



“ I am so happy I took this year for myself before going off to University. ”

Isabel is the exotic part of our Kolleg since she lives in the USA with her family. At this point in the year she speaks German nearly fluently and jokes that she might have to relearn some English when she moves back. She is a very positive, energetic, and open person. The interview with Isabel was conducted by Melanie.

Where are you from?

» I am from the United States. My parents are originally from Germany, but I have lived most of my life in the states; first in Ohio, then in Maine, and now in North Carolina. «

What are your interests?

» My academic interests are Biology and Medicine. My plan, as of now, is to study Biology at University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, and then go to Medical School in America. Outside of academics, my interests include ballet, soccer, reading, sailing, and hiking. «

With what attitude did you approach this orientation year?

» I approached this year with a very open mindset and with the goals to improve my German, make strong new friendships, get to know German universities, and partake in all the other cool things the Kolleg has to offer, like the Outdoor Excursions, and Theater performances. «

How would you describe what we are doing here?

» At the Kolleg we attend classes Monday through Wednesday taught by very engaged, young teachers to learn more about things we are interested in, and to see if it is something we are interested in studying at University. I, for example, took Math and Economics during the first trimester, International Politics and Medicine during the second, and now Chemistry and Psychology. In addition to this I also take a Spanish course. I also attend courses at the University of Konstanz, where we get to take part of courses as if we were actually studying there, and can even take the exam at the end of the Semester if we

choose to. This is very helpful in the process of figuring out what we want to study at University. My favorite courses that I've taken at the University are Evolutionary Biology, and a German course. Furthermore, we have "sprechstunden" (meetings) with Frau Groot, Frau Leitner and Herr Klause about our university decisions. We also get to take a theater class with an amazing teacher where we learn how to be more secure on stage and learn to write and perform pieces. At the end of the year we will have a big performance which everyone from the Kolleg is a part of. Lastly, we also have three Outdoor Excursions during which we go backpacking through the Alps once in the fall, winter, and in the summer in Norway, for 9 days. These experiences really force us to grow into ourselves and have made our group at the Kolleg much closer and improved our teamwork abilities. «

What is your living situation like?

» I live in Haus 6 (aka the best house ever). I live on the top floor with two other girls and three boys who live on the bottom floor. We all share a small kitchen and a very nice and spacious living room. «

What do you do in your free time here?

» In my free time here I love hanging out with my friends and going down into town or to the lake. Living by the Bodensee is extremely beautiful, and I love going on walks or small hikes to enjoy the views. I also enjoy doing things for which I never had time to do in school, like finally being able to read books again. «

Do you have a favorite place here in Überlingen?

» My favorite place to go to here is the lake. Whether it is swimming, seeing the distant Swiss Alps on the horizon, or learning how to sail, it's always a fun place to visit. «

How do you feel when you return to the Kolleg from break?

» Returning to the Kolleg after a break is probably one of the best feelings in the world for me, because it truly feels like coming home, and I get to see all my favorite people again! «

Have any problems occurred with your housemates, and how did you solve them?

» At the beginning of the year the boys downstairs bought themselves a very nice and loud sound system, which they liked to use to play loud music. But by talking to them we quickly decided that whenever it was too loud for us when we were trying to study or sleep they would turn the sound down. And since then we haven't had any problems with that. We've learned to all openly discuss problems and then work together to fix them. «

Describe a nice experience that you would like to remember for a long time.

» Our second Outdoor Excursion of the year took place in March, high up in the Swiss Alps. For six days we were constantly surrounded by a blank sheet of searing and utter whiteness that climbed up to jagged mountain peaks. We all arrived at the warm lodge in the middle of this impressive high altitude valley after a day of hiking knowing that we were expected to sleep outside during one of the nights by building a "biwak" (essentially a structure made partially or fully out of snow). This filled most of our minds with a mixture of anticipation and curiosity, but also fear. Fear that we would freeze to death, or have our Biwak collapse on top of us as we slept. Then the day finally came when we began to build our Biwaks. I partnered up with Julius, a boy from my house, and we started building. We set out to make the best Biwak the world had ever seen, filled with grandiose visions of spiral staircases, connecting tunnels, living rooms, and tables. So we started to dig. First we had to dig about two meters straight down at the side of a small hill. At first the work seemed very boring and laborious, but after two hours or so of work we had made it to the ground and the walls were suddenly higher than me. Next we split up: Julius worked on fulfilling our dream of a spiral staircase and I began to start digging the entrance tunnel that would open up to our Biwak. After about another 2 hours of work we had the rough sketch of the staircase and the beginnings of a chamber underneath the snow. But then the sun started going down and we were instructed to head back to the lodge and that we would finish tomorrow. The next day we went back at our work with enthusiasm, but also sore from all the shoveling of the day before. Julius took over being the main architect and I shoveled all the snow out of the cave-like structure we were making. After another 4 hours or so we were finally done; our Biwak was complete. I'll give

you a quick tour: to get in you first go down 2 meters on a spiral staircase, then through a small entrance tunnel and over the "Kältegraben" that was used to keep the cold air out. Then you cross the area where our backpacks comfortably rested and go up onto the raised sleeping platform where our sleeping bags were spread out on top of sleeping pads. We spent the night very warm and dry. I slept better that night than any other night of the excursion!«

Have you learned something new about yourself in your time here? And have you observed any development in yourself?

» In terms of my academic interests I haven't learned anything new about myself, due to the fact I always knew what I want to study. But I have definitely noticed other changes: On a very basic level, my German has vastly improved since the beginning of the year. I am writing a 15 page research essay in German right now, which I never would have thought I could do at the beginning of the year. Additionally, I have learned how to address problems in the house or misunderstandings between myself and others much better. I used to be too scared to say anything when things bothered me, but now I have learned how to respectfully talk about these things. Lastly, I have also regained my love of learning, which four years of high school had almost completely stamped out of me. «

What has been the biggest challenge you have had to overcome here?

» The biggest challenge I had to overcome was asserting myself in class, group discussions, or other activities, because at the beginning of the year I was not confident enough in my German abilities to really do this. But as the language came back to me more and more each day, this became easier. «

What will you miss the most from your time at the Kolleg?

» The people!! I'm going to miss all the Kollegiaten so much when I go back to America. I've moved a lot in my life, so I'm used to making new friends every 2 years or so, but I've never made as close friends in as short of a time as I did here. «

If you were given this choice, would you choose to come to the kolleg again?

» YES! This is hands down probably one of the best decisions I have made in my life thus far. I am so happy I took this year for myself before going off to University. «

To whom would you recommend this year?

» I would recommend this to people who don't yet know what they want to study, and also to people who just want a year before University during which they can grow into themselves and go on many adventures, like the Outdoor Excursions, sailing, and project trips, all while meeting lots of really cool people! «