

Hello,

my name is Tamy and I stayed at the beautiful Sunshine Coast from April '22 to January '23 where I had the best time of my life 😊.

As part of the school exchange program EQI I spent 2 terms (5 months) at the Caloundra State High School (CSHS) at the best place to be: Queensland Australia.

I'm not lying if I say that it wasn't easy all the time. It needs a few weeks to settle in completely, built strong friendships with the locals and have a full Australian life built. But with an open and positive mindset and a bit of confidence (or even just friendliness) it's not hard at all.

And all 'the effort' in the beginning is worth it! I can proudly say that I fully made the best experience possible out of it and that I had the best time I could imagine.

I came to Australia with the goal to have an awesome time I'll never forget, experience as many new things as possible, make uncountable memories, meet many new and great people, improve my English, and grow as a person.

**I dreamed of building a second life on the other side of the world, and I did!**



**And in my case, all of that wouldn't have been possible at all without Alicia Edwards and the International Department of the CSHS!**



I look back to April 2022 and my first day in school and remember how new and exciting everything was, but also how overwhelming. But Alicia was on my side from day one till my last day and I couldn't be more thankful for her.

**It's not countable anymore with how many questions and requests I came to her and how she helped me every single time, without losing her friendly, positive, energetic, and patient nature once. She's not doing it because it is her job, she is doing it because it's her passion and she loves every International that arrives at CSHS. She made it to her mission to help everyone as much as possible and make each's stay to the best experience ever, and she does it with 110 % heart and effort.**

Especially in my case, everything was a bit different caused to the previous pandemic of covid-19 and the required pause of the entire International Program in Australia. In which they just opened the borders before I arrived, I was one of just two Internationals at the entire Sunshine Coast during my first term.

Consequently, my start was a bit different and might harder than usual: I haven't had the typical International Group with all the people in the same situation or group activities. I was, and I'm really happy about it now, forced to become friends with all the Australians that needs much more time. As well as, I had to take care of all the activities and trips that haven't been organised from EQI back then.

**But I wasn't alone, I had Alicia Edwards as the head of the International Department, Cassie Hanley as the Homestay Coordinator, and the school that stood behind me the entire time, always helping to make everything work.**



Although, EQI is on their normal functional level again with a big International Community, lots of organised trips as well as multiple great available host families. I still wanted to describe my 'special situation' to show that Alicia and the school put a lot of effort in the things they care about!

For this reason, they could manage to get some amazing trips organised during my second term. Like our 2-day tour to Fraser Island, where we went for a swim in the breath-taking Lake McKenzie, visited the famous shipwreck and most important, had the chance to see wildlife dingos.

But it's not just the International Department when I'm talking about the school. Besides the (deputy) principals, there are the always kind and helpful guidance officers, wellbeing teachers, head of departments, as well as the wonderful secretaries at administration or the cleaning ladies.

**It was a pleasure to talk to them every time. All the little nice chats about the school, the exchange experience, our travel stories, the Australian culture, and things to see and do on the beautiful Sunshine Coast.**

**Little things like these create the friendly and respectful atmosphere this school stands for and makes everyone feel comfortable.**

Especially the International Room provides a friendly and save space for nice chats. It's not only the place to be with all the other exchange students to get to know them and their cultures, or to organise all the trips and activities. It's a place for the school staff to stop by from time to time and talk to us as well.



But when I'm talking about the staff, there's one big group shouldn't be missing: My teachers. **I don't know if I was just so lucky to get the best teachers possible or if CSHS doesn't have bad teachers. In all my 6 classes (exactly, you only have 6 different classes in the Australian school system) I got along with my teachers really well and developed so much more than just a normal student-teacher relationship.** It was more like a normal friendship in which we laughed together and talked about our life while or in between doing our exercises.

So, I ended up playing drama and eating chocolate muffins every Friday morning with my awesome drama teacher. Chatting about the newest movie hits in the cinemas with my Film, TV and New Media teacher and laughing about random stuff. (Sadly) getting beaten in 'Finska' (a fun wooden toss game to play outside) by my sports and recreation teacher and working out in the school gym, together with the whole class. Getting creative and talk about God and the universe while working on our art projects with my visual art teacher, as well as having a great time together at our class excursion to an art gallery in Brisbane. Or having amazing girl chats with my legal studies teacher and our 'just-girls-class', whose lessons were more like a therapy session for everyone, improving the laws of the Australian government in the theoretical way in between.

**All in all, you can just look forward to a school where you can be on eye level with your teachers and have a relaxed and respectful relationship while learning something for life in your classes.**



Besides those great classes, there were many extracurricular activities and events I took part in: I joined the schools netball team that was an awesome and typical Australian experience. I met new people and played real matches against other schools. Sport events like 'cross country' or 'sports carnival' were fun days with the whole school where everyone (teachers, students, deputy principals etc.) were working together to get everything organised and put in action.

In which I participated and became first in high jump, I could join the district sports carnival at the Campus of University of Sunshine Coast where all the qualified students went to, together with our sport teachers. It was a great chance to get to know new people from different grades of our school and cheer on each other.

Not to forget, the music night where students of all different classes have performed and made a fun and entertaining evening for everyone who came to watch. It was a great possibility to go there with friends to support the ones who were standing on stage. They were singing or playing an instrument, often together with their teachers. We've even had multiple songs of the school's own rock band.



**And the most important thing: For every single event, the school makes sure the Internationals get involved and have a great time.** Some of the exchange students were even participating in the music night and were standing on stage by themselves playing the violin.

But one of my highlight events was the seniors formal and graduation ceremony I could be part of. I've got perfectly included and had an awesome time, celebrating with my friends, schoolmates and teachers.



As I already mentioned, Alicia helped me with every single of my requests and things I've loved to do. Was it to join the netball team (even I've never played it before), to attend surfing lessons with the fantastic local 'Caloundra Surf School', to take tennis lessons at the Caloundra Tennis Club, or to start volunteering at 'Australia Zoo'. She has even driven me all the way to the zoo for my Interview. Or was it to help out at the famous Caloundra Street Markets at a 'Roesti booth' (a typical German food), or to put my idea of a cooking class with all the Internationals in action straight away (what brought us a fun time and delicious cinnamon rolls).

Everything worked out in the end. Even I mostly managed and organized it by myself after a while, the first step to get everything started came with Alicia and her amazing help. She always knew what to do, who to call, where to ask.

**She's someone of action who takes care of things without talking about them for ages, for which reason everything got done so quickly all the time. With her organised, persevering, and convincing characteristics she's perfect for the job and gets everything managed.**

All in all, I can just say: Alicia became a very important person in my life and we're still in contact. And I'm sure I'll be visiting her as soon as I'm back in Queensland.



Same counts for all the paperwork and travel forms the Internationals need to fill out to get trips and activities approved. It's a good and necessary system to make sure everything happens in order and to keep everyone safe.

But even it's a bit of annoying and complicated, with Alicias and the schools given help it's not a big deal anymore: They support you in every step and work as fast as possible to get all your activities approved in time, even that means extra hours work for them.

In general, I'm very thankful how great the school has supported me in my plans of volunteering in the zoo. It was one of my best experiences during my stay in Down Under. (I could meet so many great and inspiring people, learn so much about the Australian wildlife and myself and most important: Help amazing animals like koalas, kangaroos, cassowaries, lemurs, birds, etc.).



**Not to forget, Caloundra itself has 6 amazing beaches you can go to, the closest one is 15 minutes walking distance to CSHS.**

It's perfect to meet up with friends after school, go for a sunset swim or to get hot chips, sitting on the beach and have nice chats. So, if you asked yourself before how the typical Australian lifestyle looks like:

It's eating hot chips on the beach with friends and jump in the water afterwards ;)



Another area where the school did a perfect job is my host family.

Alicia and Cassie had a very good look at my 'profile' (my picture and the letter I've written about myself) and tried to find the family that suits my personality the best.

And they couldn't pick better than they did!

It not even needed two minutes till I clicked with my host family after I arrived. We've got along super well, and they truly became my second family who I love.

**My host mum Brenda welcomed me with open arms, and with her loving, caring, and positive nature she treated me like her own daughter.**



It's crazy if I think about how quickly we all became so close. We spent so much time together, got to know each other so well and have so many memories. Memories of trips, holidays, birthdays, family dinners, picnics on the beach, or just of sitting on the couch watching a movie, talking about our day, telling stories, and laughing.

**All these times are times we'll never forget.**

**And they'll always be my family, even far after my exchange.**

**Same as I'll always be one of their family members.**

My Australian host sister has even visited me in Germany at my home already, and we're planning to visit our Brazilian host sister at her home soon.

After I spent such a long time in Caloundra I can truly say, Australia and the people there have my heart!

I found a second family I love and know I will keep in contact my whole life, I made multiple awesome friends I can't imagine not to have anymore and found a place in Australia I can call my home.

It's crazy how many things you can do and how many experiences you can have in less than a year. If you're open and motivated to try new things, you can go back in your home country with thousands of adventures you've lived, trips you've did, places you've visited, people you've met, new things you've tried and memories you'll have your entire life.

**So, let's get your adventure started and come to Caloundra State High School on the beautiful Sunshine Coast! :)**

