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My study abroad journey is coming to an end and many feelings start to flourish. I started off unsure of what was about to come but excited to experience something new. What can I say? It was not what I expected. It was much more. I matured and learned a lot about myself. It sounds very cheesy but it is true. I met wonderful people who will make me cry when I have to say goodbye. I had some great professors who thought me a lot and I felt for this little and charming city, Reutlingen. It is clearly a lot to say, so let me start by

The Very Beginning

Time flew by with the new ambient. In about a month since I started my studies at Hochschule Reutlingen and a little over since I arrived, a lot happened. There have been snowy, sunny, rainy and cloudy days. The cold ones were definitely the hardest. So much happened since. Middle of January was both a blessing and terrible. I thought that I could freeze to death. Minus 10 was common just like the snow. On the bright side, I had my best friend with me. I don't know how I would have survived without him. Daddy came and helped me build my dorm, open a bank account, get a cellphone carrier and turn the unknown into familiar. We explored the area and went to the cities next by.

Stuttgart one of my favorites is the perfect combination of antique architecture and modern installations. It has all the fancy shopping stores (from Louis Vuitton to Prada) and also the cool trendy ones - such as Zara. Ten minutes away, the Starbucks in the middle of Scholossplatz remind me of the countless times I went to the San Diego State one. Stuttgart is definitely a marvelous place not appreciated by its residents. The multiple sushi stations around the Hauptbahnhoff makes me even more satisfied. I only wished that the tickets back and forth were cheaper so I could go at least once a week.

Metzingen is the shopping heaven. House of multiple brands, this outlet city offers great fashion and accessible prices. However, the best part is the fifteen minutes walk from the train station to the commercial area. Typical German houses with light tones and tiny streets makes it special. Small shops and bakeries give a nice touch to the residential area. The walk continuous until a church square. The church is old and never open, at least I have never seen. It has an old and obscure appearance that makes it even more charming. The tall tree parallel to the church is the perfect complement to a unique view.

Not only the cities are interesting but also the people. I met worldwide friends who have unique personalities. From Romania, I met Oana. A little quiet but strong-minded girl, she is slowly becoming a good friend. Sue and Mads, very uncommon couple that met at UNC. Really nice people from two different countries, US (she) and Denmark (he). The French guys, Louis and Xavier, are open-minded best friends that remind me about my guy friends from home. Louis has a strong British accent and Xavier looks very foreign. The Aussies are very laid back boys that are extremely friendly. Maybe it is the stereotypical side of me speaking but they have the personality I would expect Australians to have. The Finnish, Janne - hard name to pronounce (strong pause after the dry "E"). Literally tried one hundred times and always get it wrong. Very cool and introvert guy who speaks and dances a lot when has a drink. The other Finnish is Vilma. A very nice and sweet person. Ana, the Barcelona lady is short but with a strong personality. We get along well. Avery, senior from Chapman, is a typical American guy. Never travelled alone and has never been to Europe. And of course, there is Lara. Never really talked at SDSU but became good friends here. She looks like the classic German girl but has a nice Southern Californian personality. I could not have imagined me becoming more friends with someone here other than her.

Being a new exchange student is synonym to freshman. Everything is new. I struggled with the library system. Two floors building, it has a receptions desk downstairs along with the lockers. No one can bring purses upstairs. The builds don't count the ground floor as one but zero. The first floor is actually above, what for me will normally be the second. The school is quite open with a fair amount of nature – currently dead due to the harsh winter. The staff is

very friendly and quite personal unlike what has been previously said about German professors. Half of my classes haven't started yet. German B1/B2 is productive and tiring. Marketing Communication is one my favorite so far. The professor is such a character. International Organizations is my other favorite. The professor is sweet and she helps me see things in myself that I truly could not alone. I am looking forward to the other three.

The nightlife is very unique. Not that many options and not always open. The nightclubs are closed during the week. The main one is P&K Tanzbar, where most of the student parties take place. The Irish pub is the go to bar when my friends and me don't have anything better to do. There has been quite a lot student parties so far. A fun night was the costume party. It reminded me of the parties that I attend at my own school. We all had the chance to dress up in fun costumes, party with friends and dance all night.

The single dorm was great but a little lonely. It was nice to have my own kitchen and bathroom. Moving to the shared apartment was stressful and tiring. However, the guys seem to be very nice and somewhat clean. One even gave me a curtain for my bedroom. I was excited to see what this experience will bring.

I was starting to think that Reutlingen is a little boring, but sitting in my favorite café now I realized how much I will miss this place. Café am Markt is charming with an historical and classy appearance. The staff is friendly and the food and beverages amazing. The Café au Lait is divine and actually the only hot drink I have ever enjoyed. Right in the middle of the city center. I have the perfect view of the delightful architecture of the shops and the church. The statue is also very remarkable once you take the time to appreciate it. The Japanese restaurants are also very good and definitely a go to. And finally, the Döner. I don't know how but I became weirdly obsessed with it. My first time trying it and it already is one of my favorites. No kidding why here is the Döner city. The meat is perfectly cooked and sliced. It is put into a warm piece of homemade Pita along with a fresh and abundant amount of salad. Campus Kebab will be a great and missed memory.

The middle of the Journey

As the time passed by, things changed. Most of them for the better. The weather became hotter and sunnier. Actually, it became enjoyable to go outside. The trees and flowers started to regain life and with other faculties starting to have classes, much more people were outside and everywhere. Other international students arrived and so my other flat mates. The rest of my classes also started and I travelled to beautiful places.

The guy who gave me the curtain is called Han. A very great cook who literally feed me every other day with some amazing Italian dish. The last roommate arrived from Finland with his guitar and crazy diets. Through them I met many other international students from all over the world. There are Ciro, Lana and Pedro from Brazil. I was SO happy to be studying with Brazilians after almost three years that I have been in the US. Maik and Bruno from Portugal, very fun and weird Portuguese speaking guys (at least for the Brazilians). Brett, a New Zealander, happened to have even a weirder accent to me than the Portuguese males. Matt, an American, reminded me a little bit of my life back in the US. And Sonja, a German girl with Hungarian roots who is very fun and open to life. These people became my go to friends. I started to do everything with them. They were definitely the right fit for me. The other international people were very great and I still liked them but there is something about connection that was just natural with these "new" friends.

I travelled to beautiful places in the meantime. Strasbourg was the first one. I went with mainly two friends and it was beautiful. The mixture of the German and French architecture plus the rivers and bridges were perfect. The cheese and wine were divine and the city itself one of the most charming and gorgeous I have ever been to. After that, I went to Amsterdam. Another beautiful place. I loved the classic architecture and the fact that it has over 300 museums was mind-blowing. The rivers and bridges were once again breath taking. Amsterdam is the perfect combination of culture and fun. The nightlife is not overestimated and fulfilled all my expectations. The boat tour I did was lovely and the city also became one of my favorites. The only downside was the overload of bicycles and the aggressive cyclers all over who honestly are much scarier than car drivers. My next adventure was in Ireland. Saint Patrick's Day gained another meaning to me. It was one of the

most fun weekends of my life alongside good American friends. All of us, SDSU kids studying abroad, met up there for a one in a life time weekend. Fun would be an understatement for that weekend. I also had the chance to visit all across Ireland from Dublin, Cliffs of Moher. Definitely, the most amazing cliffs I have ever seen. The week after, I went to Barcelona to visit my family. We took on a trip on the coast of Spain, we travelled to Montserrat and to Andorra. It was an unforgettable vacation time with my aunt and uncle. And the last one was to Munich with my American friends to Frühlingsfest. It was absolutely amazing. It was a great German experience in one of my favorite German places. I got to wear the costume and had incredibly large Pretzels and Beer.

The trips were a nice break from the somewhat stress of living with so many different and unknown people. However, what matters the most is that they are all goodhearted people and misunderstandings are common. I also learned through this shared living the virtue of patience and was able to cultivate amazing friendships. Similarly the same happened in my classes. I was a part of many group projects that challenged me a lot and taught me so much by being next to others. I most certainly gained some priceless learning. It was also great being in Reutlingen for most of the time. This city that at first seemed very small became the synonym of familiar and cozy. I continued to love my coffee place and Japanese restaurants. I became familiar with the workers at grocery stores. I systematically went every single Saturday and sometimes also Tuesday weekly Farmers Market. The freshness of the fruits and vegetables and the friendly people made the experience of getting food unique. And coming back to this flat after a long day was just like coming home.

Now that I am about to leave, I realized how much being in Europe and mainly here in Reutlingen changed me. Clearly, I experienced a lot. The curtain guy, Han, became my best friend here. The "new" exchange students became a big part of me. The classes I had changed my perspective of myself. Not only because of the lectures but also because of the great professors and my classmates who were very culturally different than me and were amazingly

accepting. The Saturday morning Farmers Market became a new hobby of mine. The small school concept made me familiar with so many people and walking around campus became fun. Care, the student bar, became a ritual every Wednesday. Reutlingen accepted me and gave me new perspectives. It became a new home. I greatly appreciate the chance to be here and the financial support that made this one in a lifetime experience possible.

Thank you eternally,

Jessica Lima