

This summer brought with it exciting new experiences, new friendships and the opportunity to better my German language skills... all in just two weeks!

My challenging journey began as I met eleven, 17 year old strangers at Gatwick Airport and prepared to jet off to Leverkusen. We were all feeling pretty nervous as we landed in Cologne/Bonn Airport and you could hear a pin drop as the coach pulled in to the school where we were meeting our German partner families... no one wanted to be the first off the bus! However, our anxieties and nerves felt long gone after the first few days passed by.

Every morning we had four hour periods of German grammar lessons with two different teachers, which was hard work at the time, but has definitely proved to be of great benefit to me! After our grammar lessons we usually observed 2 of our partner's normal lessons which was very interesting! I think every English person's favourite thing about the German education system was the fact that they finished school at 1.30pm, every day, which meant you could do a whole variety of different things in the afternoon! My personal favorite was lounging around in the outdoor pool (that was right next to the famous Bayer Leverkusen football stadium!). I also enjoyed my endless visits to the very popular 'Eiscafes' (ice cream parlors) that fill the streets of Germany! I had many deep conversations (in German of course!) whilst enjoying their famous 'Spaghetti' Ice cream!

As well as this, we had organised trips with our fellow English students and sometimes our German partners too! We visited the outstanding Phantasialand, a theme park near Bonn, as well as visiting Bonn itself (we almost bumped into Angela Merkel as she was appearing at a presentation the very day we went to Bonn!) We had a guided tour of the historic city complete with a visit to the 'Haus der Geschichte', a famous museum looking at the history of Germany.

Our trip to Cologne was very memorable for me. I remember as we all stood in awe looking up at the outstanding Cologne Cathedral, (I don't think anyone managed to fit it in one picture... It felt like it went as high as the heavens!) We had a fantastic tour of the interior (once again in German) and then we were given time to look around the city, or in girl language - shop!

My trip to Germany was a fantastic balance of learning, growing as a person and simply having fun! I met so many wonderful people, both German and English, and I am certain many of them will be friends for life! (The English students are already planning our reunion in October half term!) My German language skills have come on leaps and bounds, and above all, my confidence, in so many different areas, has vastly improved. It was a once in a life time experience for me and I would encourage any year 10/12s to take part in a similar trip with UK German Connection... you will not be disappointed!

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