

SAGSE Scholarship

German Exchange Sponsor Report

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22nd November 2012 – 9th February 2013

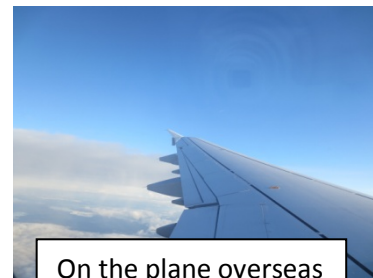


Taken at Zugspitze during Free-travel

The 11 week long exchange trip to Germany was by far the most memorable, extraordinary and amazing adventure I have ever had. I will never forget the memories, experiences, and friendships that I made during my time overseas. Firstly, I would like to thank AGTV and Scholarships for Australian-German Student Exchange for providing me with this fantastic opportunity to travel overseas and fully immerse myself into another culture, to which I had previously only read and been told about. During my time in Germany, I stayed with the Kerwien family, who lived in Mecklenburg- Vorpommern in the very north of Germany, in a small town called Bad Doberan. This exchange gave me the opportunity to experience all the aspects of Germany, from the very punctual German Transport network to the delicious variety of German food.

MY FIRST EVER TRIP ABROAD

I began this amazing adventure by saying goodbye to all my family and friends at Melbourne Airport on the 22nd of November, 2012, two days after I had finished my last exam. The excitement was building up, and the relief that I had finished year 12 and was ending my schooling on such a high was unbelievable. This was my first time leaving the country and flying on a plane, and what a way to begin with a 23 hour plane trip! I found it rather exhilarating as we took off, and occasionally experienced turbulence as the adrenalin and excitement began to kick in. At Singapore we met other Stipis (scholarship winners) from Perth and New South Wales, as we grew from a group of 16 Victorians to 30 Australians, with three New Zealanders joining us a few weeks later.



On the plane overseas

After we all said our goodbyes to the group at Frankfurt airport, I caught a connecting flight up to Hamburg, where I was greeted by my Host mother, Kerstin and Host sister, Miriam. We then travelled three hours on the Autobahn, before reaching Bad Doberan sometime during the afternoon. Travelling on the Autobahn, on the wrong side of the road, and driving on the wrong side of a tiny VW Polo at 160km/h was definitely a thrilling, yet somewhat frightening experience after having been in transit for the past 30 hours. After arriving home and meeting my Host father, Frank and younger Host brother, Finn, I attempted to overcome my Jetlag with sleep.

MY HOST FAMILY

My stay with the family was absolutely unbelievable. For me, the first week living with them was quite a shock to the system, as normally I live in a family of 8, so there is never a quiet moment and something is always happening. However, living with the Kerwien family was quite the opposite, as I entered a family of 4, with a younger host sibling, Miriam who is 16, and Finn who is 9. The Kerwien Family were very family oriented, so every day we would have breakfast together and then later on dinner. My host dad, Frank, learnt the English word, tasty, and therefore used it almost all

the time in describing something. One time, Miriam and I went out to a disco, and the next day the first question Frank asks was “So, were the German Boys tasty?” He later on discovered the word delicious, so eating dinner or talking about German Boys was always entertaining.

During the exchange I developed a close bond with my host sister, Miriam. We quickly became sisters and best friends. I spent most of my time with Miriam, going to school with her, tagging along with her to horse riding, drawing classes and babysitting. We also did a radio interview with the main Northern Germany radio station, NDR 1, talking about the exchange and Australia as part of Australia Day.



My host family and I

The time spent with my host family was the most amazing 10 weeks and I could not have asked for anything better. I entered the family as a stranger and left as an older daughter, older sister, best friend and family member.

ATTENDING SCHOOL

After a weekend to recover from my Jetlag, I attended school with Miriam. We went to Ecolea International School which was a Gymnasium in Warnemünde, a suburb of Rostock and walking distance from the beach. Normally it took 50 minutes to get to school, travelling by car and bus, so we would have to wake up at 6am, which is definitely hard when you are not a morning person and love to sleep in. School began at 8am and finished at 3pm, so we would leave when it was dark and come home when it was almost dark outside. It was quite different attending school in Germany, where they didn't have a school uniform (for me, it was hard picking what to wear each day), ate lunch in a cafeteria and spoke an entirely different language. Another big difference between school systems was that when a teacher was away or sick, instead of a substitute teacher running the class as in Australia, the class is simply cancelled and students get free periods – therefore, the Stadtbäckerei down the road received regular business from our year 10 class whenever we didn't have class. The highlights of attending school in Germany were noticing the differences in school systems, meeting Miriam's warm and welcoming friends and classmates, and quickly improving my German language conversation skills in order to have conversations with others. My favourite classes at school were English (for the obvious reason that it was the one class I fully understood and was good at) and also Biology.

THE GERMAN WEATHER

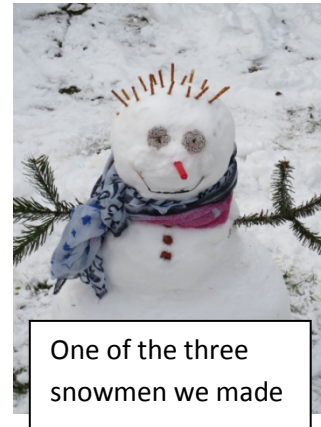
The change in climate between Germany and Australia was one of the biggest differences I found during my stay. When we left warm and sunny Australia, it was a

beautiful 35 degrees. On the contrary, when we arrived in Germany it was a cool 3 degrees. This was one of the biggest shocks to my body system, and it took me a number of weeks before I could master choosing what to wear for a day at a certain temperature. I can now say I have mastered that skill, as I dressed for temperatures from plus six degrees to minus ten degrees. Definitely one of my biggest highlights on the exchange was seeing snow. Prior to this trip I had only seen snow once when I was very young, so cannot remember it all



Snow on the beach at Warnemünde

that well. However, as soon as snow fell for the first time when I was over there, I raced outside at 7pm (keeping in mind it is almost pitch black at that time) to make my very first snow man. I was so thrilled and excited about seeing snow I could have slept outside, although I don't think my host family would have allowed me to do so. Whilst overseas, I built three snowmen, had numerous snowball fights, made numerous snow angels, went ice-skating and sledding. One of the strangest things I saw while I was in Germany was snow on the beach at minus 5 degrees, even though it was surprisingly sunny. It was definitely something I had never seen before and will always remember.



One of the three snowmen we made

THE AMAZINGLY INDULGENT, YET FATTENING GERMAN CUISINE

The food in Germany was definitely a big difference that I noticed on exchange. I had been told and warned by previous exchange students and my German teacher about the amount of bread consumed. However, to say that a large amount of bread is consumed in Germany is an understatement. In my host family, bread was consumed for breakfast, lunch and sometimes tea. Although, compared to the sliced sandwich bread I had back home, Germany has such a variety, from sweet bun rolls with sultanas, to sweet pumpkin bread rolls. The traditional German breakfast was also another change I had to get used to. Normally, breakfast in Australia consists of Weetbix or Cornflakes, however, with my host family, breakfast consisted of different assortments of bread rolls, boiled eggs, and the huge range of spreads (from liverwurst to dark chocolate cream spread and the occasional addition of vegemite).



Currywurst

On a weekly basis, I would go grocery shopping with my host mother. I was amazed in the Supermarket by whole isles filled with different yoghurts, delis dedicated entirely to cheese and the variety of "wurst" available. The typical German diet consisting of all these foods was definitely not very good on my belt buckle holes, however suited the weather and was rather enjoyable.

THE GERMAN LANGUAGE

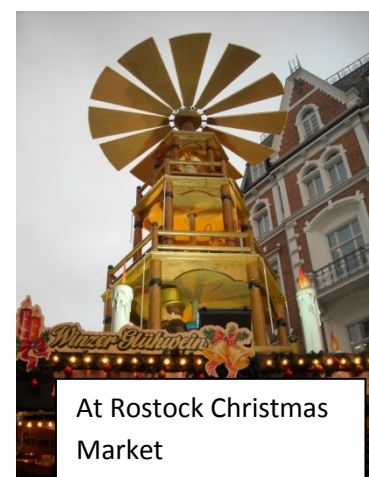
Going to Germany on this exchange definitely improved my understanding of the German language and improved my German conversation skills dramatically. Prior to this exchange I loved learning about Germany, but was not very fond of conversing in German as I lacked confidence in my abilities. The first few weeks in Germany were rather overwhelming as everyone was talking German all the time, so my head would just spin. However, as I began to adapt to life in Germany, my understanding of German improved significantly and I began to be involved in conversations between family members, friends and classmates. I also went to the movies with my host sister numerous times throughout the trip to watch new releases (in German of course). When watching *Bond: Skyfall* during my second week in Germany, I found it hard to pick up and understand the dialogue. Whereas, when I went to watch a German film, *Schlussmacher* (a film directed and starring Matthias Schweighofer) in my last week in Germany, I understood a lot of the dialogue and even some of the jokes. I was often entertained by some of the German words and phrases when translated back to English. For some reason I found the word “Zopf gummi” (translated to hair tie) very entertaining to say, as it took a great level of difficulty for me to pronounce the “Zopf”.

I am now a lot more confident in talking German, writing in German and listening to the German language. I often think in German and occasionally automatically respond to a question in German instead of English.

CHRISTMAS FESTIVITIES

Christmas in Germany was certainly my favourite time of the year. I was amazed by how much Christmas was celebrated in Germany. A big highlight of the festive season was visiting the Christmas Markets in Rostock, Gut Brook, Lübeck and Warnemünde. There is such a warm atmosphere around these markets, with small stalls filled with treats, Gingerbread, Mutzen (sweet, deep-fried pastries covered in icing sugar), sweet flavoured Potato Cakes, Currywurst and most importantly Glühwein (the drink of the season, a warm red wine). I was surprised by the popularity and amount of Glühwein consumed by everyone. If I had one word to describe the Christmas Markets, it would be magical, as everything about the Christmas markets was truly amazing.

I also had the joy of opening up the windows of my Advents Calendar in the lead up to Christmas. My host family had bought me a cosmetic themed Advents Calendar, so numerous times I would find a foot cream, or anti-aging cream in the windows, which always created a laugh in the mornings!



At Rostock Christmas Market

The lead up to Christmas also consisted of the family going out and chopping down a Christmas tree. This is something I had never done before, as our Christmas Trees back home are mostly plastic. My host Family and I decorated the tree together and watched the present pile under the tree slowly



Cutting down the Christmas Tree

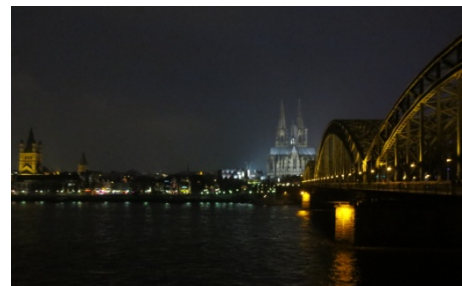


Miriam and I at Christmas lunch

grow bigger. We celebrated Christmas with my host Father's side of the family on Christmas Eve, opening up presents, having dinner together and playing board games as a family. The Christmas festivities continued with other extended family for the next few days, having a large spread of foods and spending time together.

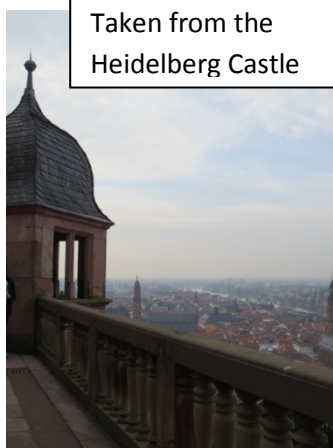
FREE TRAVEL AND BERLIN CAMP

As part of the exchange program we also had the ability to travel around Germany in groups for five days, trekking and visiting the amazing sights Germany had to offer. I was in a group of five, two people from Victoria, two people for NSW and one person from New Zealand. We began our free travel by travelling to Cologne for the first day. We visited the absolutely stunning Kölner Dom, and walked over the famous Hohenzollern lock covered bridge near-by. After indulging in spectacular ice-creams, we stayed the night in Cologne, before heading off early the next morning to Heidelberg for the day.



Overlooking the Rhine river, Hohenzollern bridge and Cologne

In Heidelberg we visited the Altstadt, which we walked through and enjoyed the shopping. We then visited the Heidelberg Schloss, a large castle looking over Heidelberg and the beautiful surroundings. That night we travelled to Munich by train, before surprisingly meeting some Australian GASSies at the hostel we were staying at.



Taken from the Heidelberg Castle

The next day we ventured with the two GASSies further south to visit Schloss Neuschwanstein and Schloss Lindahof – two of King Ludwig's extravagant castles, the first of which Walt Disney based his Disney castle on. We travelled back to Munich that night, before going out for tea at the Hofbräuhaus where the Oktoberfest was once held. The atmosphere at the Hofbrauhaus was very warm and happy, and it reminded me of many typically German things, such as Pretzel, Beer, Folk music and Lederhosen.

Having based ourselves in Munich for the rest of free travel, we then headed further south nearer to the Austrian border to visit Zugspitze, the highest mountain in

Germany, reaching a height of 2962 metres. This was the most amazing scenery I had ever seen, as we stood up the very top and looked out across the Alps, covered in snow, and glistening with the sunlight. After eating lunch at Germany's highest Beer garden, we headed back to base in Munich.

On our last day of free travel we once again headed to the Austrian border to the beautiful city of Salzburg. We took a tour of *The Sound of Music* gardens and visited the Salzburg Fortress, which looked over Salzburg. I was rather fascinated by the electric buses and the traffic signals which we saw in Salzburg, as they were quite unusual. We all had the adrenalin pumping when we had to sprint down from the Fortress all the way to the train station to catch the last train back to Munich that night. We made it with a minute to spare thankfully, but remembering back on that adventure now, I realise how long we had to run, and running that far in 2kg Snow Boots is definitely not something I would recommend.

Myself and part of my free travel group at the gates of *The Sound of Music* gardens



Berlin Camp, at the end of the exchange was probably the best week of my time in Germany. Our group of Stipis all knew each other quite well by the end of the exchange and we got along as a group extremely well. We had a great time celebrating our experiences and sharing stories of our time in Germany. I especially loved spending our last week in Berlin, a place which previously I had only heard about. Finally I was able to see it in the flesh, and visit many of the historical places which reflect much of Germany's interesting history.



Jess (another Stipi) and I outside the Brandenburg Gate

The time I spent in Germany was extremely valuable for a number of reasons, for example; the friendships I made with Australians, New Zealanders and Germans, the improvement of my German, and also my development as a person, becoming more independent and broadening my horizons. It was incredible to travel overseas with this scholarship and exchange program, as I was always well looked after. The exchange was an exceptional experience which was over way too quickly! I cannot recommend highly enough becoming involved in this society and program, whether it be hosting someone or travelling overseas. I will always remember this remarkable adventure, the incredible people I met and the extraordinary experiences I had. I look forward to continuing to involve myself in GASS, and one day travelling back to Germany to see my host family and people I met whilst overseas. Once again, I'd like to thank AGTV and SAGSE for giving me this incredible opportunity to have the adventures of a lifetime.

Herzlichen Dank,

Brittany Wren

March 2013