

# Education Abroad Returnees of the Month February 2018

## Holland Cathey

4th year Global Environments and Sustainability and German major

UVA Exchange: Albert-Ludwig University of Freiburg, Germany, Spring 2017



### **Most interesting class and why? Did you take classes in connection to your major or electives?**

My most interesting class was called Freiburg Green City, an interactive course that actually travelled around the city of Freiburg to show us many of the ways in which the city was “green”. Freiburg is internationally known for being a forward-thinking, environmentally friendly city, so it was really cool to see it in action! This is the first class I took when I got there (we had three-week modules rather than a traditional class structure) and it was great to know more about the city I was living in.

### **How was education abroad different than anticipated?**

Studying abroad was different than I anticipated in that I did not interact as much with the locals as I expected I would. I do speak German, but most of my classes were in English, with American students. I also wasn’t expecting to have courses in three-week modules, but I LOVED that because I really got to get in-depth into my courses. It allowed for interactive field trips and full engagement on each topic.

### **Number one way the experience contributed to your growth**

The number one way my experience abroad contributed to my growth was actually not in an academic setting. I’ve been a gymnast my entire life and decided to join the club gymnastics team while abroad as a way of meeting people with common interests. Not only did I find a fun way to work off the study abroad calories, but I really felt like I got to experience the culture and immerse myself in the community. I do speak German, but gymnastics was like a mutual language that we had in common. I spent a ton of time with my friends on the team, just enjoying their company and learning about all the differences between gymnastics in Germany and gymnastics in the states. No other Americans from my group were on the gymnastics team, so it was a great way to get out of that American-bubble and experience the “real” Freiburg!

### **Favorite local hangout, and why?**

My favorite local hangout in Freiburg was the bike bridge. There’s a large bridge with a bike path and a foot path on it (no cars!) that goes over the train tracks and connects one of the neighborhoods to the downtown Altstadt of Freiburg. Because there are no cars on this bridge, people like to climb up on top of the bridge and sit to watch the sunset. On a good evening, they’ll be 40-50 people just sitting on top of the bridge, hanging out and enjoying the sunset!

**Most interesting/delicious cuisine tried**

One of the best parts of Freiburg is the daily market in the main church square that happens each day. It's full of local vegetables, flowers, handmade goods, bread, cheese, meat, and foodtrucks! After class, my friends and I would go here to get some groceries for dinner that night and also a classic Freiburger lange Rote, which translates to "Freiburg-style long red one", which is in my opinion the best type of German sausage, and as far as I know native to Freiburg!

**Most meaningful experience abroad**

The most meaningful experience while I was abroad has to be the level of autonomy and independence I experienced. I've never lived so far away for so long before, and while it was difficult sometimes, it was freeing! Monday through Thursday we had class, and then I'd often choose a European city to travel to on the weekend. I was able to just decide to go to France or Switzerland for the weekend—and it was great! I now have so much more confidence when I travel—I am comfortable getting through just about any airport and on any public transportation system. I can plan a trip through Europe by myself and communicate with people who don't speak my language and know that I'll be okay. Since coming home, this confidence has continued—and now that I'm a fourth year, it feels more relevant than ever! It's given me the confidence to be prepared for graduation and the adventure-bug to go and do something non-traditional. I can't wait for my next adventure—I'm ready!

**Sum up the experience in three words**

Inspiring, eye-opening, exhilarating!

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