

# AGTV Sponsor Report

## By Gem O'Hare

How do I begin to describe my 10 short weeks in Germany! I would first like to start by thanking AGTV for their generous scholarship and SAGSE for this fabulous opportunity.

My journey began on Wednesday, 23<sup>rd</sup> November 2011 as I, along with 33 other Australian and New Zealanders travelled across the world to a place which was to become our home away from home.

After a brief 3 hours sleep on the flight, we landed in Frankfurt where I was overwhelmed by the German language and the realisation that I really was about to live with a family I had never met before. Of course the first thing I said to my host sister Hannah was "Hi, how are you?" It didn't occur to me that I needed to ask the question in German!

After a group photo and the famous Gassie Dance, we said our goodbyes to the other Stipis and began our German adventure! I was fortunate enough to have another Stipi, Julia, staying in the same town as me and attending the same school. Our hosts were best friends so we drove the 2 ½ hours back to the town of Trier, the oldest city in Germany and had a combined family breakfast where I met my host mother Andrea and was told I would meet my younger host sister, Marleen, after school.



Once sleeping off the jet lag and the initial burst of home sickness, I began to really enjoy myself. There were many differences between the daily life of my host family and to my life in Australia. Firstly, my host parents were divorced. I lived with my host mum and saw my host dad every second weekend. Their house was also very different. Andrea, my host mum, was generous enough to give up her bedroom for the duration of my stay as their house

was quite small, consisting only of 3 bedrooms, 2 small bathrooms, a living room and a kitchen. I found it odd that once walking in the front door, you had to climb a flight of stairs before reaching the front door to the house, only to climb another flight of stairs to reach the front door of another area in which my host mum slept.

Another big difference was the school I attended. It was an all girls Catholic school and compared to my co-ed school back in Australia, the atmosphere

was completely different. Of course, as everyone knows, there was no school uniform, which I found completely frustrating as I would have to think about what I was going to wear each day (with only a limited selection of clothing to choose from, 20kg to be exact). I have some fond memories of my time at Angela-MerciGymnasium, one being that Julia thought our school was named after Angela Merkel. I thoroughly enjoyed the idea that when a teacher wasn't at school, the class was simply cancelled and no replacement teacher was found. This gave me great enjoyment as my days were shortened, and I was able to go to the city during the day or to one of the yummy bakeries five



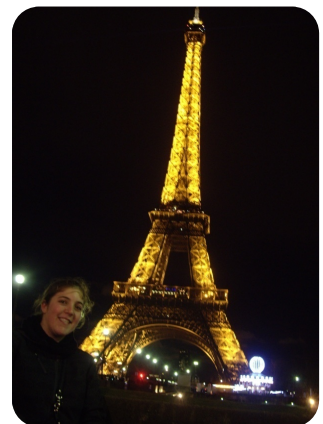
minutes down the street. In addition to all of this, English and TG were my favourite classes. English is fairly self explanatory, but TG (we call it Textiles in Australia) was lots of fun as we were able to make a Federmäppchen (pencil case) and participate in an excursion to talk to a blind man (as they were designing board games for blind children). Finally, my biggest highlight from school would be all the wonderful people I met and the amazing friend I made.

I experienced my first road trip shortly after my arrival in Trier, as Julia, Mona (Julia's host sister), Hannah and I drove the 2 hours to Heidelberg for the Heidelberg regional day. The trip went quite quickly as we each had 30 minutes of iPod playing time; it may have also been the anticipation of seeing the other stipis and meeting their hosts.

It is fair to say that not much listening was done that day as we could not stop talking! Although it had only been 2 weeks since we last saw each other, we exploded with news, stories, experiences and comparisons.

Julia and I were fortunate to travel to Paris for the weekend with our host sisters and my host dad, Ralf. It was amazing to see how many sights there were all in the one city and we most definitely did not have enough time to see them all!

My most outstanding memory from my time in Paris was when my host dad told me *je t'aime* meant 'Can I have the salt please?', only to realise 5 weeks later that it actually meant 'I love you'.



My next exciting adventure was travelling to Hamburg for Christmas. I was fortunate enough to travel to my host mum's home town and meet her family and friends during the Christmas period. We stayed with family friends and I had

a most enjoyable week. From losing a windscreen wiper on the Autobahn, and travelling on a boat and exploring the sights of Hamburg, to decorating a *real* Christmas tree, and going to the movies as a big family, Christmas was definitely a highlight of my trip. However, it wasn't as special as I thought it would be, as my family in Australia celebrate Christmas on Christmas Eve as well.

My first train ride came as my two host sisters and I travelled back to Trier for Silvester (New Year's Eve). Although Hannah spent the time working on her Facharbeit (a major assignment at her school), Leni and I entertained ourselves reading, talking and playing Eye Spy.

Silvester was unquestionably a fantastic experience. It was a friend's 18<sup>th</sup> so we partied until 11:45pm and then walked to the PortaNigra (a famous landmark in Trier) where we were surrounded by gun powder and numerous fireworks. I even had the opportunity to throw my own firework which was very exciting! The rest of the night consisted of more partying before dragging ourselves to our mattresses at 5am.

Deutschland was most certainly a land of firsts for me. My first time Ice Skating, my first road trip, my first mocktail, my first New Year's Party, my first German movie at the cinemas and the first time the temperature outside was "kälter als im Kühlschrank" (one of my favourite German sayings).

Following my eventful Christmas and Silvester, I had my 4<sup>th</sup> road trip to Bad Honnef for winter camp, a week where Hosties, Stipis and Gassies come together to get to know each other and participate in numerous activities. I must admit following the rumours I had heard, I was positively petrified of the week to come! However, despite the 11 hours sleep across the whole week, the constant partying and loud music, the week was not as scary as I initially



thought. We visited the first Chancellor of Germany's house, took a trip to Bonn for the day, participated in the StadtRalley and made a stop motion video. Above all, I met some amazing German and Australian Gassies and some fantastic Hosties who I can't wait to see in Australia in June.

From Winter camp we formed our groups and set off for 5 days travelling around Germany. My group of 4 headed to Köln for the afternoon and climbed the Kölner Dom before catching a train to Heidelberg where we spent our first night and the next day. From Heidelberg we caught the train to Freiberg where we experienced extremely interesting showers at our youth hostel. The shower block consisted of two silver cylinders with chest height windows at the front and a mirror directly opposite the showers, resulting in us



being able to watch each other shower – slightly creepy! After spending the morning exploring the lovely town of Freiberg, we caught the train to Konstanz where we stood on the border of Switzerland and explored the town in the pouring rain. However, as it was a Sunday, everything was shut, so we sat on a park bench, overlooking the Bodensee, eating Gummibärchen whilst it rained. From Konstanz we travelled to München where we spent the last 3 nights of Free Travel. This was our base as we did a day trip to Salzburg, visiting Mozart's birth house and undertook a Sound of Music tour. The day was made more magical as it snowed the entire day, adding to the beauty of the city. All of the groups apart from one assembled at the youth hostel on the second last night and we spent the next day either visiting Neuschwanstein or Dachau Concentration Camp. I visited Neuschwanstein and was slightly disappointed to see it was covered in scaffolding. However, my day soon improved as we had the same tour guide as I had had in year 9 during a school tour to Germany. A combination of the man's strange personality and the coincidence of seeing him again truly astounded me.

Our last event for Free travel was a big group dinner where we devoured delectable schnitzels and other traditional German food. Sadly the fun was destined to come to an end as we packed our bags and spent the last day of Free Travel heading home to our host families.

Sadly the conclusion of Free Travel meant I only had two weeks left with my host family, but the weeks were certainly filled with lots of fun and excitement. Having learnt that Luxembourg was only 20 minutes away and many people from Trier travel there because the petrol is cheaper, my host mum and I spent the day visiting the sights of Luxembourg and experiencing another country. My second last weekend in Trier was spent in Aachen, Maastricht (Holland) and Düsseldorf.



Having spent the morning road tripping to Aachen, we explored the town before spending the afternoon in the beautiful town of Maastricht in Holland. I then travelled with my host sisters and host dad to the Boat Show in Düsseldorf, before having a lovely dinner at my new favourite restaurant, the Block House (the bread is AMAZING!)

I concluded my stay in Trier with a wonderful Abschieds Party, whereby Julia and I spent

the evening with our lovely friends saying a sad and final goodbye to the people who had become an integral part of our lives in Trier.

However, it was saying goodbye to my host family that was truly a challenge. As we all stood on the platform with tears streaming down our faces (my host mum included), I could not stop hugging my host sisters. They had both given me train letters to read on my train journey to Berlin. Julia and I were quite a sight, sitting on the train with tears streaming down our faces as we read the lovely kind letters our families had written.

It is fair to say Berlin Camp was definitely a fantastic way to end an already amazing 10 weeks. From the Berlin Wall and the Brandenburger Tor, to completing a city tour in -15 degrees and visiting the New Zealand Embassy, Berlin Camp was an amazing week. However, it was the after 5pm activities which were truly phenomenal. We went to the movies, to see the most boring film ever made (it is fair to say the majority of the Stipis slept through that one!), and watched Harry Potter in our room. We participated in late night visits to the Supermarket and McDonald's down the street. Our late nights and little sleep guaranteed we all slept soundly on the plane flight home.

As I reflect now on my time in Germany, I have come to realise how much my time in Germany has helped me grow as a person. Not only in my ability to understand German, speak the language and use a broader range of vocabulary but to grow and improve as a person. My time overseas has made me more independent, confident, tolerant and above all understanding of another culture. I still cannot believe what I have experienced and achieved over the last 3 months and how easily I became a part of my host family. I cannot wait to visit my host family and all of my friends in Trier in the near future and already have plans to study overseas. In the meantime I will use my energy and enthusiasm to continue my involvement with GASS and know that I will see all of the German stipis later this year.

