

AFS Exchange Programme

4E (16) Sarai Valero Aguinaga 仇雍然 from Spain

Kaixo, Kaixo! This is Sarai Valero Aguinaga, baptized as 仇雍然 on a hot day of August that looks as if it was yesterday. I'm 17 years old and I studied in Madam Lau Kam Lung Secondary School of MFBM during the school year 2018/19.

There's a beautiful little city in the North of Spain, surrounded by a middle-aged wall, with about 300,000 inhabitants. It's quite small compared to the huge size of Hong Kong. But I'm sure that if you ask any Spanish person, or even some foreigners, whether they know a city called Pamplona, they'll all reply, "Pamplona! Oh yes! It's a beautiful little city and they throw some amazing parties there, where people run in front of the bulls!" Yep, people from Pamplona go pretty crazy during its festivals. That's where I come from and where I've grown up with my mom, my dad, my little brother and my even littler sister. I love my city, but I just had this feeling in my chest that did not let me sleep. I had to fly away from those middle-aged walls and discover the world because the world is so big, and my city so small, and there are always so many places to see, so much food to taste, so many people to meet. I believe that's more or less how I ended up in Hong Kong.

Whenever I think of Hong Kong, the first word that comes to my mind is "chaos". Hong Kong is an explosion of people, colors, sounds, lights, flows, taxis, music, markets, shops, parks, cultures... And

among all the madness, if you do a little research, you'll notice that there are green mountains, quiet harbor, sunny beaches and small fishing villages where you can take a break from the busy life in the city. There's so much to do that I never feel I've done enough. I guess I'm completely in love with the city.

Hong Kong has completely charmed me in about 10 months. I love taking the star ferry to go to Hong Kong Island. I love when I find myself in the middle of the blue sea, with skyscrapers on the Island on one side, and Victoria Harbor on the other, while a light breeze rumples my hair. I just love the sea, and whenever I can, during night time, I go to the little pier we have in Tuen Mun and stare at the many ships floating on the water and the tall buildings with their blinking lights.

I met my host family on the same hot day of August when I got my Chinese name, and since then we've treasured precious experiences together. One of the things they have done is to introduce me to Hong Kong's gastronomy, and what can be more precious than that? We often go yum cha together, and have dinner with Popo or Mama. We also enjoyed big Pun Choi in winter. I love going hiking with them and discovering amazing new places. They always take great care of me, even I was a complete stranger and outsider. They made me feel welcome on the first day, and they've always been caring and kind. They treat me like their third daughter.





Coming to school here has been an amazing experience. At the beginning, the idea of attending a Buddhist school only for girls certainly surprised me. It was so different and not at all what I was used to! Now, I can't picture myself anywhere else. I've made the best friends one can ask for, and enjoyed every single moment spent together. Every Friday, I long for Monday to arrive in order to gather all together again at lunchtime and gossip about the anecdotes during the weekend. They all are as crazy as I am and this is what makes them so special.

The thing that I like most about Hong Kong is that it's always full of surprises. It's so big and crowded that there's always something new to do, something new to taste or somewhere new to go. You never get tired of this city. Sometimes, even if I've already spent about 8 months here, I still feel as if I'd just arrived. Even the most usual things keep surprising me, from the neon lights in Kowloon districts, a hidden tiny shop full of knick-knacks to the colorful temples full of smoking joss sticks.

I can't find any specific word to describe my experience here. I guess it's been like a roller-coaster ride. When you first get on, you have no idea where it'll lead you to, but still you're willing to start the journey; and suddenly it does, without even noticing. It has its ups and its downs, and one day you feel extremely happy while the next very sad, never really understanding why. But one thing is certain: it all happens at an incredibly high speed, and you need to treasure and profit from every single moment because before you know, it's all over and you need to give your seat up to the other people waiting for the ride.

I've grown up a lot during this school year, in all the senses of the word. Well, I guess not quite in the literal way, but that's not really important because I'll wear high heels in the future. I've learnt how to

be more independent and take responsibility while handling all kinds of situations on my own, and to always give all I have. I've learnt to take risks and to live and enjoy every experience possible. I've learnt not to waste my time because life is too beautiful to spend it on nonsense!

I need to thank all the people who have contributed to that change in me during this school year: the teachers who have been always there guiding me and leading this pathological disaster I am, the school principal for letting me study in this school, my host family for opening the doors of their house and their life to welcome a crazy little girl from Spain and the amazing friends I've made here, whom I'll cherish and remember forever.

I'll have to return to Spain soon, my time here is limited. Still, I don't want to accept it. I can't picture myself leaving the people I've met and my life in Hong Kong behind, I can't picture myself anywhere else but here. I know I have to, but I don't want to go back.

