**Australia - About a unique experience**

This trip already started unique: on our actual about 18 hours flight to Australia, we had to make a forced landing in Dubai, one of the doors of the plane wasn’t closed properly. After our short rest in a hotel in Dubai, we could continue our flight. And then, finally, after 20 hours of flying, we landed at the Adelaide Airport, where our host families already expected us. I was welcomed so nicely and felt immediately comfortable. This first day, we didn’t do much, because I had a big Jetlag. On the next day, we already went to school, where we, first of all, had home class for checking the attendance and then chapel, a service they do four times a week, as it is a Lutheran school. Afterwards, we got our school uniform and, on the following day, lockers and notebooks. At Concordia, everybody has got their own notebook, it’s a really advanced and modern school. They’ve got also areas that are similar to our LLs. We were also able to choose subjects for our timetable out of a certain choice they gave us. There are some we don’t have in Germany, like Drama and Design & Tech.

And then school life started. I think I’ll never really get used to these school uniforms, especially the hats we always had to wear at recess and lunch, even when there was no sun at all. But the people here are very very nice. I was always happy to talk to new people and improve meanwhile my English. It’s fascinating, how many people here in Australia have origins in other countries. Almost everybody could tell you about parents of another country. Many of them were really interested in getting to know something about me and my life in Germany. Especially the year 7s we were able to join in their German lessons, that was so much fun.

I was also able to experience an Australian sports day. That’s so different to our sports days in Germany. Theirs takes place in a big arena and the whole school is divided into four houses, which compete against each other. The whole atmosphere is totally different. Everybody wears the colours of their houses and they all enjoy to have this day almost free choice of what they are going to wear. So there are mascots and boys in cheerleader costumes or dresses, it’s amazing. Apart from that, there are also some disciplines we don’t have in Germany, like javelin, discuss, tug of war or hurdles.

As we are 11 Germans at Concordia, we had our own German house for this day. This way, we were all invited to participate as well. It was much fun.

Another great experience the school enabled us to do was the Warrawong park. There I could see kangaroos and other Australian animals for the first time. That was amazing! You can’t imagine how cute little kangaroos are.

My host family is also absolutely great. I think the BJR always does a fantastic job in matching people. Their house feels like a second home for me meanwhile. And Kayla, my exchange partner has become a good friend of mine. I love spending time with her.

They always tried to show me something else on the weekends, so I went surfing with them, to the Big Rocking Horse with an animal park next to it, to the Glenelg Beach, to a viewing point to see the city of Adelaide both at night and at day, to a shopping mall and much more.

I could get to know Kayla’s all day life as well, as she took me with her to her drama rehearsals, when she met friends or played tennis.

Then there was the Outback & Oceans trip, a excursion the BJR offers, which you can experience a small part of the big Australian country in a little bit more than a week with. It was great. It started really early on a Friday morning, we drove the whole forenoon till we made a lunch break at a beautiful river. For lunch we always had wraps, burgers or sandwiches, something we could make easily and fast. For this, we divided our 25 people group into different teams. Everytime, another team was responsible for the dishwash or the food. In the afternoon, we kept driving till we reached our hostel for the next two days in the evening. The evening was funny, I played with a group Phase 10 and later almost all played “Werewolf”. On the next day, we hiked on a hill in a national park, whose top we could see the ocean and the land around us from. They warned us to watch out for snakes, it’s possible that we could meet some at this time of the year. Afterwards, we drove along and stopped every then and when at some beautiful and breath taking spots, they look absolutely amazing. Then finally, we drove to a Reservation park for Koalas, where we were allowed to walk around and have a look for koalas. My friends, who I by the way met through this exchange, and me were really lucky, we saw many koalas and even a little snake (fortunately, it crept away as soon as it saw as). After we had lunch there, we got back into the bus and drove to an animal park. There, we had the chance to pet a koala and feed kangaroos and other animals. The next day was about beautiful oceans and beaches. In the afternoon, we went sandsurfing. Actually, it’s the Australian version of tobogganing. It was big fun. This night, we spent in a camp with huts, outside, underneath the stars. It’s amazing how many stars there are in the Outback. Many more than I’ve ever seen in Germany or anywhere else. The camp was really native, there were bucket showers and a bush toilet. A totally new experience for me. In the evening, our chaperons made the Australian damper for us, it’s kind of a bread that bakes in a pot in the coals of the fire. On the following day, we went out the sea for seeing sealions and dolphins, that was such a gorgeous experience! We could dive directly next to them. In the afternoon, we went surfing, probably on the most beautiful beach I’ve ever seen. It was great fun!

After another night in the bush camp, we left for another camp further along the coastline. The plan for the day was visiting an Aboriginal culture centre, but on the way there we got really bad news. Someone in the bus received an E-Mail of the BJR in which was written that we all are going to be retrieved to Germany because of Covid-19. As soon as possible. And at this point, we’ve only spent five weeks of our ten in Australia.

The whole bus, everyone was upset and cried, nobody wanted to leave. I guess it was especially hard for our chaperones, having suddenly a heap of crying teenagers. So we had to stop, we made a break and the chaperones phoned the organizers to handle this mess somehow. Because everybody wanted something else: breaking up the outback trip for more time with the family or keep doing the outback trip. In the end the decision made by the organizers was to keep doing the trip. So we all head to the Aboriginal culture centre, convinced to make somehow the best out of the rest of our stay. There, we experienced some of their traditional handwork in the next two days. So we burned wood, made a bush medicine and painted. We spent the remaining time at the beach there. Once, a friend of mine and me watched the stars at the beach, which was so beautiful! And there were so many shooting stars. It was so amazing. Another evening, we went crabbing, that was so cool.

Through this trip, we got to see many different beaches and were able to go swimming there. The pre-last night, we spent again in camp coodlie and did a campfire. The last few days, we did different walks: one along a fascinating coast, another one in a reservation park, where we also could see some kangaroos in wildlife. It was a gorgeous trip, which I’ve also met some new friends through. But, unfortunately, there was always a little bit of strain as well, because nobody knew, when we would have to leave and what would happen. We always received new emails from the organisation and every time, it influenced our emotions. When we came home from the trip, the current situation required we should be always ready to leave, have your suitcases packed. It was so sad. So I packed on this day, as far as I could. My host family tried the best to make these last days as enjoyable for me as possible. We went to the Cleeland park at the next day, so that I could hold a koala. Unfortunately, this wasn’t possible any longer, because of corona. On the next day, we got another email telling us the exact date of our flight back about two weeks later. That was at least one piece of good news, even though I would have preferred to stay till the end. But we tried to use these days the best we could. We went shopping with a German girl, who is now a friend of mine, and her exchange partner, a friend of Kayla’s. We did a movie night with them as well, it was great. Also, we still went to school even though the schools in Germany have already closed. In Australia, there weren’t as many cases as in Germany, but nevertheless there were some. Therefore, you could go into self isolation, that means staying at home, because you feel more comfortable with that. As a result of this, there were less and less people in school. In the end, we did this as well, because my host parents decided that it would be too dangerous as I have to fly back home soon. I enjoyed these last days, Kayla’s mom took me to a beach and a park in Adelaide, the time at home, I spent with Kayla.

All in all, it was a great experience. I was able to get to know so many new and wonderful people and see this beautiful country. I enjoyed my time there and would have really liked to stay the full 2,5 months. I just can advise everybody: if you get the chance to do it, do it! I don’t regret anything. And the BJR does such a great job, even in this hard time. They did their best to bring us back home safely, and that wasn’t an easy job for sure. They cared so much, I always felt comfortable. They are great.

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