

Student Exchange between Sister Cities: Las Cruces and Nienburg/Germany

In 2018, Las Cruces and Nienburg/Germany are celebrating the 25th anniversary of their sister cities relationship, which originated from the student exchange between Albert-Schweitzer-Schule/Nienburg and high schools in Las Cruces. This exchange, now in its 31st year, is taking place within the framework of the German American Partnership Program (GAPP) and the Las Cruces-Nienburg Sister Cities Affiliation. In Las Cruces, it is currently at Arrowhead Park Early College High School (APECHS) and Arrowhead Park Medical Academy (APMA). In September and October, eighteen German students and two teachers spent three weeks in Las Cruces, were hosted by Arrowhead families, attended school and went on field trips in the area, then experienced New York for five days before flying home to Germany. Seventeen Arrowhead students are now looking forward to visiting their new friends in Nienburg after the school year ends in May.



Students and teachers from Albert-Schweitzer-Schule/Nienburg-Germany at City of Rocks

Before leaving the sunny Southwest, the Germans reflected on their stay; excerpts of some of their writings follow:

Mirko Prasse (teacher): “Once again a great program was organized for us. We would like to thank our American host students and families as well as APECHS teachers Jeffrey Johnson, Tamara Miller-Dwake and the Las Cruces-Nienburg organization. Giving young people from our respective cities the opportunity to experience each other’s everyday life and culture is wonderful. During our stay here in Las Cruces, I could observe how our students were so warmly welcomed and how Americans and Germans learned from each other. The student exchange between Las Cruces and Nienburg does not only affect the individual development of the participating students; it also helps strengthen the ties between our two cities.”

Denise C.: “After months of contact with our host families via e-mail, Instagram, Facebook, Snapchat, maybe even FaceTime or Skype, my classmates and I were still anxious at the start of our journey: What might await us in Las Cruces? What about having to speak English all day long? What about the food? But then, at the El Paso airport, after a 26-hour trip, we were welcomed with heartwarming smiles and open arms The next morning I already felt adopted by those ‘kinda perfect human beings’. Time was literally flying from this point on. How could I have thought that three weeks was going to be too long in a ‘foreign’ family? There was so much to see, so much to do and learn... A few days ago my host mom told me: ‘My dear, you can spend a lifetime exploring New Mexico!’ So TRUE! – It’s incredible how much planning had gone into hosting each and everyone of us... Getting closer took some time, but in the end, my host family and I had pretty deep conversations ... I loved it. It wasn’t just ‘an amazing experience’. This is and will always be a most important part of my life. I’m so grateful to my American-New Mexican family. Thank you so much, dear Veronika and Charlie!”

Anakin R. [translated from the German]: “ I was surprised that Arrowhead has so many different buildings and that the students go to each teacher’s room. In Germany, students have their own classroom, and the teachers ‘travel’. Students here don’t have to raise their hand when answering questions or expressing an opinion. I really like that system. The Arrowhead Cafeteria, where many students buy their lunch, is so large. We usually bring our own sack lunch from home. – After following our host students to their classes for the first two days, we were free to choose our own schedule. The subjects offered in the Medical Academy are fascinating, for example ‘Medical Intervention’ or ‘Certified Nursing Assistant’, but I also found Computer Science and Media Design very interesting. Somehow these experiences make me believe that school may be more fun in America.”

Jonas H. [translated from the German]: “It struck me that New Mexicans seem to eat bigger and more frequent meals than we do. ... I’m used to just having toast in the morning, for lunch a warm dish, and an open-faced sandwich or two in the evening. I have been amazed by the size of American beverages; what Americans call ‘small’, we consider ‘large’. We use far less sugar and are skeptical of genetically engineered foods. We usually place smaller quantities on our plates and don’t like to throw food away. It takes time to adopt new habits. All in all, I like the New Mexican cuisine.”

Sophie G. and Erik H.: “It was really nice meeting members of the Las Cruces Youth Board while enjoying pizza, cookies, fruit, drinks and a variety of vegetables. (We have been surprised to learn that Americans like raw broccoli!) We had lots of fun discussing hobbies, sports (the German sport ‘Handball’ had to be explained), differences between the school systems, the legal driving age, eating habits and, of course, we also compared the Nienburg and the Las Cruces Youth Boards. We exchanged cell phone numbers so we can stay in contact. Thank you, Mr. Robert Nuñez, Administrator of Las Cruces Youth Services, for organizing this memorable meeting. “

Nina L. [translated from the German]: “The view in New Mexico is striking: here you can see the far horizon. In Germany, we have lots of forests – small and large – or high buildings in large cities that tend to block the view. The houses also look different. Ours are built with brick and have several storeys. We like the desert but are a little afraid of rattlesnakes and tarantulas because they are unknown in our country except in zoos. Since distances are so enormous in the Southwest, people depend on their cars. For us it’s easier to go by bike to the next little village or just walk to wherever we want to go.”

Manuel R., Jakob G., David Sch.: “The Southwest, especially compared to the area around Nienburg, was for us like seeing the first Walmart – huge! (The city of Nienburg itself has only 31,000 inhabitants; however, the county of Nienburg has lots of small villages nearby with a total population of over 122,000.) Our river, called Weser, is always full of water. We’ve been told that’s not the case with the Rio Grande. Since northern Germany gets quite a bit of rain, vegetation is varied and very green [except in the extremely hot summer of 2018, due to climate change]. ... During our stay in Las Cruces, we noticed the big influence Mexico has had on the American side of the border, its culture and food, which makes this area even more interesting. We believe travelling and getting to know different types of people with their different languages and cultures makes a positive impact upon one’s life and personal view of the world. So learn foreign languages, enjoy travelling and stay open-minded! Thanks for all your kindness. It’s been a pleasure to get to know you. We love you.”

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