



Ainsley

From Ingersoll to Austria

Going to a “Krampus Lauf” was an excitingly painful experience

Servus!

I’ve now officially been here for almost 7 months and time is now my enemy. These months have been flying by way too fast to linger on the thought of going back home. It’s hard to believe how much things change and how much I have been able to improve since I’ve been here. Three months is normally a rather decent amount of time, but in exchange months it isn’t much at all. So looking back on where I was three months ago much has happened in a short time.

I’ll start with Austria’s traditions as they are very intriguing. For Christmas spirit you can look forward to real advent calendars (not the normal chocolate calendars), advent wreaths, Maroni stands, Saint Nicolas, Kristkindl, Krampus, Kristkindl markets, glühwein, schnapps and more! Oh wait, Krampus? You may wonder what this might be. Well if you like scary devil monsters chasing you and hitting you with cow tails and sticks, Krampus are thrilling and more.

Personally, this is my favourite tradition so far. Starting December 5th and continuing for most of the month there are Krampus looking to give you lovely welts and bruises. Going to a “Krampus lauf” was an excitingly painful experience. The Austrian boys make groups for each town, which include, Krampus Angels, Witches, Perchten (tree men), and Saint Nicolas. They have

huge marches at night where the Krampus run around hitting everyone. Angels then come and hand out candies and peanuts to everyone. This whole experience is quite the adrenalin rush. To me everything was so realistic that it was like watching a fairytale with witches and monsters. It was even more real getting hit by the Krampus who would run, grab you, pull you out of the crowd and beat you with their cow tails and sticks. Having gone to quite a few I had bruises and welts on my legs for most of the month as reminders of this fun festival.

These festivals and traditions all through the season really kept me busy and interested which kept my mind off of my family and Canada's traditions. Nevertheless I had some homesickness for my family and traditions, but I was really lucky to be with my Austrian families and friends. They made everything incredibly special for me as they knew it would be hard for me to be away from home.

Having said that my family has grown even more since Christmas as I have now moved into my 2nd host family's home. I was quite nervous to move families, as I becoming very comfortable with my first family and had a solid routine going. As it turned out all the worrying and nerves were a waste of energy I have come to realize as I am now experiencing living with another amazing family. Things are different here as I live in a new town and I really understand now why we have more than one host family. It's being able to connect and get to see things from other angles and mix things up. Change and adaption is really key here.

I really, really, appreciate this opportunity I have been given. This opens so many doors and I have learned things I never thought I would have the chance to. People here are always friendly and always there to try and make this experience the best possible for you. I have had the chance to live with some amazing families and have met and made friends with unforgettable people. Its sad to think of going home and having to leave, but how can I forget how important everyone back home is and how much they always help no matter how far away I am.

I am really lucky to have the support back home as well as here, not everyone has such luck. My family and friends, who I can't thank enough, have helped me apply to university and helped me meet deadlines for many things. Although you have to do , many things independently when you leave, you are always going to need help and advice from those back home. A piece of advice, always take into consideration everyone's suggestions before leaving on exchange.

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I now have been cramming my days with plans, and would never ever before have used a planner but it seems to be attached to my hip these days. While I've been here I have taken up volleyball, running, turnen (a type of gymnastics), Judo, theatre, band, zumba (traditional dancing) and many other activities. Sports were far from my thing in Canada but I can honestly say that saying yes to trying everything is the best choice. I now rarely have a free hour in the week and this has given me a huge opportunity to meet new people.

I love my exchange and I love my new country. Rotary couldn't have chosen better. I feel like this is my home and Canada is going to be the next big trip. Thank you Rotary, this has been the most unbelievable experience and most amazing opportunity that you have provided for me. And thanks to everyone who are part of my exchange, especially my amazing host families. I couldn't have had a better support system! Dankeschön!

Liebe Grüße!

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