

Downe House exchange experience

The day I found out I was going to spend three months at Downe House School, I felt like the luckiest girl in the world. However, the more the beginning of my stay here approached, the more nervous and uncertain I felt. What if they won't like me? What if I won't be good enough? However, all my fears went away the moment I first entered York and the wonderful housemistresses gave me the warmest welcome.



In addition, when I was sitting in the common room the very evening, already a part of the Holcombe House Drama team, I felt that Downe House would feel less like a school and more like a home. This theory could not prove truer and Downe House became a home to me I now find very difficult to leave. I could hardly have imagined people as nice and caring as the York house staff. I cannot remember all the treats they had in store for the whole term, but I will never forget what a wonderful place our house was thanks to their hard work and commitment.



Over the course of three months, the trees outside classroom windows were changing colours and slowly, the leaves began to fall, covering the paving stones in the cloisters with a copper coloured carpet crunching beneath our feet on my way to and from lessons. This was the time I spent talking to my classmates, usually discussing the topics we studied together and sharing our personal points of view, an experience

adding great value to the lessons themselves.

Another vital part of Downe House life were 'black tie' dinners with boys' schools, namely Eton and Harrow, which I have enjoyed much more than the Prague balls, mainly because reeling is much more fun than the ballroom dancing. There is no other feeling like boy spinning you so fast you feel like any moment, you could fly.

And talking about supernatural feelings, joining the choir was definitely one of my best decisions and I have been through many



magical moments during both rehearsals and actual performances and, as Dr Exon reminded me, the best is yet to come – the Senior Carol Service, which I am eagerly looking forward to (although not too eagerly, because it will be on the day of my depart).



While at Downe House, I have had the opportunity to explore England, or at least, our neighbourhood, Berkshire and Oxfordshire, and I have visited many places I have never been to before. Together with Adriana, we went to Winchester to visit our Czech friends studying at Winchester College, during the half-term holiday, I have stayed in London and I have spent the second short exeat with the lovely Preston family in their homes

in Islip and Croydon. This visit was particularly interesting, as they wanted me to have a proper British experience, so they took me to see a football match, the magnificent Blenheim Palace and they, while I was warming myself up by the fireplace with a cup of tea, prepared the most delicious roast dinner (vegetarian, for me).



Days flew past as if it were holiday, and almost too soon, as it would seem, Christmas was just around the corner. And Downe House was ready to transform into a place of magical and festive atmosphere with decoration painting workshops, gingerbread baking, beautiful Christmas trees and lovely little surprises prepared by Secret Santa's who took over our house in the loveliest of ways.

Thanks to my stay at Downe House, I had a chance to study only the subjects I am really interested in instead of the fifteen compulsory subjects I have at home. During English and History, I have not only learned many interesting facts about Wuthering Heights, Othello and the Tudors, but also improved my written style, especially when it came to essays, so even though I won't be staying for the whole Sixth Form, I feel more confident when thinking about studying at a British university. Which brings me to another point. From the very first HERS session it was clear that Downe House is incredibly supportive when it comes to higher education and university

applications. However, although helping me to improve academically, I am most grateful for the opportunity of growing as a person. Whether it is making friends with people from places like Malta, Singapore, Hon Kong and, of course, England, I have had the chance to volunteer in a local school for physically challenged children and the experience was truly life changing, helping me to see what I want to be in life.

Downe House exchange has changed my life in many ways, some more subtle than the others. It helped me to discover opportunities I scarcely thought about before, it helped me make friends with people from all over the world and allowed me to spend three months in a very stimulating environment and I will leave England with a heavy heart (heavy with all the memories) and mind full of inspiration and motivation, that will surely last until I (hopefully) return for my university studies.

