

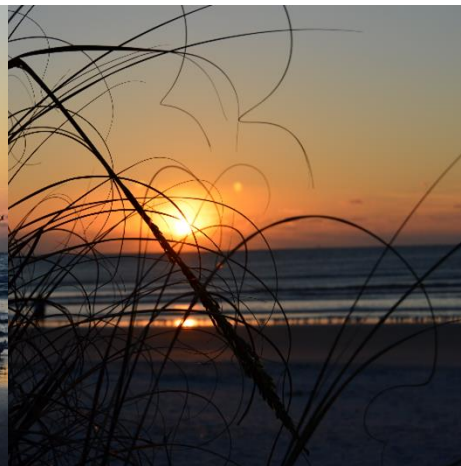
10 months in the USA

During the last four months in the U.S. I did pretty much everything you can do in Florida. We drove to Miami, which was a great experience to see this party city, but most exciting was the Everglades National Park. I saw some huge Alligators and will never forget how it feels to stand next to these big creatures. The U.S. is so versatile, which is what I love about it. It is one huge country and it could satisfy you with anything you want. But the U.S. National Parks are the most beautiful things I have ever seen in my life. Proudly, I can count me as a member of this gorgeous country, who lived there. It is unbelievable how fast the time goes by. Now I am already back in Germany and it feels so normal. I had a great time in Florida and I am proud to say that it became my second home. I have a second family and wonderful American friends.

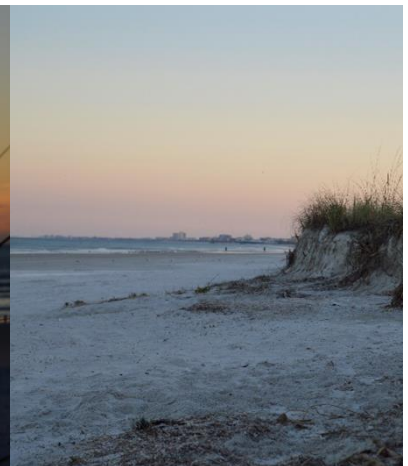
The last few months were full of experiences. I am so glad that I could live my dream and get to know the American culture and life. Therefore, I really enjoyed the one-week vacation called "spring break". We spent it at the Atlantic coast in a time-share close to the beach. It was so much fun. The most memorized moments about it were watching the sun rise and set over the ocean.



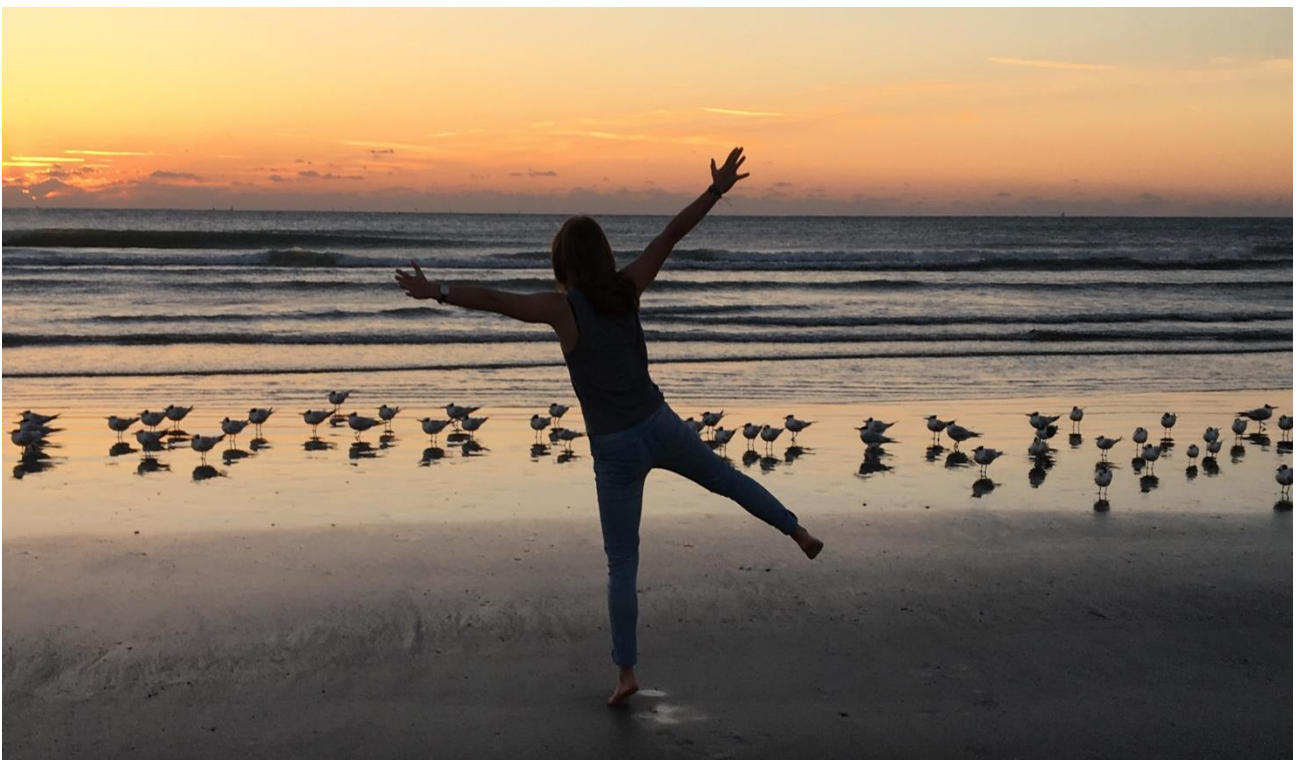
sunrise over the ocean



sunrise at the Atlantic coast

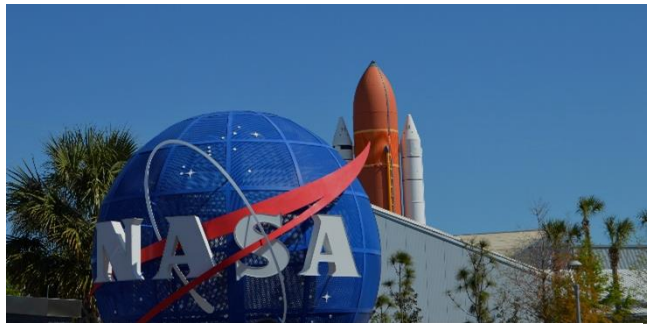


sunset at the beach



I enjoyed this moment so much

One weekend we went to visit the Kennedy Space Center. I was so overwhelmed when I was standing right next to these gigantic rockets and space ships that actually went into space. There was a lot to learn about the history and technical equipment to see. The Space Center is located on Merrit Island since 1962. The equipment is unbelievably modern and effective. I sat in some Space capsules and saw an actual spacesuit, touched a stone from the moon, but mostly I was impressed by the original space ship "Atlantis". Funny thing is that the Kennedy Space Center sent some capsules into space during my exchange year. The NASA always goes live on TV with all the starts and facts when this happens. My host family called me every time and we went out on the porch to see the capsules or satellites going up into space. We were just standing there in our yard, miles away from the coast and the base of the Kennedy Space Center, and could still watch the NASA electronics far up in the sky. Again, I will never forget these moments.



the Kennedy Space Center with the huge NASA logo



the actual space ship "Atlantis" that went into space



you can find 400 different kinds of birds in the Everglades

lot, like the alligators directly next to us. Goose bump moments guaranteed. More, not only did we ride through the gigantic habitat on a boat, we also walked through the National Park on a long walkway with Alligators next to you on each side. It was just amazing. In addition to watching nature and its animals, we also learned a lot from the park rangers. The Everglades are the natural home of more than 400 different kinds of birds, 50 different kinds of reptiles, many fish and turtles. Moreover, it was really interesting to learn that this National Park is the only place on earth where Alligators and Crocodiles live side-by-side.

The United States are so versatile and because of the beautiful nature, they have many national parks to secure the beauty of nature they still have. The big National Park in Florida is the Everglades National Park. Again, I have been very lucky to go there and experience the swamps of Florida. The great landscapes of grass and water are full of alligators, snakes, fish, birds, turtles and insects. I have learned a lot about the habitat there and had breath-taking moments when the big alligators swam directly next to me. Classically, we rode an air boat through the Everglades and could see a



a huge alligator just next to the walkway



exploring the Everglades in Florida's heat



the walkway with alligators on each side

While we already were in the Everglades, we took the chance to go to Miami as well. It is such a big city, full of skyscrapers and a beautiful beach. However, it is more a city for rich people and for going to parties. We went shopping to an outdoor mall at Miami's Bayside. It was very pretty. We stayed until it got dark and we could watch the gigantic, luxurious yacht boats coming in and leaving the bay.



Bayside Miami - an outdoor mall



the city of Miami



dressing up for Prom is so much fun

Following these memorizing moments, I was waiting for the summer vacations. Of course, not alone. My friends and me spent a lot of time together, going out to the lake of my little home town, going out to eat, or visiting Disney World together. And of course, coming towards the end of the school year, there was the big High School party "prom". It is just like homecoming, but only the 11th and 12th graders are allowed to go there. Actually, you could describe it as the "Abitur-Feier" in Germany. It was fun to dress up very fancy, meet all your friends at the location and to eat and dance to the DJ's music on the big dance floor. The last few weeks of high school life were full of testing. We had to sit the "end of the year exams" and got all last grades. I haven't got my report card yet, because we will only get it at the end of the summer. The reason for that are the testing grades, that are going to be on there and it takes a while to correct all the exams.



I had so much fun with my friends

actually is done. I enjoyed this and that's where I met my best friends. Throughout the year we got so close and had so much fun together, especially towards the end of the year. We enjoyed the last time together at the lake or driving around and eating at the many fast food restaurants the US has. It was just a fun time and I already miss them a lot.

When the day arrived to go back in Germany, all my emotions were so mixed up. It was the hardest goodbye I had to say to my host parents. I was crying so badly and probably the steward doesn't even know how much he helped me when he came up to me with a box of tissue and said: "I know, leaving is always hard".



my second home - the United States of America

Looking back on my year, I had a wonderful time. I have learned a lot about life, personalities and situations. What I really like about the American High School system are the elective subjects. These classes let you specialize in your interests. I had two art classes and it's great to draw and paint every day and see how much progress there



my friend Halli and I went out for a midnight snack

Now, back in Germany, I realize more the beauty of my home country than I ever did before. I am so proud that I grew up here, in this family in all the circumstances. It was such a great moment to be back at the airport, what felt like I just have been there one day ago, and see your family standing there, waiting for you. I was asking myself: "Ten months?" It felt so unreal. I was so glad to hug my family under tears and felt just on top of the world. I am so glad to have them and that they are supporting me in every situation, that they fulfilled my dream of a year abroad and gave me all these chances. After two days, I already got back into the German language again. Often I think in English, or while speaking fast I put some English words in my German sentences.

However, all that is no problem. During the past few weeks I have been very busy in visiting my friends. I just love to tell everybody about all the experiences I made. I still cannot realize that I really did this year abroad. Now, everything feels unreal like I had another life in the United States of America. Here in Germany, I have the feeling nothing has changed, while I have changed during the “short” ten months abroad. But it feels good that I grew up, confident and independent.

It has been a pleasure for me to represent Germany in the United States. I have learned to appreciate all the things that I have at home. It is just great to go through my hometown and see it in a way I never did before. I am so glad to be back and to tell everybody what I have experienced. The year abroad let me realize that there is nothing you cannot do in this world. Everything is open for you, there is nothing we have to have fear for, everything awaits to be explored by all the curiosity we bring. My journey is definitely not over. There is more to come because the journey has only begun.

With the best greetings from Germany,

Your Melanie

