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## **My Experience in Scotland**

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As a result of my recent experience as a summer exchange student in Scotland, I now view benefit of travel as a vital component in understanding another culture. When I was first contemplating applying for the position as representative for Sister Cities International, I was concerned with second hand accounts of Scottish stereotypes; all Scots eat haggis, play bagpipes while wearing tartan kilts, and spend their days sitting in pubs, smoking and drinking to excess. My experience couldn't have been more opposite; the people I met were health-conscious, educated, and globally concerned. Although there were superficial differences in our cultures - such things as food, expressions, and a more lax attitude toward rules - I came to realize that people themselves are not that different across the pond.

While in Scotland, I hoped to be an outstanding global ambassador representing America's youth. I wanted to demonstrate that all American stereotypes aren't accurate; we don't all tote rifles, act arrogantly, waste energy, and are definitely not depicted accurately by the show "The Simpsons" (my host family's main impression of American life). Through the friendships that I formed with other high school students and through the interactions I had with teachers and parents, I felt as though I made a difference by using myself as an example in demonstrating that those stereotypes weren't correct, and that American youth can be well-mannered and respectful.

Living in Scotland allowed me to consider how another region of the world functioned as compared to the United States. The ancient architecture, rural roads, and abundance of black sheep gave the impression that Scotland was an unsophisticated and undeveloped area. But upon further observation, I noticed that the country was quite advanced, with wind energy replacing oil, small efficient cars, and an older generation whose text-messaging abilities rivaled that of America's youth. I found it to be a remarkable contrast; keeping tradition and history alive while enjoying a modern standard of living.

I hope that I will be given more opportunities to travel in my life, experiencing new lands and people and exchanging ideas. My initial plunge into a different culture changed my uneducated perception of Europeans; in turn, I hope that my hosts, teachers and the friends that I have made also have a more "wholesome and charitable view" of Americans.