

Two months in the USA

Melanie in Saint Cloud, Florida

Step by step.

I can't believe it! It's already two months ago, when I stood at the airport, ready to go on the plane, which was about to fly me to my new home for the next ten months. Going on the plane meant to say goodbye to my family and to my friends. Farewells are hard, but



A day at a lake

after crying and long hugs, I stopped thinking and just headed to the plane. Step by step and finally I sat on the plane. Up in the air, I couldn't realize what I was doing. It was thinking about everything and put my feelings in order. I was full of different emotions, most of all excitement.

After ten exhausting hours on the plane, I arrived at Orlando International airport, grabbed my luggage and headed to the exit, where my host parents were waiting for me. When I saw them, it was such a great feeling. I finally arrived at my second family and could greet all of them. Another step was taken. Late in the night we got to my new home in the city of St. Cloud. I got my big luggage out of the car, went into the house and straight to bed.

The first week I got introduced to everybody in the family, friends, pets and was getting used to the different time zone. Germany is six hours ahead, so during the first days I always went to bed very early and was tired all the time. Also, in the first week, we went to my high school to choose my classes. A few days before the first day of school, all students have to go to the school to meet their teachers and get the supply-list of things they require for their classes. For a long time I was ready for going to school.



Sunrise at Disney World

My first school day was on a Thursday and I was so excited. I was ready for school and happy to go to all of my classes. These are:

Studio Art, Algebra, English, Weight lifting, Anatomy & Physiology, US History and Spanish

It is so cool to take elective subjects according to your own interest. In Art we can discover our own style in how to see things and bring it onto paper. Weight lifting is in the weight room of our school and you improve yourself everyday by doing different exercises. But Spanish was pretty weird at first. Did you ever try learning a third language in your second language? It was confusing but I got into it and love speaking different languages. Florida has a large population of Hispanic people, so there are many people speaking Spanish as their first language.

My first day of school wasn't as I had expected. The school is so big with over 1.800 students and nobody cares about a tiny exchange student. The classes are 55 minutes long and every time with other students from different grades, but you have the same order of subjects every day. In between you have 5 minutes to hurry to your next classroom except for the lunch break, which is 40 minutes. So, I sat in the classes, confused by the language, not clear about my thoughts about the other students and wished to be back home, where I can understand everything. But wouldn't that be boring? I just wanted to get an overview first. Getting to know to which room I have to hurry next during the short breaks, but at the same time I wanted to meet some people. At least, I survived the first day of school as I did the second one. I go to school by the typical yellow American school bus and used to also ride it back home before I started doing sports after school.



American school bus and me



My host parents, Donald Duck and me

Confused of school, I was excited for the weekend, when we went to Walt Disney World. I bought my annual pass and discovered the theme park 'Epcot'. There are different countries represented. That's why I had the opportunity to wear a kimono in Japan, watch Chinese athletes, take a look at a sombrero in Mexico, and of course, visit my home country Germany. It was pretty funny to talk German with the employees there and see all the stuff Americans associate with Germany. Mostly it's stuff from Bavaria. Moreover, I met Disney characters. Meeting Donald Duck, Minnie Mouse, Mickey Mouse and Goofy completely made my magical day at the world of Disney.



Met Goofy at Epcot

To finally meet some people and feel better after eating all the sweet American stuff, I started running at the sports "Cross Country" in the first full week of school. Everything was so new and I was just hoping that it gets better and this decision to run for XC was nothing to regret. Step by step, I got to know wonderful people on the team. Sport connects. Especially when you have practice every day after school for two hours and every weekend a competition. To run in Florida's heat of 28 to 39 Degrees wasn't fun at first. But I got used to it and made it into our Varsity Team. It is nice to run on competitions although these are 3.1 miles. If my team is there, it's always fun and makes you strong to get supported by them. I can say it makes me so proud to run for my school. The school spirit is amazing in the United States! Especially at the football games this becomes apparent with lots of cheering, music and everybody gets involved. Since I started doing sports after school, I couldn't ride the bus back

home anymore. So, my host parents are picking me up every day after practice. I get home at 5 o' clock, take a shower, have to do my homework and we eat dinner together. My school week is so busy. Getting up 5:30 a.m., take the bus, go to the classes, which are more fun every day and after that I have practice. In my first full school week I also got to know more and more nice people and started being with them during my lunch break and it is so much fun. On weekends, I have a competition in running 3.1 miles, but these usually start very early in the morning,



Cross Country girls proud with trophy

so that we don't have to run in the heat of the day. That's why the competition ends early and we have plenty of time left of the day and my host parents take me to visit Sea World or Disney World. During my first two months, I visited the theme parks "Hollywood Studios" and "Magical Kingdom". The second one everybody knows because of Cinderella's castle. Disney is such a magical place, where you can watch lots of shows, where everybody is singing, dancing and just happy. Childhood dreams come true.



jumping in front of Cinderella's castle

Sea World is also a great park to visit in Orlando. You can see so many shows and watch the animals of the sea. The trainers are swimming with the dolphins, Orcas jumping out of the water, Seals are waving at you and otters are running over the stage.

On Sundays we are going to church in the morning and it is much fun. We are singing songs with the band on stage, hear the pastor talking about a special theme out of the bible, sing again, have the communion, pray and have time to meet the other Christians. Everybody is so nice and stands by your side. Recently, I started going into the church's youth club and began to meet more and more people.

School is more fun when you get to know all the people. I chose subjects which I can't do in Germany and it's lots of fun. Especially weight lifting is a great class, improving your physical education and sticking together with the team. Weeks passed so fast and I collected experiences for my life. On the days on September 8th to 12th I got to know hurricane "Irma". We got the days off from school and the



Orcas at Sea World

house got prepared for the storm coming in. "Prepare for the worst, hope for the best" the reporter told us on the TV every minute. We were prepared. Windows were covered, loose things in the back yard were picked up, the generator was ready and the house was full of food and water. After Irma went through, we could go out of the house and look over the

damage. We were lucky and didn't even lose power. Our fence was a bit destroyed, but the neighbor's house was blocked by a big fallen tree. Everywhere were trees fallen down, boughs lying around and streets were flooded, but compared to the coast cities and islands, we were really lucky. After one more week off school because of the damage of the hurricane, I was ready to go back to the classes and see my friends.



Florida's nature



At the beach on the Atlantic side

I enjoy my time here in meeting so many great personalities and learning so much for my life. When I look back, it's very emotional for me. The first time during classes I sat there and just wanted to cry because of all the new coming towards me. "What have I done? Why am I sitting here?" And step by step I could answer this questions by myself. And now I enjoy every second, I'm happy to be here. Looking at Florida's nature when I run through it with my friends during practice or competitions. These moments are bliss and I don't want to cry because everything is new, but I want to cry because I have this great opportunity to spend one year in this wonderful

host family, going to an American High School, meeting all the nice people and learning so much. I am so proud that I did this big step. Going alone on adventure, far away from my home country and family, allowing me to arrive at my second home and family.

I'm enjoying every moment in beautiful Florida,

Kind regards, Melanie



American flag in the classroom