

# SAGSE Exchange 07/08



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# Journey Log

## Sunday 9<sup>th</sup>

After rising at the crack of dawn and bidding farewell to our host families, our group was finally off to the most awaited week of the exchange- the tour around southern Germany and northern Austria. Most of our morning was spent in the bus, before arriving at the city of Nuremberg;



most famous for Hitler's infamous party rallies. However, during a



tour through the city, we discovered that the place offered much more than that. Nuremberg was dripping with medieval history- our youth hostel was a converted fortress and even featured a moat, a drawbridge, and various nasty surprises for any would-be attackers. It also had a wonderful Christmas market, famous for the fountain which stood in the middle of it. A local legend exists, saying that if you turned a ring on the fountain three times, a wish would be granted to you. Yes, I bought into the myth, but don't expect me to tell!

## Monday 10<sup>th</sup>

In a process we would soon grow very used to, we once again boarded the bus and headed south, crossing the border of Austria and finally ending up in Salzburg. This was the first time we had seen snow and was very exciting! On the way we stopped at the Starnberger See in southern Germany for a toilet break, photo opportunity and, of course, a snow fight! I soon learnt that the convenient piles of a clean white powdery substance on the side of the street were not, in fact snow,



but salt for dissolving ice on the streets. Oops. The next port of call was the historic salt mine site, where we got dressed up in miner's gear then went for an underground tour in the mine. We even got our very own salt sample! Finally, we arrived at our youth hostel-, which turned out to be a school boarding house, complete with school boarders. The bonus was that we found a piano and spent the evening singing songs from the "Sound of Music" and eating chocolate.

## Tuesday 11<sup>th</sup>

This morning we were treated to a "Sound of Music" tour, where we visited the most well known scenes off the film- including Nonberg Abbey, Captain Von Trapp's house and the "Sixteen Going On Seventeen Pavillion". The evening was spent in the city of Salzburg; free to go where we pleased. Our group of five elected to see some of Salzburg's main tourist attractions before going ice-



skating in the outdoor rink we found. We first decided we would like to see the castle that was on the top of a hill. We walked through a cemetery with the crypts of the most famous people of Austria, before trekking through the city and up the hill. The ice-skating was marvellous, even though it did start to snow and we all got very wet.



## Wednesday 12<sup>th</sup>

This morning we rose early to get on the bus heading north again. We were headed for Schloss Neuschwanstein, a world heritage listed castle. It was nothing less than amazing. Situated on the top of the hill in the snow surrounded by evergreen forest and only accessible by coach ride- that's what I call romantic. To top off our morning, we also visited the Wieskirche- this time a world heritage listed church. The church was beautiful- except for the relics behind the altar.



Everybody was a little freaked out by the skeleton! That afternoon we once again boarded the bus, this time headed to the modern city of Munich. After dinner, my friends and I headed out to the "Toollwood Festival", a modern market with international fare, jugglers, dancing and music.



## Thursday 13<sup>th</sup>



On schedule for the first half of the day was a visit to Dachau, a concentration camp of WWII. This was an incredibly intense experience, but one that I do not regret. Here we saw first-hand the effects of Nazi rule on Germany, and were able to fully appreciate the suffering of the men and women who were incarcerated. Our

afternoon boasted a tour of Munich, complete with modern shopping! After several days of seeing churches and castles, a Myer store was a bit of a shock to the system. However, it was also much welcome- we had the chance to buy some everyday essentials- camera batteries and underwear leap to mind! Munich also featured a great Christmas market, where we bought souvenirs for family and friends. We also paid another quick visit to Tollwood to make some last minute purchases. After dinner, the group took advantage of the free Karaoke offered by the hostel. It was so much fun! AND it was "auf Englisch" - what a bonus!



## Friday 14<sup>th</sup>



This morning was spent mostly on the bus, travelling the "Romantic Road" on the way north to a truly historical town, Rothenburg ob der Tauber. Upon arrival in the afternoon, we disembarked the bus outside the city wall- from then on it was by foot. No vehicles are allowed inside Rothenburg- they would ruin the cobbled streets! We spend the afternoon wandering throughout this town,

seeing the ancient houses and sampling some of the local fare. After dinner we once again set out, this time to visit Käthe Wohlfahrt's Weihnachtsdorf- an absolutely ENORMOUS Christmas shop. With three stories full of decorations and paraphernalia, all made to the highest quality, you can be assured that we left with our purses lighter and our bags much heavier. Later on we assembled outside the town hall for the "Night Watchman Tour" around Rothenburg. This was led by a very amusing man who led us around the city, giving us the history of the town along the way. We also walked the city wall- what a view.



Saturday 15<sup>th</sup>



It was a solemn occasion- the last time we would strip the sheets off our youth hostel beds. It was finally time to leave Rothenburg and head back to our German homes in Frankfurt and Essen. On the way we made a stop at Germany's "university city", Heidelberg. We were only there for an hour, but there was a great castle, as well as a gummi bear shop and a bookstore. That, along with a market selling hot crepes, kept us fully occupied. We

dropped the first lot of students (including all my friends!) off at Frankfurt at about four o'clock in the afternoon, and I arrived home at about eight o'clock. It was an awesome trip!

## Reflection

Reflecting back on my exchange tour in Germany, only one word pops to mind. AWESOME! But, I figure I might need to expand on that- just a little. The purpose of my travelling around Germany was to gain first-hand experiences regarding German culture, language and history. Our tour certainly covered all this. Germany (and northern Austria) is seeping with history, from the medieval Rothenburg and Nuremberg, to the Wieskirche and Schloss Neuschwanstein of the Renaissance, to more modern history that can be seen when visiting places such as Dachau. It is all too easy, when travelling around Germany, to forget about the present. However, places like Munich ensure that this can't happen. The German language was present in everything that we did- we were completely immersed. However, some people did want to practise their English on us after they figured out that we were exchange students. Everybody in Germany has to learn English as a second language at school (we weren't going to complain). Germany is also a place with a strongly defined culture, seen in the people, places, markets and, of course, the food. Our exchange to Germany, but particularly the tour, taught me a lot about myself- for one thing, I made it home in one piece! Would I do it again, you ask? Any day!