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Australia – what a country! Part I

Maja Brumm

I have been invited to write an article about my time in Australia and I am happy to do it. I will write it in English, obviously. It is also a document of my English after five months in Australia.

The Very First Day...

I remember my arrival in Perth vividly. After the pass control I found myself sitting in the lounge with no-one waiting for me even though me and this yet-to-be-known Swiss family agreed to meet at the airport. After twenty minutes I had a chat with a woman who was equally waiting for someone. She was so nice to phone the Swiss family to pick me up. Fortunately, they live just 20 min away from the airport. Yvonne said that after that bad start it could only get better... and it did.

Later on, it turned out that we had written down different days (me Saturday, they Sunday) so they expected me the next day. The family comes from St. Gallen and moved to the Italian part of Switzerland where their two children went to school. About 15 years ago when the children were teens, they moved to Australia and have been living there ever since. Everyone in the family speaks Swiss-German, Italian and English. Yvonne's comment on her kids was: "They always learnt the swearwords first!"

I was stunned at their spacious house with an even bigger garden and a swimming pool. Obviously, they have to live in Perth's "mountains" (which are rather hills). Their house was on a hill, hidden behind the trees. The small "valley" with a meadow and a lake was the meeting point of kangas in the evening!! Unfortunately, I saw them on my last day with the family.

Here are my very first impressions (which may not be representative):
o Traffic is on left... walking people as well!!

Just change the side if you don't wanna bump into them all the time. (Take care when going on an escalator! They're on left as well)

o Many fat people... no wonder: McDonald's, KFC, Hungry Jack's, Red Rooster... most Australians have a sandwich for a "small" lunch.

o So many houses! One-storey and spread out...

The First Homestay

After a week's time for settling down in Australia (jetlag and cultural differences), I changed families and got to know my first homestay family. It was a single woman, actually. Another Swiss-German girl was there, but she was about to leave. I got many important "survival" tips from her. My hostmother Eileen had a cat and two birds. That was action in the morning! I usually got up before her, so the cat was miaowing for food and the "let-me-in-let-me-out"-game (the kitchen's door was connected with the garden). And you were hearing the birds all the time.

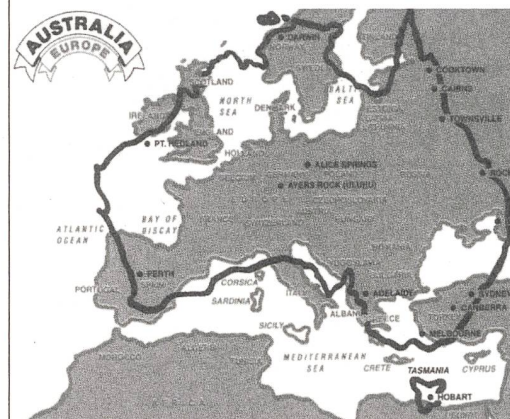
It'd have been a great time as Eileen really did different things like going to a concert, going to Northam to catch up with friends or just in the neighbourhood. However, the fact she was a Jehovah's witness made me change the homestay.

Perth - Das Stadtzentrum vom Kings Park aus gesehen.

The Second Homestay

I was able to change after five weeks... It took longer because Eileen spent a weekend in Geraldton where I would have changed. You have to add one extra week because of formalities, where the school looks for new families and where you can see them and then decide.

The second homestay was a five-head-family. Jan and Roy have two older sons, one living in France (Angelo) with his



oben: Perth - Das Stadtzentrum vom Kings Park aus gesehen.

unten: Voilà, meine Klasse.

French girlfriend and Paul travelling round the world. When I came he'd already been to UK and France and was heading to America and Canada. They're both a few years older than me. Their daughter, Melinda, is still at home. No wonder, she's only 12! She's a very good singer and dancer (probably inherited from her mum).

I happened to bump into one of their busiest time. They were having two Thai students and one long term Chinese student (who goes to an Australian high school). With so many people there was always something going on... and I did enjoy it! Communication problems? Yes, mainly at the beginning. I didn't have the vocab or I said a funny sentence (with wrong word order, or non-existent English words).

The English College

The staff was very aware of my situation and respected me as a person with hearing problems. I had to do the listening test because they wanted to see whether I was able to attend the real listening test in the FCE-exam. I wasn't, but still improved from 33% to 55%. (60% would be a pass) Jan, my hostmother, commented it with these words (after I told her the improvement): "I believe it coz you don't need me so much to tell you what's happening on telly than you used to." They didn't have captions because you need to have TXT for it... so it was a good hearing practise! J

Voilà, meine Klasse.

What about my schoolmates? Four of them were Swiss which does NOT automatically mean I can speak to them in Swiss-German. One of them was from the French part. There was a Czech and two Koreans (When I say Korea, I always talk about South-Korea). As you can expect, every person had its own accent. The Korean is the worst you can have! It means listening very attentively and combining from the context. I wasn't the only person having problems in understanding "Q" with his strong Korean

accent (his real name was Gyu, but the pronunciation is like an English "Q") However, Q could lighten up the atmosphere with his typical questions and Korean tales.

The Swiss accent was clearly the easiest. But I can tell you, after a week, you'll be so tired as the needed concentration is higher when you talk to other English learners because a) of the accent and b) the missing vocab.

So everyone had a communication problem, not just me, but you'll get along with it. In the end I became quite skilled at how to describe the meaning (not just spelling) of a word or a sentence to other English learners (and vice versa). I was constantly forced to speak in English with people from other countries as the only common language.

No we didn't only learn and do some "mock"-exams, but also did we go to excursions. To... ANZAC war memorial, planetarium or the old court, just to name a few. Of course, it was related to the vocabulary topic we were having and to the Australian history as well. All in all, it was a fun time at the school.

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The Exams

The Cambridge exams all consist of speaking, listening, writing, reading and use of English tests. Guess the names explain what you are tested about. These exams have five different levels: pre-elementary (KET), elementary (PET), (upper-)intermediate (FCE), advanced (CAE) and proficiency (CPE).

I did the FCE and passed with a "B" which was my aim. (A, B and C are passes, D, E and F failures). My exams started with the

speaking test which I had to do on my own. But on this specific day I got a phone message from my school saying my exam had been phostphoned because the special package the examiners needed hadn't arrived yet...!! I asked the office every day whether it had arrived until I got the message I'd do it on Wednesday next week. As you can imagine, I wasn't that keen anymore and I'd have preferred to have done it with a partner. I knew I was capable of this, but was ordered to do it on my own. Speaking of partners, they're usually the classmates and sometimes mates from "next" door, so you know your partner. The rest was no problem....and the listening test.? Guess what?... yeah, had a free day ;)

Travelling Round Australia

Many things happened to me whilst travelling, so it'd be too much to write them all, but let me tell you where I have been to: Broome, by tour to Darwin, stayed a week up there followed by another tour around Darwin. I met some friends from Sydney and Melbourne on this tour. Back to Perth where I prepared to go to Sydney and Melbourne to drop in on my friends. I went to the Cochlear company as well where I did the interview. Alice Springs was the last destination to round up my journey. So I haven't been (yet) to Queensland, Southern Australia and Tasmania. I felt very sad about leaving that lovely country. On the other hand, I'm already thinking of visiting my Aussie friends again... *smile*.

No worries, mate, am not gonna leave again soon. J Will do my duties first...

Glossar

Swearwords	Fluchwörter
Kangas	kangaroo
Homestay	Gastfamilie
Miaowing	The cat does it. (miauen)
Schoolmates	Schulkollegen
Telly	Television