

Spotlight

Making the Most of Your Time Abroad – What Not to Do!



MITTEL AUDIO by Clare Maas

So, I was thinking about how I spent my time abroad and what I might change if I went abroad again. So, what I would do the same if I were to do an exchange again... I think that I would definitely move into the dorms again. It was really nice to have a community of people around me who were going through the same things I was going through, especially towards the beginning of my stay. It felt like there was some solidarity, and that we could try to understand Germany together, and commiserate when things went a bit wrong. We could talk about the ways that we were feeling about being in a culture that we were very new to and that we didn't understand very well.

I do have a couple of regrets, though. One thing I'd do differently is that I wish I had taken the time to learn German. I didn't. And I think that was one of the reasons why I found it so hard at the beginning. And I know that if I had taken some time to actually learn the language instead of focusing on my other studies, I would have gained a more permanent skill set, as well.

Anyway, let's see what else...

In terms of the overall experience, I got really enthusiastic about the idea of living in Europe. It's so great — Germany's like right in the middle, so you can get to lots of countries really easily! But then if I had the opportunity to travel, I didn't often go to places in the region I was living in. I ended up leaving the country quite a lot, mostly going to the UK because I felt comfortable there with the language. I loved the UK! If I ever have the chance to move to the UK, I'll definitely take it! But my specific experience of Germany wasn't so great, because of all the time I spent away from the town I was living in. I made the mistake of thinking all Germans and German towns were similar to what I knew from where I was staying. And so I didn't make an effort to explore more. I would change that next time!

So what would I recommend to other students? I think really I have to say: take the time to get to know the local culture more.

It's scary, because you can feel very vulnerable if you don't always understand what's going on around you. I often felt a bit helpless because of the language barrier. But looking back at it now, I think if I had faced the issue of being a foreigner that didn't speak the local language, then I could have discovered sooner that most people spoke enough English so I could get by! I still felt guilty for relying on English. So I think I would take the time to learn the language if I went there again. Then I would have maybe actually gotten to know the area I was living in more, instead of just going to places that made me feel comfortable and safe. So really my advice is to embrace the fact that you're a foreigner in a new place, and push yourself to try new things!

EXERCISE

Vocabulary: Listen out for words in the audio that fit the following definitions.

- a building, usually at a university, containing a number of rooms for residents, often with shared bathroom and cooking facilities
- a person who comes from a different country
- a problem, rule or situation that prevents somebody from doing something, or that makes something impossible
- frightening, causing fear
- support by one person or group of people for another because they share feelings, opinions, aims, etc.
- the act of accepting an idea, a proposal, a set of beliefs, etc, especially when it is done with enthusiasm
- to need or depend on somebody/something
- to show somebody sympathy when they are upset or disappointed about something
- weak and easily hurt physically or upset emotionally

ANSWERS

a. dorms, b. foreigner, c. barrier, d. scary, e. solidarity, f. to embrace, g. to rely, h. to commiserate, i. vulnerable



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