

## Exchange to down Under

It's hard to believe that it's been only 5 weeks since I was diving with see lions and dolphins. But let me try to tell you about the unforgettable time I spent in Australia from the beginning. Even though I doubt I can't express this amazing experience in words.

When the February 14, 2020, finally arrived and I was waiting with 25 other German exchange students for our flight at Munich airport I started to realize that this was real: I was going to spend weeks in Australia, something I had imagined for years. All the time I spent for the application procedures was worth it. The excitement and the waiting for the answer whether I got chosen or not was worth it. My dream of spending time in a host family in Australia, of attending a high school, was going to come true. I was asked the question "are you nervous" a lot, but honestly: I wasn't nervous at all. I trusted our exchange program, which had run those exchanges before I was even born and we also had two really friendly guides with us who accompanied us the whole trip.

And then we boarded the first plane, there was no turning back. The first flight from Munich to Dubai went as scheduled, something I can't say about the second one. 30 minutes after take-off in Dubai we heard an announcement which told us that we had to pilot a forced landing because one door wasn't locked properly. But because we had to lose fuel before landing we spent one hour flying in a circle over Dubai. We landed well and no-one was hurt or something but we had to stay in a Hotel in Dubai for the night and caught a new flight the following day. We then headed to Adelaide and this time we made it.

At last we arrived in Adelaide with a delay of 11 hours. None of us cared about the delay anymore, we were lucky to finally be there. In retrospective I'd even say I'm nearly glad that it happened this way, we spent a night in Dubai and got to know each other a little bit better. The moment we got through customs everyone spread out to their host families which were already waiting for us. It was Sunday morning and I spent the day mostly on the beach with my host family. I have to add, a girl called Vanessa, who is in my year and a good friend of mine, was also in my host family. She was the exchange partner of Jack, the older brother of my exchange partner Zoe. He already spent his exchange in Germany at Vanessa's, so I already knew him.

In the early evening the Jetlag caught me for the first and last time. On Monday it was our first day of school and I was so excited. We arrived (like everyday) at 8:25am and school started at 8:30am. On our first day we got the possibility to choose our own individual timetable, I chose those subjects: PE, Modern History, Design & Technology, Visual Art, Drama and English IB. We received a lock for our locker, our own school laptop, a school uniform (normal uniform and sport uniform) and took a picture of each of us for a student ID, which we also received in the upcoming days. "Each of us" means all the German exchange students who went to Concordia college, all together we were 11 pupils.

The school system is completely different from the German one, and of course it took time to get used to it, but it wasn't so difficult. The school campus was huge with a huge meadow and more than 5 buildings, so it was pretty hard to not get lost in the beginning, to be honest. But I received a lot of help from Australians, they were all very friendly and outgoing. I really liked the school and I was looking forward for every day to go to school. The teachers I had were nice and integrated me as well as the other Germans as well as they could in their lessons. Students in Australia don't have one specific class, like we, but they have different courses for each subject. They do have one lesson every morning called „home class“. They just talk about what's going on, problems which have to be solved or events like internships with their teacher, who is similar for them like our class teachers in Germany. And the last big difference to us is that they have chapel 3 days per week. To be honest, I first wasn't so looking forward to this, but the first time I attended chapel, it turned out to be really interesting and I started to like it and I always paid attention. It wasn't like I imagined it to be at all. It was way better.

On the weekends my family tried to do a lot of things with us. We spent one weekend in a house in a city called "Burra", which is one of the most historic cities in South Australia because the first settlers used to live there. On another weekend they booked a beach house whose view was

awesome and we were swimming, diving, snorkeling on one of the most famous beaches there, the "second valley beach". We visited a national park in which we saw koalas and kangaroos in their natural habitat. We hiked up a mountain and visited some other beautiful landscape spots to which we went for a walk or a little hike as well. We often went to a beach because that's one place which never gets boring and watched a lot of sunsets there while eating some Australian food. After school I often went for a walk or skating with my host brother and sometimes we met friends of our host siblings. We did amazing things and saw so many beautiful places, learned a lot about the Australian way of living, which I'm sure just a real "Aussie" could show and teach you. I got so used to living there that I felt like it was a second home for me, it didn't feel like I was just a guest to the everyday life of my host family in which I joined only for some weeks, it felt like my own daily routine. And I think that's important, to feel integrated, to accept foreign habits, to adopt to the host family's routine, how they are used to live.

I shared one of the best but also one of the worst memories with the Ocean and Outback trip we did. It was definitely the most unforgettable week I had during my 7 weeks exchange, in both ways. I'm going to start with the positive story: On March 13 all the Germans who took part in the Oceans and Outback camp (just one boy didn't, so we were 25 teenagers) met really early in front of Concordia College and waited for two buses and 3 guides who would accompany us the following 8 days. We spent the first two nights in a hostel and the others in different camps. We slept in swags, under stars, 10 meters away from the beach and in wooden shacks without walls. We sat together and sang at the campfire, we watched the stars, we walked on the beach, we cooked and did the dish-washes together, we swam, we laughed, we took pictures, we hiked, we were speechless, we played and we cried together. If I had to describe this camp in one word I would pick "together", we got so close to each other in this short period of time, we built strong friendships which surely will last forever. We also experienced the greatest things like surfing, fondling koalas and kangaroos, sand surfing, hiking and walking on fascinating spots in the middle of the outback, visiting Aborigines, speaking with them, learning about their culture as well as some employments and traditions of them. And we were swimming with sea lions and dolphins. But not in a national park, we were out in the open sea on a little boat (separated in two groups) and swam with them in their natural habitat, which was an indescribable feeling for each of us. And again I am sure that this experience, these places, only an Australian can show you.

I mentioned we cried together and I mentioned these days marked the worst part of our stay in Australia. In the middle of our trip we received an email that we should have to fly back home earlier than planned. They couldn't tell us when exactly yet, just that we should be prepared, because of Corona. If not, we would have to stay there for months because Australia was apparently going to close their borders and we had to catch one of the few last flights. This message hit us completely unexpected (on Friday before we left to the camp our organization told us we don't have to worry about Corona and the borders, it probably wouldn't affect our stay in Adelaide). We definitely weren't ready to leave at all and nearly everyone immediately started to cry. After 2 hours of a sad atmosphere we decided to not let this bring us down anymore and to enjoy the time which we had left.

In the end we stayed 7 weeks instead of 10, and even though our exchange got put to the touch several times it turned out to be the best experience in our lives so far, and I'm sure I can talk for everyone in this case, because everyone enjoyed it with their heart. Australia will forever stay awesome in my memories and own a piece of my heart now. I surely want to go back sometime, watch some more sunsets, swim again in the sea, see some more of the gorgeous landscape, animals and nature and meet the persons again who made my exchange to the best time in my 15 years lifetime. I'm very thankful for the opportunity I got, the people I got to know (Australians as well as Germans) and the things I was able to experience.

Also a big thank you goes to Mister Hüttinger, who played a major role in making it possible for us 5 to go there, as he helped us to manage everything and put so much time and effort into ensuring that we could live the time of our lives. I personally want to thank Miss Kögel, who contributed a lot, too, by formulating (as I guess because I obviously got chosen) a very positive letter of recommendation for me about myself.

Australia, I'll be back.