

2-10-2014

No Two Days Are the Same!

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Recommended Citation

Kachel, Nicole, "No Two Days Are the Same!" (2014). *2013-14 Postcards*. Article. Submission 12.
http://digitalcommons.linfield.edu/intl_postcards_1314/12

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Top left: our bounty from ice fishing Top right: skiing with packs on while on a five day winter forest excursion Bottom: Norwegian Perspectives on Outdoor Education classmates

An entire month has passed since arriving here in Norway and I have already made more than enough memories to make this trip worthwhile. Highlights and experiences since my last update include:

It took about a week after my arrival for the snow to start falling and it has continued to fall on and off since. It has been a mild winter here so far, but there has still been enough snow for skiing. About 15km out of town there is a mountain called Lifjell where the majority of my basic skiing class has been held, also where my first outdoors in the wintertime 5-day trip was completed (more information below)! Through combined instruction on skiing on tracks, backcountry, downhill, and Skilek (Norwegian word for playing on skis) I have spent many hours slowly but surely gaining confidence in my skiing abilities. About 90% of my class time is spent outdoors, which is beyond what I had hoped for.

The best way to learn the layout of this charming little town is to take walks and explore. Navigating Bø isn't a problem. Most stores are located on a single main street easily within walking distance from both the College and student housing. I have been able to find everything I need here between the grocery, sporting goods store, and bookstore. There are also hiking trails just above my student housing hill that double as ski trails and there is a lighted ski track only a couple kilometers up the hill behind the school.

I have greatly enjoyed getting to know people from all over Europe: Austria, Romania,

Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, Slovakia, Spain, Italy, France, Czech Republic, Russia, Kyrgyzstan, Denmark.... *deep breath* ...and of course Norway. There are many opportunities like game/movie nights or the weekly school-sponsored coffee social that are a great way to meet other students.

Last weekend I served "American" pancakes made from scratch to 16 other international students. I had to enlist the help of a grocery store employee to make sure I was buying the correct ingredients. This will hopefully become a tradition and next time include more people!

With a group we ventured by bus to the town of Notodden to explore the city and visit the historic Heddal stave church. The heavily overused word of the day was beautiful, which was the best way to describe the wooden church constructed in the 13th century. I had the chance to teach the group how to do the hokey-pokey as a way to stay warm while waiting for the bus to take us from the church back to town.

Another first-time experience was attending a Sunday mass completely in Norwegian. The service included two baptisms, where the families involved wore traditional Norwegian clothing. It was very neat to see the unique culture in both the style of dress and architecture of the church built in 1875 that sits on the hill above the college.

As mentioned above, my most recent adventure was a 5-day snow camping and skiing trip on Lifjell Mountain for my outdoors in the wintertime class. Two second-year outdoor life students acted as our trip overseers, but the planning and executing was up to our group of 5 international students. The time quickly passed as we gained skills in shelter building in the snow (no tents!), fire building (which was how we cooked our dinners and boiled water), navigating with map and compass, and communicating as a team. On the trip I went ice fishing for the first time ever, which was one of my goals to accomplish while here! (see the picture above). Though we have much more room for improvement, I am proud of the group progress we made. I am looking forward to our next outing, which will be 10 days long.

All my time abroad is made exponentially better because it is spent with friends. I feel like I am learning every day, both about myself and those I'm sharing this experience with.

Until next time,

Nicole Kachel