

Newsline

Exchange student Christoph Buring goes “down under” for ten weeks

“The time of my life in Australia”

Melbourne/Trier. Haven't we all dreamt of escaping everyday life and traveling to the other end of the world for a few weeks? Christoph Buring – a pupil from the Friedrich-Wilhelm Gymnasium in Trier – was lucky and given the time of his life during a ten week stay in Australia. Organized by a German/Australian-New Zealand student exchange program of the Gesellschaft für Deutsch-Australischen/Neuseeländischen Schüleraustausch e.V (GDANSA, Cologne) and backed by sponsors – of which one was the Kolbenschmidt Pierburg group – 16 year-old Christoph and 25 other school pupils were given a grant to use and naturally also improve their English on the Australian continent. Christoph Buring read about the Cologne-based organiza-

tion in a newspaper article. His older sister had been on a student exchange to Canada and had roused his interest, so he sent in his application. And – honestly – which country could be better for a 16 year-old than Australia? The condition for participation in the GDANSA exchange program was the willingness to host an exchange student from Australia – without actually being guaranteed a grant for Australia. Only after his Australian counterpart had left for Australia did Christoph actually find out that the organization had found a sufficient number of sponsors to fund his visit (along with the others) to Australia for more than two months. Christoph whose hobbies include tennis and the piano gave us this first-hand report of his time down under:

My life with the Fisher family in Melbourne – the second largest city in Australia – started after a 24 hour flight and an eight hour time difference. My host parents had traveled to Germany with the same organization many years ago and had met each other there, so I could hardly have wished for a family with stronger ties to the exchange program. Their elder sons (15 and 19) are both active members of the Australian sister organization Society for Australian-German Student Exchange (SAGSE), and the youngest sibling aged 12 is likely to follow suit.

The Fishers live in a big house near the beach about 25 minutes from the city center. I was given a wonderful reception and felt quite at home immediately. I had a spacious room all to myself and didn't miss my family which meant I didn't get in touch with them all that often (admittedly, my parents were slightly disappointed about my lack of communication although they

soon realized that this was a sure sign that everything was going fine in Australia). My English improved a lot while I was there and I didn't find it hard to understand what people were saying.

I visited the 10th grade of the Mentone Grammar School (MGS) together with the 15 year-old son of my host family. MGS is a medium-sized private school only a few

kilometers away from the Fisher's home. Pupils have to wear school uniform which is something I liked. I found the all-day school interesting although it meant there was little time for other activities like sports by the time we got home as school finished at 4 o'clock in the afternoon. As the host family lived outside Melbourne it took us quite a while to get into town. A car is vital out there as the city is huge. In this respect, Australia is much in line with my idea of the USA.

The school itself offered a lot more chances to do sports than my German school does although I can't image spending most of my spare time with my school comrades like I did in Australia. They watch more television than we do in Germany although the quality of the TV program is inferior.



There was plenty of time to get to know my host family in the evenings. I got on really well with them and we had lots of fun together. They showed me all the beautiful places of interest in and around Melbourne, like for instance the Great Ocean Road, a spectacular rock formation on the coastline where we spent a whole weekend.

Besides my outings with the family, I was also able to see more of the country during a trip undertaken with other German exchange students, without our host parents or any accompanying persons. Six of us set off on a discovery tour through the sunny state of Queensland, starting with a short sailing tour off the Great Barrier Reef, followed by the rain forests which we all found absolutely fascinating. I had never seen corals or a jungle before, both of which left a deep impression on me.

I went on a final trip to Canberra and Sydney during my last week. The entire group – however without our Australian host students – visited the young parliament and then went to see the Opera House in Sydney. Afterwards, we were received by the German ambassador.

Hardly surprising that none of us even wanted to think of the return flight after ten fantastic weeks in Australia. Given the chance, we would all have liked to have extended our stay.

In hindsight, I can really only emphasize that this exchange was the most fan-

tastic experience in my life. I had a wonderful time and my time down under exceeded all my expectations. The stay there was very rewarding and a great success, both in terms of my spoken and written English and in terms of the people I met. Thanks to the support of Kolbenschmidt Pierburg AG, I had the time of my life in Australia.

GDANSA

The Society for Australian-German Student Exchange (SAGSE) was founded in Melbourne in 1967 by the late Fritz von Einem-Joosten (1916 - 2003), a German businessman who emigrated to Australia soon after the war. He believed that student exchanges would help towards a better understanding between Germans and Australians. Shortly afterwards the German sister organization Gesellschaft für Deutsch-Australischen/Neuseeländischen Schüleraustausch e.V (GDANSA, Cologne) was called into life.

Building on youthful enthusiasm and barring all prejudice, the exchange program sought to give se-

lected students an insight into foreign cultures. The youngsters were to live in families and go to school, to tell other students about their home countries and later return home with impressions from the country visited. In 1968 the first six Australian scholars traveled to Germany on scholarships generously provided by various businesses. Three years later, the first German pupils went to Australia. Not much later, the exchange program was extended to New Zealand.

Kolbenschmidt Pierburg AG – and members of voluntary organizations, the exchange program helps to ensure that the financial burden on the scholarship holders and their families is minor so that the students can participate in the exchange without financial obstacles.

As mentioned, the main aim of the program is to encourage and foster understanding and friendship between Australia, New Zealand and Germany, and to give young people

An ambassador “down under”

Since then, GDANSA e.V. has set itself the target of sending about 20 students on scholarships to stay with guest families for 10 to 12 weeks each year. Funded by sponsors – these are private persons, associations and large international businesses like

an insight into the way people live at the other end of the world. As “ambassadors” of the younger German generation, the impression these youngsters leave in their families and schools also has an immediate impact on the German image abroad.