

## TRAVEL REPORT – OLIVIA DAY from the USA

I grew up in a family that lives in the middle of Omaha, a city with over 430,000 people. Naturally I just ate food that was put in front of me, well as long as it tasted good, without thinking much about where it came from.

Because of this one sentence I would say that so far my IFYE experience thus far has been very eye opening and I've only been living here in Austria for 6 weeks. When living with families who survive off the animals they feed and the plants they grow, you see that there is a place where food comes from besides the grocery store.



My first host father is the manager of the pea fields for Iglo, the frozen vegetable company located here in Austria. I have seen the whole process of how peas go from the fields to the containers that will be shipped to grocery stores. I saw how stressful it is to be in charge of making sure the peas get harvested at the perfect time because of how many factors go into figuring out when they should be harvested.

During my time on the fields I was able to drive a pea harvester. Even though the harvesters don't go nearly as fast as I had hoped, the fact that I felt pretty cool driving a machine that big made up for it. During my tour of the factory, I got to see how the peas and spinach get sorted by size and quality as well as how they are cleaned and packaged.

During my time here in Austria, I even saw a real cow up close for the first time; I had no idea they were so huge. I'm pretty sure my jaw actually dropped open. When I arrived at one of my host families and was touring their farm, they casually told me their cow was giving birth like it was no big deal. Ten minutes later, I watched a cow give birth and that has been one experience I will never forget. They even let me name it -

Montana. Not to mention the day after it was born, I got to feed it with a bottle!

With my other families I've:

- attempted to learn how to milk a sheep
- learned how eggs come out of chicken coops onto belts to get sorted, labeled, and packaged
- learned how farmers cut and rake their grass to feed the animals
- visited an ostrich farm
- fed sheep out of my hands
- learned about the typical lunches of farm families
- had the opportunity to go on a sunrise hike at 4 in the morning
- eaten in traditional Austrian Alms, which are houses in the mountains that serve hikers fresh homemade foods like cheeses, meats and breads
- visited a fruit juice company and toured their fields
- shown my families how delicious sloppy joes and macaroni and cheese are
- gone on hikes with my host families

I toured the Zotter Chocolate factory (<https://www.zotter.at/en/homepage.html>) with another host family; this is one of the most sustainable Austrian companies. I learned that their company buys all of their cocoa and sugar cane organic and from Fair Trade. Yes, this means their products are a little more expensive but it gives farming families in third world countries a chance to live with a little less stress due to proper wages as well as prevents child labor and harsh working conditions. *This also means you can buy as much chocolate as you want without feeling guilty!* During the tour I learned about how chocolate is made here in Austria and what it tastes like every step of the way. I probably ate my weight in chocolate here since they had every flavor imaginable. At the Zotter Chocolate Factory, I learned how important it is and how much of a difference you can make across the world if you support Fair Trade. (<http://www.fairtradefederation.org/what-is-fair-trade/> )

Not only have I learned so much about food and how it is produced but about things I never thought I'd learn or stumble upon. I've learned that:

- The world is a bigger and a more beautiful place than I could've ever imagined. I've traveled all over Austria already and each state's geography, crops, and lifestyle is different but also very similar as well.
- The fact that this is the first country that I've been to outside of North America and it's smaller than my own state makes me realize how diverse the world really is.
- Far more than I could ever learn about Austria as a tourist like what it's like to live on a farm in the mountains, that houses don't have air conditioning, and that lunch is the main meal.
- Stepping out of your comfort zone can be a challenge but can also provide the most rewarding experience.
- Communicating with someone who doesn't speak the same language as you isn't as hard as it may seem.
- By adapting to a situation you find yourself in and making the best of it, you will often find that the situation was not that bad and you end up learning from it
- You should never turn down opportunities because you never know what you can learn or who you'll meet.



Most importantly, I've learned how important it is to accept the differences you share with people and respect them. Although people may eat different foods than you, have different jobs than you, and drink water with no ice, that there is no such thing as the wrong way. Asking questions to understand your differences before making judgments can get you a long way. The list of things I've learned so far is endless as well as the impact they've made on me.

When I decided to participate in the IFYE program a few months ago I had no idea it would be one of the best decisions I've ever made. Although quitting my two jobs and

leaving my friends and family behind wasn't easy, I can't imagine it any other way. I'm so thankful to have learned the things I've learned, met the people that I've met, and seen the things I've seen. They have all made an impact on me, whether big or small.

