

MANDEQ HASSAN

The summer before I finished university, I got a scholarship to go study abroad in Europe — in Germany — and I was super excited because I would never have been able to afford to go travelling otherwise. So I spent a couple of months in Germany studying migration and refugees and at the end of that summer, with the money that I had saved up from that scholarship, I was able to pool our money together with my sister and have her come and spend two weeks going around Europe travelling, and we had a great time and a friend of mine was kind enough to put me in contact with some of her friends who were living in different parts of Europe and to go visit them as we went along.

And so, one of those friends lived in the South of France and on our way there, we decided to make a pit stop in Paris because, y'know, it's the city of love. And so, Paris wasn't quite what I imagined it would be, I wasn't excited as I thought I'd be so I left Paris feeling kind of down and I wasn't quite sure what to expect going to visit these people who I'm sure were lovely, but that I didn't know.

So, we get there and it ends up being the most beautiful place I think I've ever been to. They lived on this farm with all this land and had a house that was like a château, it looked like a castle, and they had decorated each room to their liking, so the rooms were coloured so beautifully. The room that we were staying in was purple and blue and yellow and just so beautiful.

And they lived in this farm, so they had all sorts of animals. They had geese, they had dogs, they had cats, they had chickens and their main livestock was this long-haired endangered donkey. And I know what you're thinking: donkeys can't be that beautiful, but these donkeys were. These donkeys were brown with this long hair that covered their eyes and just the sweetest animal.

And so, we spent a week with them and we travelled all around, we went to go visit different castles and to different restaurants, we went to a market that has run every Sunday for the last several hundred years which was just amazing.

And so, on the last night of the trip, I was reading a book that I had picked up at the start of the week and had just finished on the last night and I was sitting on the terrace, underneath the stars and this was the countryside, right? So there was no light pollution so the stars were just above me.

And I finished my book and I head back into the house, into the hallway, which were these huge, tall, hallways with these arches at the top and I hear Paul, one of our hosts, teaching my sister something on the piano and all I hear was just this beautiful, haunting tune bouncing around this gigantic hallway and it was such a magical moment for me and what just overwhelmed me at that time was this feeling of home. Not necessarily my home, but a home, and I think that's something I'm going to carry with me forever.