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## Our trip to the island of Réunion The report of the Austrian students

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Over one year ago our headmaster, Mag. Peter Rindler, told us about a project called „Comenius“. We were told about the things we would do and see. Not everyone seemed interested, but eleven pupils from our class were. Afterwards he told us that our first trip would be to an island in the Indian Ocean. We were enthusiastic about the trip ever since we found that out. Because of the Comenius project these eleven pupils were allowed to travel to the beautiful island of Réunion with two of our teachers, Mag. Peter Rindler and Mag. Anke Pronegg.

Comenius is a big project, which many European countries participate in. It's about pupils having new experiences,

seeing other cultures and gathering information about European food, and sharing all of these things with each other.

So we started the preparations for our journey to the island of Réunion. We took photos of our school building and made a video to introduce ourselves to our future hosts. As we didn't know anything about Réunion before our trip we searched for some facts on the internet. It has an area of 2512m<sup>2</sup> and is located near Madagascar and Mauritius.

Our journey began in the very early morning in front of our school, because we had to catch a flight from Vienna to Paris. After the first flight of our trip (and first ever flight for some of us), and eight hours of waiting we took off for Réunion in the evening. The eleven-hour flight wasn't a very pleasant experience,

but a price we would be willing to pay again. Most of us were exhausted after the flight, as it was hard to get any sleep. Not only because it's difficult to sleep on a plane, but we couldn't stop thinking about our hosts and we were really excited to finally meet them.



We arrived at Réunion airport very tired, but there was no time to rest, as we had to hurry. Our hosts were already waiting for us and neither us nor them wanted to wait any longer. It was a strange feeling for us to stand in the middle of a big crowd, waiting to find out who was going to pick us up.

At first it was hard for us to communicate with each other, as we were all nervous and English is not the mother tongue for either of us. But after a while we all found a way to communicate with one another, and immediately tried to get to know each other better. We tried to teach each other words in our language. The people in Réunion speak French or Creole, which is a mixture of French, Malagasy, Portuguese, English and some other languages. This is

because they are an overseas department of France.



Most of us had the impression that the food in Réunion wouldn't be very different from Austrian food, but we soon realised: people from Réunion eat a lot of rice, baguettes and spicy sauces. And we all found that the food tasted great. The exotic fruits were very tasty; especially the pineapples, lychees and the passion fruit, as these do not grow naturally in Austria.





The next day, we went with our hosts to their school Lycée Paul Moreau in Bras Panon. They showed us around the school building. There was a large courtyard, around which was the school, which is very smart-looking. The average temperature in Réunion is around 23°C, if not hotter, so they need fresh air in the classrooms. With this in mind, all rooms have two walls of windows, so it doesn't get too hot. The "hole" in the middle is a place where all the students meet up during their breaks. Overall it is a great concept.



We also went to classes with our hosts, which were very funny to be honest. The

teachers either tried to explain what they were doing to the Austrian pupils, or they just worked like they would normally do. And they had really cool blackboards to write on. They are big white boards which they can write on with certain pens. Everything happens on the computer at the same time, so they are able to change the colour they are writing with, or delete the whole page, or skip/return to pages they have already used. It seemed like a very nice gadget to have as a teacher.



The Piton de la Fournaise was our next destination. It is one of the most active volcanoes on Earth and erupts once or twice every year. Even though it was exhausting to go all the way there it was such a beautiful sight. There was a whole new landscape in front of us; barely any plants, just a big empty field and the volcano at the end of it. But we had to turn back twenty minutes before we got to the peak, which was very unfortunate and upsetting. But, nevertheless it was a great trip.



The next day, we went to eRcane, which is a sugarcane factory. They carry out tests to find which sugarcane has the best attributes for specific areas, to get the most out of planting and harvesting it. Sugarcane is a very important product for the economy of Réunion, as it connects it with a lot of other countries.

The same afternoon we went to Saint Denis, which is Réunion's capital city. We went to several markets and it was a lot of fun and really enjoyable. as We saw many things that had never seen, smelled or tasted before. There were so many tiny shops with lots of things to see, and some of the hosts went with us so it was even more fun.

In the evening we went to a sugarcane distillery. It was steamy and hot in the factory, but it was interesting to see how everything was made, and at the end we got to taste some of the jam and alcohol they produce there. One of the waste products is known worldwide: rum.

Thursday was the first time we

went to the beach and it was awesome! The water was turquoise, and you can see so many fishes that swim directly beneath you. If you snorkel, you can see so many beautiful things underwater. There were many corals and fishes that we had never seen before. It was such a great experience.

Afterwards we drove to a botanic garden and looked at all the plants that are grown in Réunion. There were many interesting stories about how they got to the island, and how this huge garden was all the owner's idea.



The following day started with a visit to an organic farm. The owner of this farm and his whole family lived there and they achieved something that not a lot of people can say about themselves: they eat only what they grow themselves. A fact that makes it even more impressive, is that they do not use fertilisers or pesticides. He told us how certain plants keep other ones healthy, act like pesticides or give the earth enough nutrients for the other plants to grow.



When we returned to the school, we stayed with our hosts and went to class again. This was the last time we were in any of their school lessons, although I have to admit that it was a lot of fun to stay in their school with them.

That evening was simply amazing. All of the Austrian people met up at another host's house, together with all of their hosts. We had an awesome pool party with dancing, eating and playing around in the pool. It was one of the best parties we've ever been to.

Saturday was taken up with shopping and getting presents for our families. Some hosts went with us and we had a lot of fun and found some beautiful things to buy. We went to a large beach with black sand, and did everything that we could think of.

Our next day was reserved for our host families. Some of us went to the waterfalls, some did a tour of the island and others went for a traditional Réunion dinner. It was a very nice last opportunity for us to spend time with our

families.

Overall Monday and Tuesday were great. We spent our time mostly at the beach, swimming, relaxing, reading or sunbathing. Thanks to some very kind resident and bar owner, we were given a lot of delicious food and drinks. We all ate as much as we could and we were stuffed. Literally!

The evening was breath-taking. The sunset was by far the most stunning thing we've ever seen. It was almost unbelievable; like looking at a picture or a painting.

We spent the morning in an aquarium, looking at all the tropical fishes of Réunion.

After returning to our hotel, we spent some more time on the beach. Our journey pretty much ended here as we then had to return to the airport, where our families saw us for the last time. It was a very sad moment, as many of us didn't want to say goodbye. But one thing is for sure: Even though we said goodbye to them, we will remember this journey for our whole lives.

Some things we noticed about Réunion: They have cultures from all over the world. There's no such thing as racism, and you're free to believe in any religion you want to. Most inhabitants have dark skin. They eat a lot of spicy food. When it's time for dinner, they switch on the TV.

Things we liked about it: The people are very nice and helpful. Their beaches are amazing. There are trees and

plants everywhere, so there is a lot of nature. The landscapes seemed like they could be from another world, they were so beautiful.

Overall, it was a really great trip, and we would go back anytime.



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