What Being an Outbound Exchange Student Meant to Me
Lauren, 2010/2011 District 5080 exchange student to Norway

A year ago, Norway was just another oddly shaped country on the globe that sits in the corner of my room. Over eleven months, two new families, plenty of laugher and awkward moments, and lots of new friends, that little country became my second home. I was skeptical to becoming an exchange student when I first applied, but continued through the paperwork, never really believing it would happen. But it did; the Norwegian flag covered in goodbyes hanging on my bedroom wall and the new language flitting around in my mind are evidence of the best year of my life so far, as a Rotary Youth Exchange student.

Through living as a local rather than a tourist and going to school I got a good perspective on Norwegian life and culture, having so much time to pick up on differences between Canada and Norway. One of my favourite parts of being an exchange student was the challenge of using another language, how communicating went from being second nature to a puzzle that had to be solved. I can't even explain how much fun it is to beat your host family at scrabble in their own language, convince the train conductor that you're a local, or just have a long conversation in a language you'd never heard of a year before.

I kept a blog throughout the year, and on it is a list of things I'd never done before I went on exchange. I'd never taken a train, been north of the Arctic Circle, eaten reindeer or sheep's eyeball, thought in three different languages at once, or even been outside of North America. All these little landmarks were amazing, but the best part was just being a Norwegian and adapting to a new country so that it became my own. I never would've thought you could get so attached to a place in such a short amount of time, but I already miss speaking Norwegian and all the incredible people I met there. I'm so thankful I had the opportunity to be a Rotary Youth Exchange student; it was a year I'll never forget!!