

The Society for Australian-German Student Exchange Scholarship
(SAGSE)

22nd of November 2010 – 3rd of February 2011

Sponsor Report

The Association of German Teachers Victoria (AGTV)

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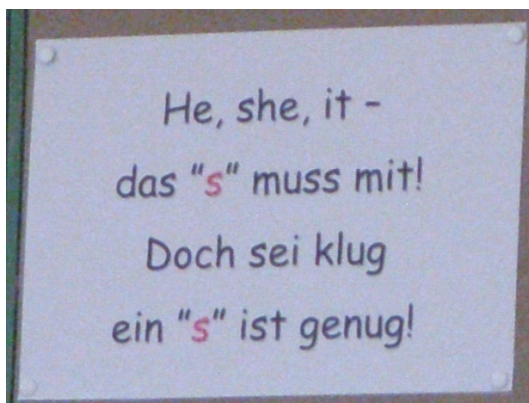
Introduction

After contemplating on how to begin this report there is no other way to describe my 10 week stay in Germany than saying 'Mein Aufenthalt war wirklich der Hammer'. I had an absolutely brilliant time in Germany, made many life-long friendships and improved my understanding of the country and its people. I would like to thank the Society for Australian-German Student Exchange and my Sponsor, the Association of German Teachers Victoria for providing this incredible trip. My German Teacher, Mrs. Lynette Tonkin and I found it a pleasure to meet the AGTV's president Catherine Gosling, vice-president Brigitte Ankenbrand & treasurer Ursula Fisher at the Banquet in October 2010.

Host Family



I stayed with the Kenn family, who lived 500 metres from the Rhine River in a small village called Unkel. The town is located in Rhineland-Palatinate (Rheinland-Pfalz) and is 20 kilometres south of Bonn and 50 kilometres south of Cologne. The scenery was beautiful there and enriched with history. My host brother, Bastian, was virtually my German equivalent because we had so much in common and we got along really well. Our music taste is exactly the same, we thrive on sarcasm and we love Little Britain. He has two older siblings, Anna and Niklas, who are really nice. His parents, Thomas and Karin, looked after me really well and are two of the most down to earth people I have ever met. My host Grandparents, Willy and Edith, who lived in the backyard, were also fantastic people, who literally gave me an endless supply of chocolate. My host family called me a 'richtige Kenn', told me that I was not a guest, but part of the family and demanded I return to see them in Summer 2012.



School

I arrived in Germany on the 22nd and the very next day, still a wee bit jetlagged I was off to Martinus-Gymnasium Linz am Rhein. For the first two weeks all the teachers didn't really notice me, thought I was Italian and called me Henry. However, in course things began to improve, we changed my timetable around and then I started to really enjoy it. I made a lot of new friends and was always there to help when somebody asked 'du bist Australier, na? Kannst du mir mit meiner Englischaufgabe helfen?' I did 10 or so speeches in English classes who were dealing with the topic 'Australien', which was quite a humorous experience. I tried to be the best ambassador for Australia and give an insight into the country from my own perspective. All in all school gave me a global perspective on education and I found it really interesting to find out how other students on the other side of the world learn everyday.

St Nikolaus Tag

6th of Dec 2010



Although it was my second time in Germany, I was yet to experience St Niklas Tag, but I am so glad that I did. The evening before the 6th of December, my host brother and I went downstairs to polish our boots and then placed them before our doors. The next day my boot had been filled with German literature and there was a whole plate of Süßigkeiten waiting for me on the tallboy. Afterwards we went over to the Omi's for waffles and then I got a whole 1.5kg bag of lollies from the Grandparents. I love Germany! Luckily I played Handball with my host brother as well so that I wasn't waddling around by the time I got to Berlin.

Christmas

25th of Dec 2010



Weihnachten and Heiligabend were truly unique and lovely experiences in Germany. On Christmas Eve around 6pm all the kids had to go upstairs, while my host parents laid out the presents for us. We then walked into the family room in a sort of conga line, singing 'Tannenbaum' (the lyrics of which I

embarrassingly did not know) and then sat down to open the presents. 'Bescherung', usually a five minute experience at my home in Australia, took at least an hour and half because of the family's tradition. There is one dice and each family member has to roll it once in order to get a one or a six, when somebody gets this they are able to open a present. The suspense killed me. However, my host family 'schenkte' me so many presents that I thought it was little bit unfair because I wasn't even their child. But I gave my host siblings and parents jewellery, some Australian souvenirs and 'mehrere' packets of Tim Tams (which were well received and disappeared in two seconds). So we found a good balance.

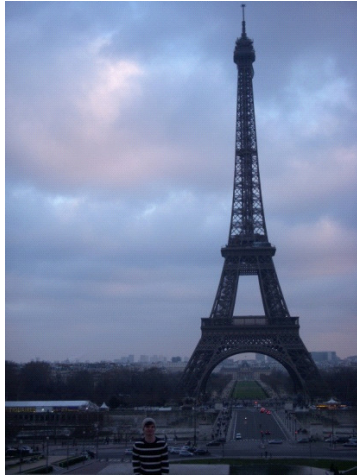
Hamburg 26th of Dec 2010 – 2nd of Jan 2011

On the second Weihnachtstag we were already unterwegs, on the way to the beautiful city of Hamburg. My host dad is originally from there and thus we stayed with his mum (Oma Renate) in her cosy little Wohnung. Hamburg is a lovely city that has its own Weihnachtsmarkt on top of a lake in the city when it freezes over, it was amazing! Oma Nate was an incredible cook and I thought I would return the favour by baking something typically Australian – ANZAC biscuits. After improvising some of the ingredients I thought they would turn out to be terrible, however they passed the verdict swimmingly. My host mum said about four times, 'Ja, die sind aber lecker!' We celebrated Silvester with one of my absolute favourite ways of eating – the raclette grill. Afterwards we met up with another Stipi, who was staying in Hamburg, and then went to watch the 3 hour long firework show (carried out by the public) on the 'Haven', which was a crazy experience! On the 2nd of January it was time to depart from Hamburg for an eight hour drive to Weimar, Thüringen for Winter Camp.

Winter Camp 2nd – 6th of January 2011

The gathering of all the Australian and New Zealand scholarship winners, our German host-siblings and many Gassies (former scholarship winners) took place in the former Eastern German city of Weimar, Thüringen. It was a chance to catch up with our fellow Stipis and meet their hosts. We visited many Museums, Buchenwald Concentration Camp, met Weimar's mayor (although we couldn't understand him very well because of his Eastern accent) and had lots of fun. We sung many German songs and anthems, played many GASS games and had a good time.





At the end of the Camp in Weimar, it was time to organise our groups. I was invited to join many groups, but after an hour or so of tedious discussion the groups had been formed, and somehow I ended up being the only male in my group along with four girls. But I was fine with this because I only have two sisters so I quickly got used to it. We planned to conquer five cities in five days, but later decided not to because we would have spent our whole time on the train. Thus we conquered four cities in five days, travelling to Dresden, Nuremberg, Salzburg (Austria) and then Munich. We stayed in hostels and were given the chance to gain more independence as people. I thoroughly enjoyed myself on free travel and had an opportunity to get to know my fellow Stipidaten better.

Paris

My multi-lingual host brother, who speaks German, English, French, Italian and Spanish, has travelled all over Western-Europe and wanted to give me a taste of a different Europe too. So at the end of January my host family took me to Paris for three whole days, which was a slightly surreal experience. We went to the Louvre, the Arc de Triomphe, to Versailles Palace, to the Notre dam Cathedral, went ice skating on the Eiffel Tower (for free!), went shopping along the Champs Élysées, saw the Mona Lisa Painting and the Moulin Rouge. All in all Paris was a magnificent, surprisingly clean, unique little city and I will minor in French for my Arts degree this year



Berlin Camp

After a rather emotional departure from my Host family in Rheinland-Pfalz it was time to board the train from Cologne in Richtung Berlin Hauptbahnhof. The train ride was quite lonely and I had had enough of the Deutsche Bahn's repetitive announcements of 'Nächste Halt, Hannover, Ausstieg in Fahrtrichtung Rechts' and (in very poor English) 'Thank you travelling with deutsche Bahn, we wish you a pleasant journey, thank you and goodbye'. Seven tedious hours later I arrived at Berlin Hbf and saw that my fellow stipis from Lübeck were on the same platform. With all of our extremely heavy bags, we got on a bus to Alexanderplatz, giggling and falling over frequently, to find our Jugendherberge to rid ourselves of about 200 kilos of luggage. Although it was my second time in Berlin, I couldn't get enough of the brilliant city. They have the best outlets for retail therapy and some of the boutiques are better than what we have in Melbourne. The itinerary was planned well by GASS Germany, but was unfortunately not executed as intended due to shocking weather and places closing without notice. We did many tours, went to many museums, and went out for dinner for some Berlin specialities. We also went to a restaurant called Vapianos, which serves Italian food right before your eyes. My friends and I found this exceptional. A highlight was the reception at the Australian embassy because it was really interesting to get an insight into the political and diplomatic relations between Germany and Australia. All the Stipis knew each other really well by this time and we felt like a close knit family. They had amazing cake there too and my friends and I couldn't get enough (i.e. I ate seven slices). We rubbed shoulders with the Australian and New Zealand Ambassadors and their fellow German colleagues. It was also interesting to find out that the Embassy was originally situated in Bonn, near where I stayed. I will never forget the innumerable good memories and experiences in Berlin.



Conclusion



2010 SAGSE Banquet

My stay in Germany was an absolutely invaluable experience that I will cherish for many years to come. It has immensely helped me with my improvement of my German, my linguistic skills, my confidence and my independence. Staying with my host family has increased my love of Germany, its people and its culture. I am now contemplating whether or not I should live there when I am older or not. However, I know for sure that I will be returning next year to complete an 'Auslandsemester' in the German summer at the University of Bonn (pictured above). This year I will start my degree, a Bachelor of Arts, at Monash University, with German as my major. This scholarship has increased my will to speak the German language and stay connected with the country for the rest of my life. I am looking forward to enthusiastically taking part in the German Australian Students Society and visiting my host family again next year. Once again, I would like to sincerely thank the Association of German Teachers Victoria for generously providing me with a scholarship through the Society for Australian-German Student Exchange.

Harrison Watt