

TRAVEL REPORT – ZOE NEWMAN from Tasmania

It's hard to put into words how getting on my first plane felt. First time flying international and first time flying alone, all in one go. Hugged kissed and waved my family good bye and as I walked down to my first plane it all became so real. A trip of a life time was right in front of me and there's no way I felt ready.

My first flight was 1:15 minutes from Launceston to Melbourne and little did I know that the next two planes I would travel on would make this one look like a tin can. Boarding my plane to Vienna I was surprised to I come across a familiar face, who lives about 40 minutes away from me, it's such a small world. After 21 hours I finally arrived in Vienna, where I got off my plane collected my luggage and got that all important stamp in my little blue book. Through security and into a huge crowd of people, with signs waiting to meet the people from my flight, and there she was my first host.



We instantly became friends, just like id met her before somewhere. She welcomed me with a huge smile and open arms. Her name was Isabel and she was a crop farmer with great English, which was a huge shock. But I soon learnt that speaking slowing and simply was a good idea, and it's something I would be doing a lot of over the next three months. A short visit to her house to meet her family and her two Hungarian vizslas. Then we were off again into her local town just outside of Vienna, to deliver some of her produce, which includes capsicum, eggplant, and tomatoes. Isabel is also very interested in horses and trains people to ride them. I got to see some beautiful Austrian horses, and I learnt about what the different breeds where used for. It was a great first day in Austria even though I spent most of the day getting in the wrong side of the car and jumping out of my skin every time she drove around a round about the opposite way. We ended the day with a traditional dinner of bread, meat and cheese at one of the local vineyards.

A new day and a new place to stay. I said goodbye to Isabel and hopped on a train it was only a short train ride but to be truthful I was terrified. I had no idea where to get off, no idea how the trains worked and I was really scared to ask someone where I had to go. 15 minutes into my train ride I asked a lady sitting opposite me where I should get off and she was lovely, she asked me where I was from all about the exchange program. She also helped me onto my next train and it made me realise, there will be many times I need to ask for help and that sometimes it's not as hard as it seems.

I stayed in Vienna for the night and met some of the other IFYE'S (INTERNATIONAL FARMING YOUTH EXCHANGE). Olivia from America, Helen and Rebekah from England and Peppi from Finland. I also met Lydia the lovely lady who has been organising my exchange from the other side of the world. It was great to meet them all and learn not only about Austria but the type of people Austria attracts and why the other girls picked to come to Austria. That's the most frequent question I get asked, "Why did you pick Austria?". The first time someone asked me this I had to think about. Why did I pick Austria? After hosting three girls from Austria one from Switzerland and now one from Norway. I learnt so much about the world and even my own country and state. I really enjoyed being a host and thought maybe I need to see it from the other side. But I never thought I'd apply to go on my own exchange, until I met Eva Sallinger. She spoke about her dairy farm and how she had the biggest in her area with 45 cows. I questioned Eva and said "the smallest?" But she meant the biggest. I said, "I've got to see how you live off 45 cows." It sounded incredible and it's crazy to think that was a year ago and now here I am in Austria about to see Eva's 45 cows.

Not a cow insight at my second host farm, in Steinhaus a small town 2 hour from Vienna. It's one of the biggest pig fattening farms I've seen so far, with over 1000 pigs. Buying pigs weighing 30 kilograms and selling them at 130-150 kilograms. Along with crops and forest land they owned 100 hectares of land altogether. Austria's pig farms make up 2% of Europe's breeding pig population. Which I think is crazy because I've seen so many pig farms. Pig farming is very common in the flatter areas of Austria. This beautiful family didn't just have pigs they also had a few pets, which included goats, ducks and many cats and kittens. With young children and managing such a huge farm they were like super humans, so I really enjoyed lending a hand where I could, even if it was just entertaining the kids for a few hours while they were in the field. My second day with them was the highest temperature I've experienced so far and this was the day we were harvesting the barley straw. It was so hot that the neighbour's field even caught on fire. Stacking the trailer 8 layers high and 36 bales in each layer, we ended the day by doing 500 bales or so which was only half the field, but with little rain this year Martin my host dad said he has had a lot more in the previous year.



In the next week, I moved to a new farm and it also had pigs, but this time with piglets. With around 90 pigs, the family had 7 breeding sows and 1 bore. The male pig is only used to bring the sow on heat, and then the farmers use semen to inseminate the sows. All the breeding farms I have visited use this system and I found it very interesting. Most of the dairy farmers with littler dairy farms also use semen, because its more expensive for them to feed a bull all year than it is to buy the semen.

The baby pigs are castrated in the first few days of being born. After 4 weeks they are taken of the mothers and are fed a diet of hay, oats, and barley. On some farms they are also fed soya beans. This family lived in Gmunden and it had a dairy farm right around the corner. Whilst here I got to stay and become friends with a girl named Helen, who was from England, she lived on a dairy farm and had

Holstein cows. When our host Doris asked us what we would like to see we both said we would like to see the piglets and a dairy farm if that was possible. In the next few days we visited my first dairy farm in Austria and I fell in love with the cows and the dairy farms straight away. This farm had 30 Fleckvieh cows, which is a big farm for this area. The biggest dairy farm in Austria has 300 cows. The Fleckvieh are a dual-purpose breed, the cows are for milking while the bulls are fattened up to 750 kilograms and are sold to the slaughter houses for meat. Some farmers focus on milk production and sell their bull calves at 4-5 weeks of age. In the flatter parts of Austria, the tanker can collect the milk every 2nd day, but higher in the mountain sometimes it's a little hard for the tanker to access the farms, so the family take the milk down to an area where they can meet the tanker closer to milk factory.

After seeing a dozen or so Fleckvieh farms, I was really interested in seeing what other breeds the farmers use for milk. My next farm was in Mittersill with 6 cows, 2 goats and a few chickens, this farm miked all year round, with the rest of their cows in the mountain for the summer. My host Alexandra took me to see so many beautiful parts of her area in Austria. We drove up to see her boyfriend's cattle which were also in the mountains for the summer. This time there were no Fleckvieh they were Pinzgauer cattle, another breed that is commonly milked here.

When we got back to her farm I got to help her family harvest their hay and silage. It's so different in the mountains as they can't use tractors any big implements. They use specialised equipment to cut and rake the grass as well as to collect it and take it to the barn to store in concrete pits. The silage is then covered in a thick plastic and is weighed down with sand bags. After being weighed down for two or three days the silage pit drops a metre, as the silage starts to ferment. The angle of some of the fields were crazy. It's so steep, and is incredible to see how they store their hay and silage.



Moving on to my next amazing family who had Holstein and Fleckvieh cows. My host mum made 80-90 kilograms of her own cheese a day and sold it to people from her local town. I've now seen a few different dairy farms and apart from the size of the farms, the major difference to Australian dairy

farms is that the cows are inside most or all year round. On a lot of the smaller farms the cows have access outside as they please, but always have access to the barn. Cows on bigger farms are usually inside all year round as the farmers don't have big enough outside areas for all the cows. But in comparison to Australian farms they may be small. But with around 104 people per square kilometre, Austrians are very land efficient. The crops are so close together using every piece of land that they can. Most of the time you can drive through the middle of the local towns and find a random maize crop where the land wasn't being used for anything else.

Because it's time to harvest a lot of the crops, I got to help a lot of the families harvesting things like hay, silage and straw, I also got to ride with one of the contractors in a combine harvester which I really enjoyed. While staying here in Klagenfurt, I was lucky enough to stay with another of the IFYE'S. This time it was Olivia from America. We got along like best friends and it was great to have someone once again who could speak fluent English.

Arriving at Eva's farm, her 45 cows have now turned into 120 which is quite big for Austria. I was so excited to see her and learn all about her farm. Her family have selectively breed their cows for 20 years and use a variety of different semen for their cows. After seeing a cow calve we checked out her local area and planned to go to Hallstatt the next day. Hallstatt is so beautiful and the city has been even recreated the city in China.

It's incredible to think this is just scratching the surfaces of what I've seen and done over the past two months, because I've had the experience of a life time and with one month to go I can wait to see more of Austria's beautiful agriculture and what it has to offer.

