

Five Months in Seattle

I have always wanted to study abroad. For a long time, I was scared; it seemed impossible to go to another country and be away from home and everything I knew. Being away from the familiar is hard for many of us, but being scared is not how you live your life to the fullest. When my mom told me she was going to work in Seattle for five months and asked if I wanted to come with her, I said yes. I was really excited.

We began looking for an apartment online and found one near Lake Washington and Capitol Hill. On the 16th of August, we boarded the plane, and our adventure began. The first two weeks in the US we went on a little road trip, exploring the state of Washington. The rainforest was my highlight. It wasn't a tropical but a temperate rainforest. The rainforest was located in the Olympic National Park. It had every shade of green one could imagine.

After these two weeks, my mom started working, and my school was supposed to start in a few days. However, it didn't. In America, teachers are allowed to strike, and the teachers at my school did. For one and a half weeks, school didn't start. I was alone in the apartment and didn't know what to do. I didn't know anyone. To cope, I began exploring the park near the apartment and getting to know my new home. I visited a bookstore and started kickboxing at a gym. Nevertheless, I began to feel homesick with no friends around me. In Germany, school had already started, so I couldn't call my friends back home. Nobody talks about being homesick when they are studying abroad, you only see the fun side. However you get homesick and it is okay to be homesick. It only shows that you like your home and miss your friends and with time it gets better.



When school finally started, the feeling of homesickness faded because everything was new and exciting, and I was busy experiencing it all. The hardest part on my first day was finding all my classrooms. The school building was huge, and there were so many students. I took six classes: Physics, Math, World Literature, Geography, Psychology, and French. My favorite class was psychology; we don't have that in Germany, and it was so interesting. We learned about Sigmund Freud, how our minds work, dreams, happiness, and various psychological experiments.

The first few weeks were a little overwhelming; everything was different. Tests could be retaken if the grade was unsatisfactory. School started at 8:50 and ended at 3:40. Also classes lasted 50 minutes instead of 45 minutes. There was only one lunch break, but we could get snacks in between periods from the school counselor. The presence of gender-neutral bathrooms and pride flags in every classroom made everyone feel safe and allowed them to be themselves. Every teacher asked which name and pronouns we preferred. The dress code was also very open; basically, one could wear pajamas or very revealing clothing. I struggled a little with finding friends due to having different classes with different people every period. The school was so big that you would never meet the same people you had a class with again that day. Another challenge was that every two weeks, we had to sit differently; the teachers would change the seating chart so we could get to know each other. However, when you made friends with someone, you had to sit with someone else, which made it hard to really get to know them. It took some time but I managed to find some friends in my classes.



After a few weeks, I established a routine: taking the bus to school, going to class, meeting my new friends, and going to kickboxing after school.



There were many things I didn't know about Seattle. First of all, it is very hilly; you can't ride a bike there unless you're very sporty. Seattle has a great landscape, on one side you have the mountains with Mount Rainier and on the other side you have the sea. In between is Lake Washington and Lake Union. Lake Washington is surprisingly warm for its size.

In Seattle, there are a lot of activities to do. You can visit Pike Place Market, go to an underground tour or go to a concert. Seattle is the city of grunge. You find small or big concerts there. I went to two concerts with friends and my mom. We went to see Florence + The Machine and Foals. It was a one in a lifetime experience.

What I appreciated most about going to the U.S. is that I lost my shyness when speaking English. Americans are always nice; they let you finish talking even when you make grammatical mistakes or when you're stammering and trying to think of a word. They help you and encourage you to speak. In school, everyone was so nice to me and helped me get around. Another reason why I liked Seattle so much is that you can be who you are, people accept you. They accept your weirdness and your extravagance. I know that not everyone and everywhere in America is open to this but Seattle is. I would go back there anytime. If you have the chance to study abroad, you should take it. You learn more about another culture, meet new people and get to know the country's beautiful nature.