

My Canadian Exchange

The first time when I heard about the possibility for a student exchange with Canada I knew at once that I had to participate. Although I really hoped to be chosen I didn't really believe that this would actually happen. So indeed I was really surprised when I got my acceptance letter. On one hand I was really excited to meet my Canadian exchange student and to travel to Canada but on the other hand I was also a bit scared about being away from my family for three months.

On August 28th I met the other participants at Frankfurt airport whom I already knew from the information meeting. Although we all were looking forward to spending our time in Canada, most of us shed some tears when we had to say goodbye to our friends and families. The flight to Calgary took almost 10 hours and I was lucky to sit next to another German exchange student so that we were able to talk about our fears and hopes. In Calgary we had to wait about three hours before our final airplane to Edmonton took off and we all used the time to get to know each other better. After a 45 minutes flight we all thought that we would get our luggage back first, but suddenly our exchange families were already there. I was so surprised that I didn't even recognize my exchange student Kessia until she was standing right in front of me. After having said goodbye to all the other exchange students, me, Kessia and Colleen, my host mum, drove home. Of course we stopped at a fast-food restaurant to have supper.

At home I met my host dad Russ and Martina, Kessia's twin sister. I was really happy that they didn't look alike too much because I was scared that I wouldn't be able to tell them apart. After talking a bit about my journey they showed me their house. I already knew that Kessia and I would share a room and to be honest I was a bit anxious to live in one room with her for three months. However it turned out to be great because at nighttime we usually talked until 2am. By this we got to know each other very fast.

I was kind of lucky to spend the first evening with Kessia's best friend Kristy who also joins in the exchange because although everybody was really friendly it was still hard to switch into English. Together with Kessia, Martina, Kristy and Theresa, Kristy's German exchange student, I went to the cinema the same day. Theresa and I were really happy about it as we were able to help each other with the language and to talk about our first experiences. We watched a horror movie but Theresa and me were so tired that we missed most of it. After the movie Theresa and I decided to speak only in English to each other in order to be able to learn more because we knew that we would spend a lot of time together.

For example, we together went shopping with Kessia, Kristy, Martina and some other friends at West Edmonton Mall the next day. West Edmonton Mall is a huge shopping center with

more than a hundred stores, an indoor water park and a leisure park. Despite the fact that we spent at least one or two days a week in the mall I always was excited to go there again and again.

After the first week school started in Canada and I was really excited. The school where I went to is called Spruce Grove Composite High School and besides me three other Germans went there as well. We all had to choose four subjects which we had every day for 67 or 97 minutes blocks. I chose Social Studies, English, Design Studies and French. Unfortunately I had to notice that French wasn't quite the same level than I had in Germany so after 3 weeks of school I dropped it and took Drama instead. Right from the beginning I was really surprised how easily I understood what the teachers were talking about. And after two weeks, when I finally was used to 97 minutes blocks and all the other students, I really enjoyed time at school, especially my Drama and Social classes. At first I was a bit scared of quizzes and tests but after I noticed that I was able to pass all my quizzes with really good marks I stopped worrying about it.



Sonic Boom concert: Riley, Ashley and me

After school Kessia and I often went shopping with or without Martina or we met with Kristy and Theresa so that Theresa and I as well as Kessia and Kristy had the opportunity to talk about experiences we made in our classes or in our host families. On the weekends we usually met some friends, went shopping again or went to the movies. Once we attended a rock concert with some friends. The concert was organized by a popular radio channel called Sonic. Although all the bands were really popular and famous in Canada I never heard about them before. However I really liked most of their music. Usually our days on weekends started really late because Kessia loved to sleep until 3pm. One Saturday we went to Calgary Zoo. It was an impressive day because the zoo was really interesting and the weather was amazing, about 27 degrees in beginning of October! Another time we went to Banff, a well-

known National Park in the Rocky Mountains. Banff city is a really nice town and the National Park is just beautiful. Unfortunately the weather wasn't good and it wasn't much fun to be outside. One of my weekends' highlights was a visit to the water park in the mall. The water park has the world's largest indoor wave pool and tallest indoor bungee tower, as well as more than 17 unique waterslides. I really enjoyed spending time there.



Colleen, Martina, me and Kessia in Banff

Other highlights of my stay in Canada were Thanksgiving and Halloween. At Thanksgiving my host family invited friends and family members and we had a huge dinner. Colleen, my host mum, made so many different dishes that I wasn't even able to try everything. Halloween was amazing because everybody dressed up for school and even some teachers came in disguise. You cannot compare German Halloween to Canadian Halloween. During lunch time we had a little Halloween dance in the cafeteria and a costume contest. Later in the evening Kessia, Martina and I went to a Halloween party at a friend's house where we met a lot of people with crazy costumes.



Halloween, Kessia, me and Martina

I also enjoyed the adventure camp with the other German exchange students. The camp was close to Red Deer in the Rocky Mountains. For three days we lived in wooden cabins with 20 beds and unfortunately the heater was so loud that we sometimes woke up at nighttime. During our stay there we spent our time with climbing, rafting and hiking and all was fun. In the evening we had camp fires and we were able to go out on a lake with a canoe.

Time in Canada passed too quickly. In beginning of November everybody of us Germans was sad that the last month started. But the approaching departure wasn't the only thing which upset me. Two weeks before I had to fly back to Germany I was told that Kessia wouldn't be allowed to come to Germany because the Canadian exchange organization thought her marks wouldn't be good enough. Fortunately the organization allowed Martina to come which comforted me as much as Kessia's promise to visit me during next summer break.

During my last week my host family tried to distract me as much as possible from my farewell and organized a trip to Mazatlan, Mexico. In fall they always spend one week in Mexico and I was really surprised and excited when they told me that we were going to spend my last week down there. Of course that meant that I had to say goodbye to all my classmates and friends earlier than I expected to. Therefore my last day in school was really sad. On the same evening I had a little goodbye/ birthday party because I became 17 a few days later in Mexico. The next morning we flew to Mexico. Although I thought the weather was not too cold in Edmonton the warm weather in Mexico was really nice. Especially because I was able to celebrate my birthday on a sunny beach.



Martina, Colleen, me and Kessia

The day before my departure to Germany we flew back to Edmonton and we were kind of shocked to get out of the plane and find that Canada had turned white in the meantime.

What a fun to dig our car out of 20cm of snow, at about -20 degrees still wearing ballerinas but no jacket. When I woke up the next day and thought about saying goodbye soon I was terribly sad. After some farewell pancakes Colleen, Martina, Kessia and I drove to the airport to meet the other Germans and their host families. When time came to say goodbye almost everybody cried. Unfortunately our airplane in Calgary started almost three hours later so that our journey took even longer.



Saying goodbye: Kristy, Theresa, me, Martina and Kessia

Canada was the most amazing times I ever had! I made so many new experiences and if I'd get the chance to do the exchange again I will do it. I met so many nice and friendly people whom I hope to meet again very soon. Ever since I am back I am counting down the days until Martina will arrive.