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Linfield College: Study Abroad in Austria

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Dear Future Study Abroad Student!

My name is Helena and I am a senior. I am writing this to tell you that studying abroad is not only the *coolest* thing you will ever do in college, it is essential to your experience as a student. Actually living in a foreign country for a few months is FAR different than going somewhere as a tourist in dorky sandals and a bucket hat. I studied abroad in Vienna, Austria two years ago and the best part about it was being a real Wiener for a few months. “Wiener” is German for “Viennese”, by the way. You might study abroad in Costa Rica or Senegal, but I went to Austria and I am going to tell you how awesome it was (I will try not to get too nostalgic or teary-eyed). The Vienna program also no longer has a German requirement so you can go even if you have never taken German!!!

First of all, Vienna happens to be one of the most breathtaking and historically rich cities in Europe. We learned all about the secrets of the city and toured everything from Roman ruins to sprawling castles. We would spend one day in the classroom (which is right downtown across from the famous opera house) and one day walking the city with our professors learning about history, art, architecture, food, and culture. Our professors took us to places that tourists would never see and taught us things tourists would never know. During our lunch breaks we, along with everyone from businessmen to construction workers, would walk down to the nearby sausage stand and get a bratwurst and beer. And yes, it is acceptable to drink a beer during your lunch break.

During free weekends or holidays I went hiking in the Alps and visited Amsterdam and London. My host parents even took me to Venice! We also went on several class excursions. We went to Prague in the Czech Republic, visited picturesque towns in the Alps, and went to old abbeys and fortresses in the countryside surrounding Vienna. One of my favorite days was when we volunteered at a local winemaker’s vineyard. We drove to the outskirts of Vienna on a crisp fall morning and helped trim vines while he enthusiastically told us about wine and mother earth in delightfully broken English. In the evening, his wife cooked us a phenomenal Austrian meal and we ate, drank and were merry. It was, without a doubt, one of the most magical days I had abroad.

Going out in Vienna was also great fun. Our group had our favorite bars and clubs which we would frequent. It is when you have “favorite” spots that you really feel like a local. Our group would meet at our usual meeting place on weekends and then go to our usual spots to dance and have fun. I met some of the most interesting people on those long Saturday nights. One night we met a group of Danish students who were on a class trip and another night our language tutor took us out to get to know his friends. You meet other young people, whether they’re local or not, and see what it is like to be someone our age in modern Europe. On my own time when I was not with the group, I would go out and purposely get lost to see what I could find. There was always a new café or restaurant to be found. Sometimes I would just go somewhere to people watch. Eventually, I got to know the public transportation system so well that I can say with confidence that I know Vienna better than my hometown.

The most magical time in Vienna that makes me most nostalgic is Christmas time. Around the end of November traditional German Christmas markets are set up all around the city where crafts, food, and hot mulled wine are sold. It also happened to snow for the last few weeks in Vienna. I cannot describe how magical it is to be drinking hot, spiced wine in the snow with your friends as you absorb the beauty of the music and lights around you. Coming back to my host family’s apartment and cuddling with their cat, Beethoven, was also especially nice on snowy days.

I could go on for pages and pages about my experiences, but I want you to find out for yourself what studying abroad is like! I will tell my stories to anyone who will listen, but you will never truly know what studying abroad is like until you actually do it. You will be amazed how well you will adapt to new surroundings, languages, food and culture. You become so immersed in it that coming home is more of a culture shock than going abroad. I have every intention of returning to Austria in the near future. I hope my letter has convinced you that studying abroad is super duper cool.

Sincerely,

Helena