



Chloe

from Bolton

to

Austria

"The Home of My Heart"

SIX MONTHS!

I have been living in what feels a dream come true for the last six months. I remember writing my first beaver tale in such a rush. I was so busy climbing mountains, traveling Europe with amazing people, and learning a new language to actually sit and take my time to recount all of my amazing experiences. I was so excited about everything that I didn't see that time was literally flying out the window. Now, that hasn't changed and I am still delighted in every experience I encounter.

To think of how much, I have done and how far I have come even since my last Beaver Tale is unbelievable. This year is going by so fast that I just want to scream at the top of my lungs and tell it to stop! Give me a second to let this sink in! It feels like yesterday, and in fact it has almost been exactly a year since I read out in front of friends and family that I was going to be spending a year of my life in Austria. To be completely honest, I was absolutely shocked. I thought, this must be a mistake. Austria hadn't even crossed my mind, and really, I don't know what I was expecting. Ever since that day, nothing has been what I have expected.

Since my last BeaverTale have opened a Debutänten ball, celebrated a proper Austrian Christmas along with all of the traditions, New year, Birthdays, gone skiing, visited many cities, said goodbye to friends and made new ones. It has been a never-ending whirlwind that I do not even want to begin to imagine stopping! Just as the weather begins to get colder and the leaves are falling is the perfect time for all season in Austria. Now when I first heard the word 'ball' I imagined something close to what you see in the movies. This was nothing compared to what I was meet with. The dancing and festivities of the Austrian out-shone everything I thought. The energetic personalities and incredible talent stretched the night until I could no longer feel my feet (I've never fallen asleep so quickly).

Not only did I experience this amazing festivity among friends and family I got to 'open' the ball. I had been in dance classes since the beginning of September where I learned how to dance traditional dances like the Weiner Waltz as well as more upbeat ones like Cha Cha Cha and the Rumba. We had to also learn a 4-minute partnered dance which is what we danced to open this ball. Just imagine almost two hundred students lined up turning, bowing and spinning all together in elegant dresses with huge smiles on their faces.

The next thing I knew Christmas rolled around and it was definitely not what I would have imagined; there are so many interesting and special traditions that were so much fun to take part in. As usual Christmas celebrations start long before Christmas Day and Austria was no exception. In Austria and Germany, they have St. Niklaus as opposed to Santa Clause like in North America. He comes to visit all the good children on the night of December the fifth. When all of the children wake, they find a bag of goodies in their shoes. It is filled with snacks and nick knacks such as, oranges, chocolate, peanuts, Christmas crackers and more!!

Just when you thought that would be all of the pre-Christmas traditions besides the typical cookie baking and decorating the house into the holiday spirit you find you are horribly mistaken. If the good children are treated the bad must be punished. That is where the Krampus come in to play.

The Krampus's are people who dress up in big costumes with jarred teeth and big horns carrying whips and big bells. They run around the streets and torment children swinging their whips at the bystanders legs and getting in the children's faces with giant masks on. Quite an unforgettable experience if I do say so myself.

Austria is also quite famous for its Weihnachtsmärkte otherwise known as Christmas markets. Now this is truly something to experience. If you visit any city, the center will be filled with markets of all kinds selling Christmas gifts along with hat, scarfs, all types of food and everything else that fits in the holiday spirit. Not only did I get to see these markets in my town but as well at the city of Salzburg. Rotary combined all of the exchange students, like it does every year, to show us the city and give all the students a true taste of the holidays all together. This weekend was very bittersweet as this was also the last time many of the students would be seeing some of the exchange students that came in the winter.

Christmas itself was a great thing on its own. I live with my host parents and two host brothers and it just so happens to be my oldest host brother's birthday right around Christmas. So you know what that means, time to celebrate! We had all the family over to share gifts and enjoy the holidays. It felt like our house had a revolving door that people kept coming an opening for over a week with smiles and good wishes.

Just when you think there is time to rest another amazing experience comes your way because the New Year was just around the corner. I got to spend New Year in the biggest and most magnificent city in Austria, Vienna. I went to Vienna just before the New Year and saw

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a performance at the opera house with one of my last host sisters. This was when I realized how much German I truly understood, when I was sitting in the opera listening and understanding most of what all of the performers were singing. The overall performance was phenomenal.

New Years in Vienna is a very thrilling experience. Newspapers reported that over 400,000 people were on the streets of Vienna that night when the clock struck midnight, and honestly, the streets aren't that big. It's an experience that I wouldn't have traded for the world. All of the music and the fireworks going off around while people broke out into dance was unimaginable.

I have been lucky enough to go skiing on the wonderful mountains that Austria has to offer and I can still hardly believe that such beautiful places exist! Not to mention how it feels to be above the clouds and being able to look out onto the sun. I am truly speechless on how to explain the views I've been able to see. Now this tradition is usually just one day but it is also common for them to come to your towns and get them to run through the streets and do it all over again.

Shortly thereafter school began again and my life was on a cycle that was my Austrian life style. Now, like Canada, in a sense there are two semesters even though all classes are taken at the same time. But in-between these semesters, there is a week in which every Austrian has a holiday (that may as well be called Ski-Week because is used by most to go skiing), and in this time my host brothers and I went to a ski course where I was taught how to ski properly. It was the amazing thing being in a chalet only minutes away from the mountain knowing when you go to sleep you get to wake up and live the dream all over again. Now I still wouldn't say I'm the best skier but I can make it down the hill in one piece.

I filled any extra time I had with my friends going skating, bowling and just hanging out together but soon enough semester began. not only did I attend my school I also volunteered / visited my host brothers' school. We all go to a different schools in completely different cities which I think is quite funny. I get to see both of these schools and make friends in them as well! It felt wonderful being able to walk in these places and talk to the students and tell them about the program while laughing and doing school work alike.

I remember opening my letter on announcement day around this time last year. Honestly for the first thirty seconds I was so nervous that I couldn't tell if it said Austria or Australia! Since then Austria has become my home. I no longer feel like a tourist, but in fact a resident, with the most fantastic host of friends and family. I refuse to look at the number of days that have passed, and I only look at the number of days that I have left in order to ensure that I use each and every one of them to their maximum potential. Now that I am on the second half of my exchange, I can say whole-heartedly that I was placed in the perfect country for me, and even though I still miss my friends and family in Bolton I do not want to leave my new home and all of my amazing friends.

Dankeschönn und liebe Gruß

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Here are some pictures of the highlights from my last three months here in Austria.

