

HÄ, WAS?



THE ADVENTURES
OF JOHANNA- AN
INTERNATIONAL
STUDENT LIVING
IN FREIBURG

**WHY
OPEN-MINDEDNESS
MATTERS**

OPEN-MINDEDNESS MATTERS

By Johanna Patton

It seems like an incredibly obvious thing to be open-minded when you decide to travel broad. Naturally if we want to spend any considerable amount away from our home countries we're probably looking for something- Either to broaden our horizons, expand our vision of the world, or to learn about how people live day-to-day life across the globe. But it's not until we actually get tested in real-life that things become a little fuzzy. Open- mindedness, like any other life lesson, can definitely be easier said than done.

Someone once asked me after my 6 month backpacking trip around Asia: "What's the most valuable lesson you learned while you were away?" and I laughed from my belly because it was going to sound so ridiculous. I told him: "I realized I don't know much about anything" There was no better way to describe how I felt.



As Albert Einstein once said,

***"The more I learn,
the more I realize
how much I don't
know"***

The more I learn about culture, the more I travel, the more life stories I have the pleasure of listening to, the more experiences I have.... Well, the more I realize how little I know at all.


It's the same feeling I have when I'm on top of a mountain or standing next to the sea: it reminds me how small I am in the most humbling way possible. It reminds me that the world around me is so much bigger and more expansive than what I realize on a day-to-day basis. It reminds me that my thoughts, feelings, ideas, and knowledge is held only within the constraints of my mind. It is so vital to help me remember that all my worries, anxieties, passions, fears, thoughts, and ideas are limited to existing inside of me. That the world is so vast- and that the world exists in a way far greater than just my own idea or perception of it.

I think this is the same mentality we need whenever we decide to go live in another country. In all honestly, whether or not you're experiencing life abroad or not, I think we should try to do the best we can to keep this perspective. It's important to understand that the way we were raised is not "the only way", and that our opinions, perceptions, and ideas aren't the ultimate truth. We have to be willing to be wrong and most of all- willing to be curious. In fact, I encourage you to make curiosity your very best friend.

”

***IT'S ONLY IN
CURIOSITY
THAT WE
CAN LEARN
NEW THINGS
WITH AN
OPEN HEART
AND MIND***


“



Curiosity helps us meet others where they are. It helps us accept, to be interested in the unknown, and it enables us to listen without judging. There may be ideas we've been told to not agree with as a foundation of the societies we grew up in. Maybe we were taught that following a certain religion is the "only way" — but that's kept us from meeting good-hearted people who happen to follow a different religious beliefs. To that I again say: I hope you make curiosity your very best friend. Curiosity helps us to learn ideas and beliefs something from a new perspective- not to take it in as your own, necessarily- but to understand why and how other people choose and choose not to believe- without judgement.

Or perhaps it's not a matter of religious beliefs, but you could be feeling a little bit lost in the context of social interactions. I'm not the only one who has felt lost in German social culture. I used to feel offended when people would speak directly to me about their opinions or when no one would smile to me on the street. I also couldn't get used to how long it would take for other people to warm up to me. I quickly judged others for what I didn't know, since I thought everyone should be "warm" as a rule. I decided, instead, to meet my judgements with curiosity- for me, that meant going back into history and understanding how different countries have developed and how that has influenced the behaviors of different societies- including my own.

Other times it can mean simply accepting people for how they are despite the differences. More importantly, it's about not taking these differences personally. Try asking yourself questions about why things you're not used to in your home country might bother you. In my case: why did I take the lack of smiling passerby personally? Why did I feel like someone speaking directly to me feel like they were upset with me? Why did it bother me when a conversation seemed one-sided? I've learned a lot in the process of living abroad, but the most important thing is that it's helped me understand myself better as well.



So my friends, keep on with your curious living and opening your heart and mind up to the unknown. Don't take the differences you're experiencing personally. Take in the people and world around you to help you learn and grow. I encourage you to meet other people and yourself with curiosity and kindness. It will help you not only accept and understand those around you- but I'm sure it will help you accept parts of yourself, too.

xoxo, Johanna