaise has so generously made available to students of French, enabling them to extend their education. I feel so privileged that I was given this wonderful opportunity that I must once again send my gratitude to the Alliance for the creation of such an experience and I wish the entire process and organization the best in the future, and may it continue. While I am passionate about French, the experience added a new dimension to the language and improved my French conversation significantly.

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