

Welcoming the Swiss family Milsom

Fortunately for the six-month house-swappers, they like the weather wild and windy

Moving to a foreign country to live is a huge decision to make and undertake – for many, probably never an option. But what if it could be done just for a short time, where you get all of the experience but without the long-term commitment?

Well, that is exactly what a family from Switzerland have done, and they chose Orkney as their destination.

Matt and Natalie Milsom, along with their two children Nanouk (10) and Maleah (7), travelled to Orkney at the end of December after arranging a six-month house swap with Jeremy and Miriam Baster, from Deerness.

The family have been planning the trip for a couple of years.

Natalie explained: "We knew we wanted to come to Orkney, and thought that a house exchange would be the easiest option. It is good, because it comes with some connections already in place, which you wouldn't necessarily get with holiday accommodation".

Firstly, the family put an advert in *The Orcadian*, and although someone did reply, it didn't work out.

Next, they approached Orkney Library, but still had no luck.

It was only after getting in

touch with *Living Orkney* magazine and an appeal on Facebook that they finally managed to secure the exchange with the Basters.

The Milsoms visited Orkney in spring last year, when they met their exchange family and saw the house and school. They were all very excited about the trip.

Matt explained: "In Switzerland, we live in a totally different environment. We live in a town of around 20,000 people, and we live pretty much in the centre.

"But we are very happy to be in Deerness, in the middle of nowhere.

"The biggest challenges were before we came. We have been arranging it now for around two years. We had to think of so many things – how would we do this and that – but we pretty much had it all settled before we arrived, and once we arrived we could just start to enjoy it."

Natalie is a primary school teacher in Switzerland, and is working at the St Andrews Primary School as a volunteer.

"The school is very good. I am very impressed, and everyone at the school has been so helpful and welcoming in every way," she said.

Thelma Holt, headteacher at St Andrew's Primary School, explained how the young Swiss students are doing in their new

school: "They just do so well with English. They immediately understood well, and we very quickly found out what level they were at.

"Reading in English was a fairly new experience for them, because they were still only learning to read in their own language, but they are doing very well and fit in well in their classes."

There are not only learning experiences for the two new pupils, but for their classmates, too.

According to Mrs Holt, once a week Maleah gives her primary three class a lesson in German, and so far they have covered numbers and greetings, and next week will move on to colours.

Matt works in IT, so has been able to continue working for the same company in Switzerland, from their temporary Deerness home, three days a week.

He said: "It wouldn't have been an option for us to come here if I had no income, and it would have been impossible to find a job here for only six months. So it worked out well for us."

Natalie said that working in the school has been a great experience, and that the school is very similar to those in Switzerland.

The family are making new friends, and Natalie has joined



The Milsom family, from Switzerland, have swapped houses for six months with a couple from Deerness. Pictured, from the left, are Meleah, Nanouk, Matt and Natalie.

(www.theorcadianphotos.co.uk)

a craft group. The children have joined the school band, and are keen to join in after-school activities, which Matt and Natalie encourage as, back home, everything is outwith the school, which sometimes makes it difficult for the children to attend.

But the one thing the Milsoms were well prepared for was the weather in Orkney.

Natalie said: "Our friends said 'oh, it will be so cold if you go there in winter', but I really enjoy it when the weather is really wild and windy."

Matt added: "I am looking forward to seeing the landscape covered in snow."

Natalie laughed: "And it will be fun to have a day off school if it snows. At home we have a lot of snow in the winter and never

get a day off school!"

The Milsoms are in Orkney until July, when they return to their home in Wil SG, which is around 45 minutes drive from Zurich.

The family say they are really enjoying Orkney but will be happy to return to Switzerland, although Matt and Natalie both feel they would perhaps like to return here to live in the future.