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Linfield College: Study Abroad in Austria

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Jasper Erickson
4.10.12

Vienna

Arriving in Dorfgastein undoubtedly set the bar high for my expectations of my Austrian experience. Stepping off of the regional train deep in the bottom of the Gastein valley in late summer, awestruck and jetlagged, my study-abroad comrades and I found ourselves in the middle of an alpine paradise. Paragliders sailed between mountain peaks high overhead, cowbells sang in the distance, and the grass lining the valley radiated shades of vibrant green.

I was excited to be in Austria, but I was also nervous to be completely immersed in my new home for the next several months. I had recently decided to pursue a biology major back at Linfield, and part of me felt that I had been yanked away from satiating my interest in the sciences to experience a more historical, sociological, and political phase of my education. In retrospect, I don't regret one moment of my experience in Austria, and frankly, I still plan on going back in the near future.

Studying abroad gives one the rare opportunity to integrate into a foreign culture on an unparalleled level. Immersion really is one of the best words that can be used to convey the all-encompassing nature of the experience. Every day is filled with seeing, breathing, feeling, smelling, tasting, speaking, and listening to a world completely foreign from the one that we have been raised in for most of our lives. I must stress, the *opportunity* to integrate. This is a choice that some make and others don't. Most of my Linfield colleagues and I attempted to experience Austrian culture

this way as best we could. I joined a local rock-climbing gym in Vienna and became a member of the Austrian Alpine Club, which turned out to be a goldmine of discounted lodging options across the country, which came in handy later when traveling to the alps of Austria again. Others volunteered at local schools, helping teach English to Viennese grade-schoolers. Others yet helped with babysitting and English tutoring across the city. As a group, going out to local gathering places on weekends and meeting locals, attending operas and flocking to the infamous Viennese coffeeshouses afterwards to engage in lively discussion late into the night, and traveling and hiking to more mountainous regions of the country were all experiences that are still fresh in my mind and that I know I will remember for the rest of my life.

By the time we were scheduled to leave Vienna to return to the United States, I felt like I had just become acclimated to the city and the culture to the point where I envisioned myself staying indefinitely. Just as when I had left the U.S., I felt that I wasn't ready to leave. Today, two years later, I can't wait to return. I urge anyone who has the privileged opportunity to study abroad to do so, and I guarantee that anyone that does will be a changed person upon their return home.