

HÄ, WAS?



THE ADVENTURES
OF JOHANNA- AN
INTERNATIONAL
STUDENT LIVING
IN FREIBURG

THE IMPORTANCE OF LIVING ABROAD

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A stylized illustration of the Earth, showing continents in green and oceans in blue. It is surrounded by several orange four-pointed stars and small orange dots, set against a light green background.

OH, TO LIVE ABROAD...

Even when I was a young girl you could count on me to be daydreaming about frequenting a small coffee shop in a small town in Italy, going on an adventure next to the pyramids of Egypt, or imagining the dark hallways in my high-school to be the vibrant streets of Paris. Travel, adventure, and simply living abroad has always been in my blood- and if you're reading this now, I'm assuming you look at the world in a similar way!

I ache to see the world and to know the people in it. I crave learning about cultures, to listen to different languages, and to experience different traditions. The most beautiful thing is that the more I travel, the more I realize how little I really know at all! There is always room to learn and grow.



Before I get any further , I want to say that I don't take living in another country lightly. It's an IMMENSE privilege. Often the first hurdle is simply being born into a country in which gives you the "right" passport to be able to travel. Those of you from the EU have it a lot easier, and can freely move from country to country within the EU with no problem (what a dream!) But in addition to having the correct passport or not, there's a heck of a lot that goes into moving to another country. You may or may not have the financial means, the support from family or friends, or you may or may not feel confident enough to go for it!

If you're struggling to find the confidence, consider me your very own cheerleader yelling "YOU CAN DO IT!" There are so many lessons to learn while living abroad that will completely change your life and I want to encourage you to take that opportunity if you have the possibility! Today I'd like to shine some light on a few reasons living abroad is so important.

We often share certain character traits, ideas, and visions about what is considered right and wrong depending on the culture we're raised in- this might include (but isn't limited to) our values, the way we treat others, or whether or not we put pineapple on our pizza. ;)

No matter where you move, there will be something that will be undeniably different. Maybe it'll have you scratching your head and thinking, "wait a second, maybe it doesn't make that much sense to beat around the bush when I speak to others. Actually, I want to try speaking more direct to people the way they do here." At least that's what happened to me. It's only a small example of challenging your own ideas, but when I came here I was a true midwestern gal at heart. Politeness a number one priority. Little did I realize, "politeness" actually meant not speaking up for myself when I needed to because I thought other people might think I was rude otherwise. Although I still consider myself a polite person, I have adopted a more direct "German" way of speaking and it has been a game-changer. Newsflash: just because you say what's on your mind, it doesn't make you rude. It makes you communicative!





A WAKE-UP CALL

Have you ever noticed what kinds of habits you have in your daily life back home? Perhaps you have a certain set of routines like going to the gym every morning, Sunday dinners with your family, or maybe it looks a little something like spending a little too much time around the TV playing video games. Maybe you're stuck with having the same types of conversations with the people around you, do familiar things or don't bother to do things that take you out of your comfort zone!

I think our thoughts and behaviors are often intertwined in a physical place, so when you really move to another country to settle down it can really shake you up!

By being away from your normal life back home, you might find yourself with clearer vision of the habits you have back home and it'll give you the time to decide what you want to hold onto. Moving can give you the opportunity for clearer vision of what you want your life to look like in the future since you will experience a different country where the norms are completely different from back home. You may even find yourself taking ideas from the new culture you're living in and incorporating them in your life!

Distance is funny that way, I think. It can give you the space to understand what your dreams are, who you want to be, and it actually gives you the freedom to try out an entirely new way of living. If we live the same day over and over again with the same people, have the same conversations, and do the same things everyday (which is totally great for some people, don't get me wrong!) it is only normal that there won't be as much opportunity to wiggle new ideas into your mind. Living abroad truly helps you see beyond your little bubble back home and help you to realize that there is an entire WORLD out there to discover and experience!


HUMILITY

There are TONS of perks of living in the same country for your entire life- For starters, you probably have a safe and stable network of people in your life, no complications with the language, and you understand the ins and outs of a culture! Heck, some of us have even climbed a “social ladder” and made a name for ourselves in our hometowns. I think there is something important in going to a place where no one knows who you are, where you have no connections, and to have enough humility to be comfortable to be a “nobody.” Heck, it’s not always easy. But it certainly can teach you a lesson or two! You won’t know everyone, maybe you have your own struggles with the language, or maybe you just won’t be able to understand all the social cues that would come to you easily in your home country- and that’s fine! It’s all about taking a step back and knowing we don’t know everything. If we walk into a new country with curiosity and kindness, eager to learn, there are a huge amount of opportunities to learn about yourself and those around you!

THE CHANCE TO CREATE YOURSELF



We are an ever-growing compilation of everything we put into our system. The books we read, the podcasts we listen to, the friends we choose to have, what we decide to do in our free-time, and the movies we watch all influence the person we are becoming. So, just imagine how much you can put into your system when living abroad. Just to name a few: new foods, drinks, sounds, perspectives, new ways to wash your laundry (I had never used a drying rack before moving to Germany!), new means of transportation (driving the car was replaced with biking and riding the tram!). The list could go on and on. Plus, you'll have the chance to see different places, meet different kinds of people from what you're used to, and have conversations you might never experience back home. Trust me, creating yourself is a part of this magical process of living abroad!



If you're debating whether or not a life abroad is right for you, I wholeheartedly encourage you to go after it. It will surprise you in more ways than you could ever imagine and will expand your world. It'll give you the opportunity to challenge your ideas, to become humble, and will wake you up. It will make you realize there is no such thing as "normal" and help you to live more empathetically. All in all, I can't think of something that might open your heart and mind up more than to experience life in another country. It will truly change your life! If you ever have any questions feel welcome to reach out to the Intercultural Mentoring Team. We're here to help you!

Cheering you on!

xoxo, Johanna