

Letter from AFS participant  
School Year Program from Australia to Argentina 2006 (AUSYPscARGSH06)  
25 November 2006

*Dear AFS,*

*My year here in Argentina has been amazing, and I am so thankful that I was able to go on this exchange. It has made me look at my life in a whole new perspective as far as family, friends, myself, my future is concerned! Some of my daily routines include, walking to school, drinking a coke with my friends, eating lunch as a family, taking a siesta and going to the gym. Although the Argentinean lifestyle and culture is very different from my own, I have a new appreciation for this culture and a better understanding of my own surroundings. The people here are very lively and friendly, and I have always felt warmly greeted by strangers. Practically nobody has a job at my age here, so many young people have a very active social life.*

*Argentineans are definitely not morning people, as their typical Friday usually goes as follows: They go to work or school from around 8 to 1, then go home and eat lunch with their family, then probably take a siesta from 2 to 5 and go back to work from 6 to 9. Then they come home and eat dinner around 10pm, and then go out dancing from midnight to 5 or 6 am and then sleep until lunch!!! Every single family that I know has a maid, and they are there to make lunch and keep the house tidy. It's been pretty good because my maid cleans my room, but I guess that's not the best habit to get into!!*

*Argentineans eat a lot of meat as well as sweets. Some typical food here is Milanese, which is fried meat covered in bread crumbs, empanadas, which is meat or chicken in a pastry (but much better than a meat pie!) and dulce de leche which is cooked sugar and milk and is usually put on bread or in cakes. Although adapting to the food was no problem, I found it hard to be surrounded by poverty. As I had never seen this before, it astonished me to see people begging for money, and living either in the streets or very rundown houses.*

*Another difference is that Argentina is a Catholic country so there are many Catholics, and it's normal to see people making the sign of the cross when they pass the Virgin Mary on the main avenue. It's interesting as well that although the legal age to drink alcohol, smoke and go out clubbing in Argentina is 18, there are girls (not boys) as young as 14 or 15 who go out, and never get their ID checked, because they look older. Although this may seem fairly dangerous, the people here don't drink very much and usually just go out to dance, rather than to drink. As the town that I live in is fairly small, most 18 or 19 year olds do not to have their driving license, as everyone usually walks or takes a bus to wherever they want to go. But as well there are exceptions, for example my brother here, who is fifteen, always drives the car without a license!!*

*My family here has been fantastic, and I totally feel as though I am another daughter in this large family of 4 girls (3 living in another state and I living in my house) and 1 boy. I have grown so close to each member (including the 3 other sisters) of the family that I know I will miss them terribly when I go back home. My brother here (15years old) is very similar to my brother in Australia so I get along with him very well. I go out dancing every weekend with my sister (19years old) or my friends from school.*

*As for language --- well, I knew about 12 words in Spanish when I arrived here!! And now all my interaction is in Spanish – with my school friends, with my AFS friends and with my host family. It was a struggle at first but somehow it just happened!!*

*My sister and I share the same room and although we often fight, she has become my best friend here in Argentina. I don't have a sister back in Australia so this has been a very good experience in learning how to communicate and share. I have made such good friends here that I am amazed with myself, as I never thought that I could share such a good friendship in another language. I am very sad because I am leaving in less than two months so I am trying to make the very best of the rest of my time here. I know that I will definitely come back to Argentina because I have a family here and so many special friends. I would like to thank AFS for giving me this opportunity, as it has been the best learning experience of my life!!*

*Best wishes to all AFS volunteers, returnees, hopees and hosted students,*

*Amanda Hameon*