

A love of chocolate, travelling for Gaelle

STAFF REPORTER

Gaelle Iburguen might feel a long way from her Belgian home, but there is at least one thing in this part of the world that will be familiar – a chocolate factory.

Gaelle is a Rotary Youth Exchange Student being hosted by the Rotary Club of Tawa for a year in New Zealand.

She comes from Horruues, a small village 50km south-west of Belgium's capital, Brussels.

It has about 2000 inhabitants, a 12th century church, a primary school, "one delicious chocolate factory" and the people she loves most – her family.

A far cry from the cities of Wellington and Porirua, but at least there is the Whittaker's Chocolate Factory to help her feel at home.

Gaelle is an accomplished pianist, a Scout and loves doing improvisation or Theatresports, but she also has travelling in her blood.

"I have visited a lot of countries in Europe, so the idea of an exchange became almost an obvious."

Her interest in New Zealand was sparked by an English Language class assignment when she was 15.

Students were required to choose an English-speaking country, research it and deliver a presentation. Gaelle chose New Zealand.

"What I expect with this trip is to discover and to learn as much as I can - another way to live, meet people, learn about myself and more about New Zealand, and have a lot of fun. I want it to become an unforgettable adventure."

She has found her first few weeks in Wellington good and with little homesickness. She has already met some great people at Tawa College and in the community.

During her year in New Zealand Gaelle will be hosted by three different Rotary families.

The Youth Exchange programme provides thousands of young people across the globe with the opportunity to meet people from other lands and to experience their cultures.

Tawa Rotary youth director Mark Carroll, said this helped plant the seeds for a lifetime of international understanding.

"You couldn't build a better foundation for understanding and peace, because it begins at someone's home."

He said an exchange also offered a unique experience.

"Students are immersed in another culture for 12 months, in a way that isn't possible as a tourist. They experience the daily challenges and the rewards of this experience as they make friends and get to know their new culture."



Gaelle Iburguen, from Belgium, who is attending Tawa College as part of Tawa Rotary exchange programme.

SUPPLIED