

The Berlin Experience

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't Rijks meets Bertha

Our student exchange experience in Berlin

Our bilingual
classes on their
first exchange!

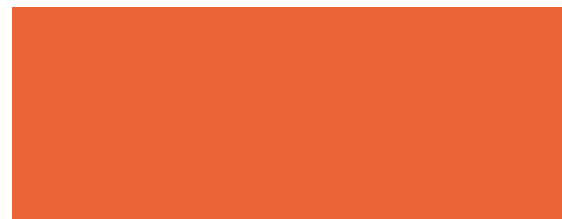


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The importance of cultural exchanges

By Ema, Stella, Marius, Quincy, Valentina, Midas

If you can't decide whether to go on an exchange or stay at home here are multiple reasons that we experienced which we think could help you to make a good decision!

A positive aspect of an exchange is that we got to learn more about the cultural differences and similarities like food and history. The Dutch students for example learned about the Cold War and the Berlin Wall, as well as the German political system, which they found extremely interesting. The German students also learned how the Dutch people celebrate Christmas and other cultural aspects, when they were in Bergen op Zoom.

We constantly spoke English to communicate with the exchange students and we improved our skills a lot. We have definitely experienced the importance of communication in English especially in other countries for example the Netherlands.

Another thing we noticed was that being responsible for our exchange partners and ourselves played a big role in this experience. We had to be very independent and take care of food and hygiene in order to have a nice exchange.

In the past week we had to be quite flexible and got used to the different conditions in the host families quickly. There were a lot of differences between the lifestyles in the two countries, for instance day and sleeping schedule, meal times and rules.

These and many more arguments have led to the conclusion that there are many benefits of a cultural exchange that should also convince you to take part in such activities.

The Checkpoint Charlie Museum

By Jona, Muhammed, Che, Marleen, Johanna, Senna

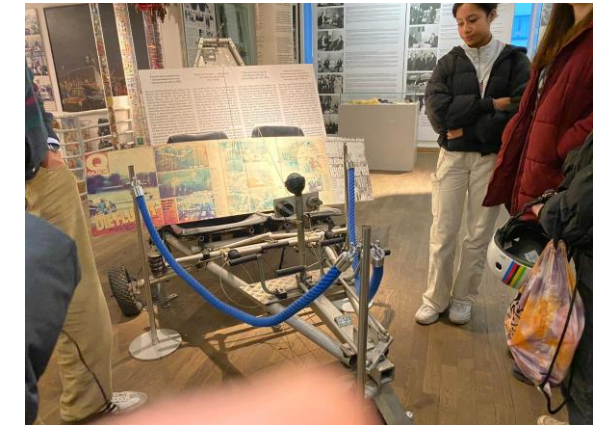
After the Second World War, Stalin (then leader of the USSR), Harry Truman and Clement Attlee (a deputy of British Prime Minister Winston Churchill) signed a treaty to divide Germany into East (USSR) and West (UK, USA and France). Checkpoint Charlie was a crossing point of the Berlin Wall between East and West Berlin during the Cold War, 1947-1991. It was named by the Western Allies (Western Bloc). It became a symbol of the Cold War, representing the division between East and West. After the dissolution of the Eastern Bloc and the reunification of Germany, the American guardhouse at Checkpoint Charlie became a tourist attraction. It is now housed in the Allied Museum in Berlin's Dahlem district.

The Checkpoint Charlie Museum is a huge building with lots of windows and green tiles. Inside the museum there are long corridors connected by small rooms. On the walls of these rooms are collages of black and white pictures and texts about attempts to escape over the Berlin Wall, and small televisions showing videos about different aspects of the history of the Berlin Wall. There are also some exhibits from the time when the Wall was still standing, such as old cars or barbed wire.

The museum is full of famous escapes from East to West Germany. The most impressive escape we learned about was that of two families who built a hot air balloon to cross the border into West Germany. It took them two attempts to cross the border. Another escape was that of three brothers who built a flying object to fly to the West. Another person swam to the West and returned to help 30 others cross as well.

It was very interesting and we learnt a lot. The guide showed us and told us how to escape from the east to the west. Actually, we learnt that he had been a former student of Europäisches Gymnasium Bertha-von-Suttner, who had attended the school before the Wall was built. We really enjoyed it and were amazed at the ways of escape. We think the most impressive escape story is the hot air balloon.

All in all, Checkpoint Charlie is a good museum of Berlin history. The exhibits and objects that were used to escape the Wall made everything seem more real. The many colourless photos on the walls made it feel like another time. There were not many people, so you could read the texts in peace or watch and listen to the videos on the small televisions. It was a nice experience because you could understand everything very well because the guide also told his own story and that of his friends.



Warm-up

Changing Perspectives through Acting

The English Theatre Company

By Julia, Jette, Greta, Jakob, Kacper, Teaghan



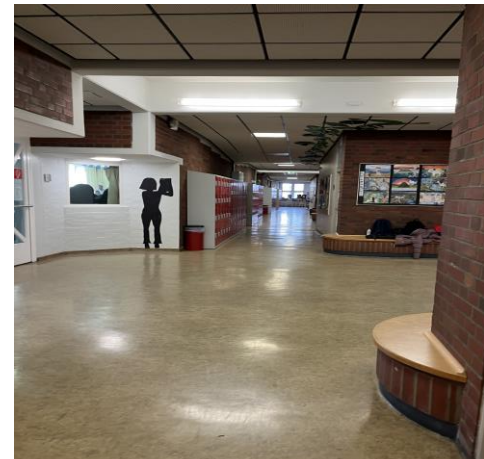
When people start to be creative, stories are created like a chicken nugget spaceship flying around the universe. The purpose of the Theatre Company was to connect people and get them out of their comfort zone. So what have we actually learned?

English theatre wants people to connect and get to know each other, so we started with warm-up games. They helped to overcome shyness and nervousness. At first, everyone was a little confused and nervous, but as time went on, we became more comfortable and started to open up to our group members and share our ideas. Stories were created and presented to the group. The students were able to be creative and show their ability to adapt to new people. The trainer helped us to engage with the group and open up. She was really passionate about her work and this was reflected in the way she challenged us to participate in each play. The groups were often mixed, which helped to get to know everyone in detail. We had different tasks which inspired us to communicate with others. The more you opened up to your group members, the more they engaged with you and let you know what they thought.

All in all, this experience helped us to forget our stressful everyday lives and be ourselves.

From Bergen op Zoom to Berlin

By Tabea, Defne, Samuel, Ema, Nora



Have you ever thought about comparing different school systems in different countries? We compared Bertha-von-Suttner in Berlin, Germany and RSG 't Rijks in Bergen op Zoom in the Netherlands.

We also found out a few facts about the schools. Bertha-von-Suttner was founded in 1908 and has 1196 students and 111 teachers. RSG Rijks was founded in 1882 and has been rebuilt several times. There are 2600 students and 225 teachers. However, the school building is quite small and it feels as if there are far fewer pupils.

There are many similarities, for example both schools have many students and the lessons are about the same length. We also have the same core subjects: English, Maths and our own language.

When we talked about our schools, we were surprised by all the differences. For example, the school systems are different. In Germany you first go to kindergarten for children from 1 to 6 years old, then you go to primary school from year one to year six. Then you go to a secondary school, which you attend for four or six years, depending on your career plans. In the Netherlands the school system is slightly different, when you enter secondary school the Dutch start again with Year 1 to Year 4/5/or Year 6, again depending on whether you want to go to university or not.

All in all, it's very nice to have an exchange because you can see how different school systems or schools work.

OPINIONS

When I first walked into this school, it felt very big. I felt like I was lost in the school and I didn't know how to get out. It felt very intimidating. But when we went on the school tour it felt less scary but the school still felt so big. It was very quiet and bells were ringing like every second it felt like. The school still feels so big, but much less intimidating now.

When we were at Rijks School we were very impressed with all the modern things they had. It was very modern, colourful and clean. We wished that our school would be as modern as theirs.

That's why we were interested in what the teachers thought about the different schools. So we asked the German teacher Mrs Kriesmann and the Dutch teacher Mr Perdaems. Mrs Kriesmann thinks that the BvS is very academic and that most of the teachers and students are very dedicated and motivated.

Mr Perdaems thinks that the building is very big, that there are a lot of trees and that it is very quiet compared to the t'Rijks. He thinks that the school is of a high standard, that it offers a very good education and that all the people at the school are very friendly. Mrs Kriesmann thinks that the t'Rijks school is more modern, that it adapts easily to changes in society, that it is well equipped with modern technology and that the teachers are very motivated and inspiring. Mr Perdaems thinks that t'Rijks is a good institution to learn things for life and how to behave in society, that the school is equipped with good technology and that the WiFi system is also good. He thinks it's good that t'Rijks is modernized regularly.

Sightseeing Walking Tour in Berlin

By Izabella, Justin, Jade, Rosa and Martina

On Wednesday 15 February 2023 the German students and the Dutch exchange students went on a tour of Berlin. We started at Potsdamer Platz and walked to the Reichstag.

The first sight we visited was the traffic light. It is the first traffic light in Germany since 15 December 1924 and it is controlled by policemen. Students found it hard to believe that this was the first traffic light. Then we went to the pieces of the Berlin Wall. It became a tradition to put chewing gum on them. Some found the tradition disgusting, others found it interesting.

Every federal state in Germany has its representative house in Berlin and they are all in the same street called "In den Ministergärten". They talked about the House of Hessen, which is known for its good wine, so they have a wine garden in front of their house. The students don't drink wine, so they were not interested.

On the way to the "Memorial to the Murdered Jews", also called the "Holocaust Memorial", they passed the bunker where Adolf Hitler had his office and also committed suicide. Many of us felt uncomfortable being there.

At the memorial most of the students walked through the stones and the others were freezing because it was still very cold outside. The guide told us that the architect, Peter Eisenmann, didn't give an exact meaning. Everyone should have their own feelings and thoughts about the victims.

As we walked with the guide and our teachers through the "Academia of Arts" to the "Brandenburger Gate", we took a short break and a class photo. It was warm inside, which made us feel better. There were some interesting drawings and paintings inside, but unfortunately most of us didn't really notice them.



Then we arrived at the "Pariser Platz", where the most luxurious hotel called "Adlon" is located. It's a funny fact that the building survived the wars, but not the party of Soviet soldiers - the building caught fire. We were shocked and didn't expect that. Next to the hotel there was the Brandenburg Gate with Victoria, the goddess of victory. She brings victory to the city. The Dutch found it very interesting and took lots of pictures with the gate.

The last part of the tour was the Reichstag. First, we had a long tour around the building. Then we went up to the dome, where we had a great view and could see all of Berlin.



Berlin's not-so-distant past

By Adam, Elena, Emilia and Mitch

On Monday we had two history lessons to make sure everyone knew about the history of Germany and Berlin, which was important for the rest of the programme. The first one was about the Cold War. It was very interesting but challenging for some of the students as it involved a lot of listening and sitting. Something that helped our learning was that Mr Rath gave us a handout that we had to fill in because we really had to listen and pay attention, and he also prepared a PowerPoint presentation with vivid maps and cartoons to think about. One of them symbolised that each side had the opportunity to use nuclear weapons against the other, but nobody did because the other side would have retaliated and it would have ended in World War III and something like the end of the world. At the end he showed us another cartoon which I thought was very interesting because it made us think about the similarities of the situation then and now. So even though it was difficult for some people to keep their attention, I think it was important to know and everyone learned at least a little bit about the Cold War that they didn't know before.

The Berlin Wall was one of the most interesting things we learned about during the exchange. For most Germans, the Berlin Wall is a thought in the back of their mind, a piece of distant history that comes up during a boring history lesson. Well, after visiting the wall itself during the exchange, we would have a completely new perspective. It was new information to us that the Wall had a death strip. After learning about the Death Strip, I imagined myself running through the Death Strip, hearing bullets behind me and the sand crackling under my feet as I approached the Western Wall, my heart pounding and my legs aching, climbing the Wall and crossing the border, feeling a sense of freedom and a weight lifted from my chest. The history lesson here in Berlin was about the Cold War and the Berlin Wall, which we hadn't studied before, so it was interesting.

We Dutch might have a different opinion and see the Wall and the Cold War differently. At first it was ok to learn about these important moments in history here, but as time went by my feet started to hurt from walking and I got bored and annoyed because I couldn't sit anywhere and my feet felt like they were on fire. The museum we went to was at the end of the day so everyone was grumpy and tired which didn't make it any better and the whole day of Cold War/Berlin Wall information got really boring if you weren't really into it. However, we learnt that it was the best feeling ever for an East Berliner to cross the border. But many died longing for that feeling of freedom, people of all ages, and that is the sad reality of the not so distant past of the Berlin Wall.

Monday's lesson was quite interesting because I didn't know much about the Berlin Wall and the Cold War. I learnt that the Cold War was a kind of proxy war and that means that both sides fight with small weapons because they both knew that if they attack big, the other side will attack big and they really didn't want that to happen. I also found the lesson interesting because in our lessons at home we mostly take notes and here there was more social interaction with the students. My first thought about the Berlin Wall was that it was just a wall, but I learnt that there were a lot more things to cross like a fence, a watchtower and a pit of sand called the death strip, so I can say that I learnt quite a lot.

Learning from History

Mr Rath & Mr Davis



The Reichstag, the mind of a nation

By Fiete, Pien, Carsten, Noah

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The Reichstag is a very important and interesting building with a lot of history. It was built in 1884 and has seen 5 different government systems in Germany, the German empire, the Republic of Weimar, the Third Reich, the GDR and the FRG. It was the parliament of the German Empire, the Republic of Weimar and the Third Reich, but it was not used for most of the 20th century because it was too close to the border. It was reopened in 1999 after renovation and the construction of a new dome.

It now has 736 members, and the person who commands attention during a parliamentary session is the president, not the chancellor. The number of members each party has is determined by its popularity in the election, not by the chancellor.

It feels strange to stand in this living piece of history, where almost all the decisions for the country are made. It almost makes you feel out of place, or as if you don't belong here.



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