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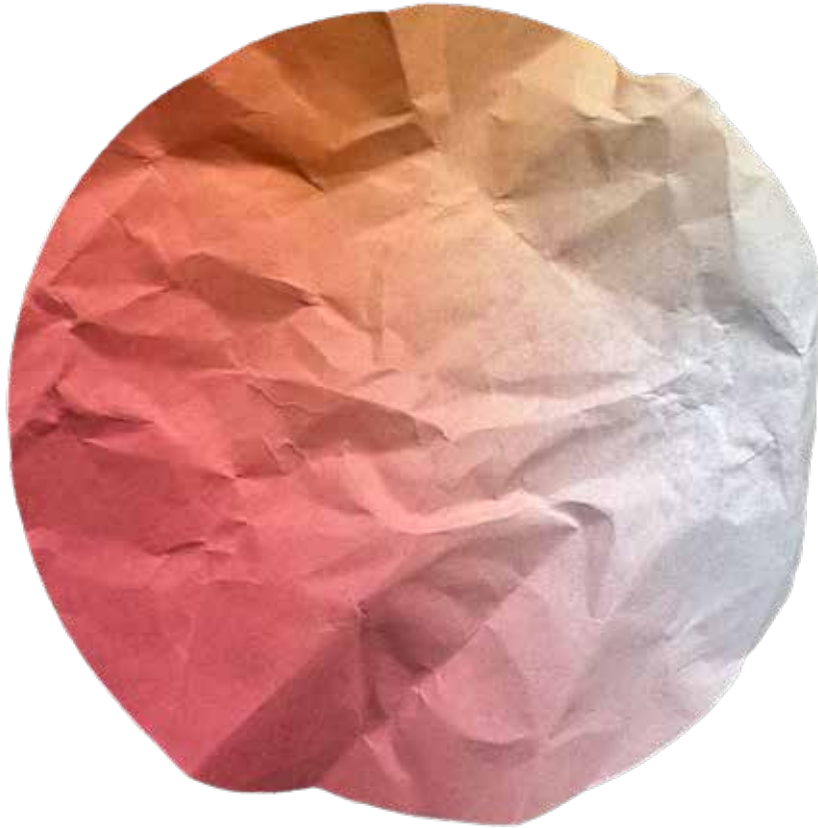
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„HEIM KOMMT MAN NIE,“ SAGTE SIE FREUNDLICH.

*„ABER WO BEFREUNDETE WEGE ZUSAMMENLAUFEN,
DA SIEHT DIE GANZE WELT FÜR EINE STUNDE WIE
HEIMAT AUS.“*



PREFACE

BY LISA JANSEN

An ABROAD magazine dealing with the topic of home? Isn't that contradictory?

'Home' in the German language means 'house, residence, village, region, country' but also the 'full range and feeling of home', a concept that belongs distinctively to the word home. With this magazine here we want to take you on a journey.

What can home mean for us? It can mean that you know your way around and know where things are and why things work. Structure and routine, familiar patterns and people. Which spaces can we connect with home? What does it mean to leave your home and find a new (temporary) home? If we think of home as a place, is it a room, an apartment, a house, a city, a region or a continent or another place? In a university context: What does it mean to leave home for a specific time abroad? Can habits and rituals create a home? Can a café where you pick up your coffee in the morning be part of your routine in creating this (new) home? Or the swimming pool you go to each Wednesday? The project meeting, a cortado at Gute Stube or the table soccer you play after lunch at KISD? Or is your feeling of home related to the people you spend your time with? Family, friends, colleagues, fellow students. Maybe you have a dog or a cat who makes you feel home. Or your grandma who cooks you the same dish again and again when you

go to see her. In my family it would be the famous cheese cake that we have for each of our birthdays. How important are language and culture if you want to settle in a new space?

Are there any strategies if you are new to a place on how to connect with others? Is this exciting or scary if you are creating a new home somewhere? At KISD we strongly encourage you to leave your comfort zone, explore new cultures and spend a certain time abroad during your studies. We interviewed KISD students to share their perception and experiences. Hoping that these can be inspiring to others, show strategies or just make you smile or thoughtful while reading the interviews.

Maybe it's a specific object that helps you to make yourself at home? Become comfortable in a place you do not live in, feel at ease. An important question from a designer's perspective. We collected a few of these objects and are curious to see if you can relate with those.

Without a final checklist or a one fits all we hope you enjoy our journey here, find some answers and even more questions no matter if you are right now creating a new home, sitting in your long-established home or just travelling in your mind.

KENDON
JUNG



Let us introduce you to Kendon, a 34-year-old Fulbright scholar from Phoenix, Arizona. Kendon is a PhD student who puts sustainability and service design at the centre of his practice.

Read on to discover how he has navigated cultural differences, redefined home and found joy in unexpected places around Cologne.

How long have you been studying in Arizona?

My story is a bit unique. I'm pursuing my doctorate while working full-time in university administration, so it's taken me a bit longer to finish. I'm currently in year four or five – I can't quite remember – but I started in 2020 and I have one year left until I finish. I'm hoping to graduate when I return home from KISD.

What was it like starting your doctorate in 2020 at the beginning of the pandemic?

So yes, just when I got accepted into the programme the pandemic hit... While the pandemic was obviously not a good thing, from a class standpoint it did allow me to disconnect from my work and focus on school, especially since everything moved online. It was tough, but the flexibility of online learning made it easier to balance work and my doctorate.

What is the focus of your doctorate?

My doctorate is in design, specifically focused on how service design and service designers interact with sustainability. My research question is: What methods, tools and approaches do service designers use that align with the key competencies for sustainability?

Why did you choose KISD? What made you decide to fly from Arizona all the way to Germany?

I initially planned to finish my research from Arizona, but I received a Fulbright grant, which changed everything. Fulbright is an exchange programme between the United States and countries around the world to promote cultural understanding, mutual exchange and academic research.

To be honest, I applied for the grant as an opportunity to focus solely on my doctorate. I was feeling burned out from working full-time alongside studying, so I asked myself where I could go to really accelerate my research.

Birgit Mager, who pioneered research in service design, is based at KISD. Therefore KISD was literally the only place in the world where I could be close to her work, immerse myself in the Service Design culture and have dedicated time to finish my doctorate without juggling multiple jobs on the side.

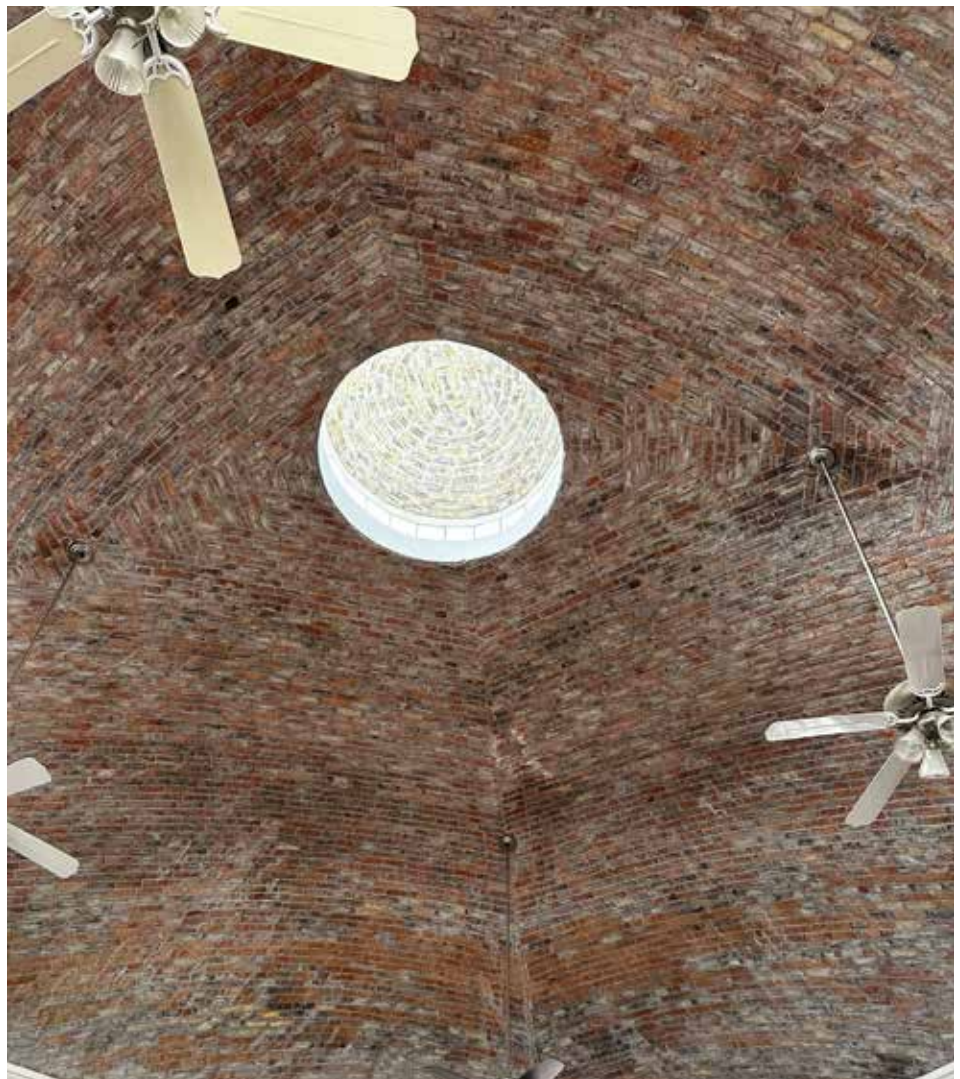
Would you tell us a little more about Fulbright? Is it also possible for German students to benefit?

Yes, it's typically for six to ten months and most of the time it's for people completing a research project, whether post-bachelor's or master's. For example, there's another 'Fulbrighter' here in Cologne who's researching the role of AI in medicine. He isn't pursuing a medical degree here but is applying to medical schools back home in the States. Because it's a direct exchange programme, there is also the opportunity for students to go to the U.S. There are 94 'Fulbrighters' in Germany right now, which also means there are 94 German participants in the States, too.



What was the first sentence you said in Germany?

Es tut mir leid.



Why did you pursue a doctorate in design?

I chose a design doctorate because, in my opinion, it's one of the most transferable fields. With it you can become a professor, work in a design studio or do research that applies to creating products, intangible services or even shaping culture. One of the reasons I personally pursued design is because of its relevance to sustainability, which is my main area of interest. Design has played a significant role in creating our climate crisis by encouraging over-consumption, but it also has the potential to be part of the solution, right?

Right.

We'd like to ask a bit more about leaving Arizona. How did you feel before leaving? How did the people around you feel about it?

This is the first time I've ever lived far from home. In fact, I've only ever lived about a kilometre away from where I was born. My family is deeply rooted in the area – my grandparents taught at the university where I work and my parents met there. Together, we have eight degrees from the university and we've lived in the same house for 30 years. I'm incredibly connected to my community.

I have travelled a lot, but I've never had to recreate a life, so that was a lot to prepare for and I think that I would have been more excited if I had time to think about it, but it all happened so fast. On my last night in Arizona I drove to my best friend's house to say goodbye and it was then that I realised that I'm not going to drive a car for an entire year – It was probably the first time that I considered the difference between European and American lifestyles and I was like, whoa, this will be weird.

I didn't actually get to pack, or shop, for things before leaving. I was like: 'Just throw whatever I got in the suitcase. We'll figure it out over there.'

It was overwhelming. But one of the practices that I did before I left was to ask my friends that had at least moved states, what did you do to anchor yourself?

So the day after my birthday, with mum in tears, I got on a plane with all my worldly possessions and flew over here. Birgit Mager offered to house me until I could find a place to live. I had searched for a flat for four months – it turned out that if landlords can't see you, they won't respond to you.

It was overwhelming. But one of the practices that I did before I left was to ask my friends who had at least moved states: 'What did you do to anchor yourself?'

It was really helpful for me to to understand how different people understood 'home'.

Some talked about exploring without purpose, just wandering through your new space, whilst others talked about getting connected with like-minded groups, whether through a sports team, painting club or establishing a routine to regulate what-ever emotions you might be going through.

So these are the things that I tried to look for as a way to anchor myself here in Cologne.



How have you adjusted so far? Have you been able to find some of the routines and connections you mentioned?

I think it has taken me longer than most. I feel this way because many of the other international students seem to have acclimated far quicker than I have. I think this has something to do with unexpected cultural differences between European and American systems and cultures.

But I would also say that I've been hard on myself to try and do all of this too quickly. It's only been about six weeks and in that time I've moved, started my research, attended a conference in Helsinki, co-taught a class at KISD, registered with the city and looked for a permanent place to live.

Actually, the biggest journey for me is to understand the gyms. I do not get them. They drive me crazy, I've been trying to figure out how the whole system works and I am still so confused.

Germany is also a very analogue culture, which I didn't expect. I was like 'Oh my god, this app is like, terrible.'

Yeah, I was hard on myself for not moving quickly enough, but I also think that this is a learning opportunity to ask why do you need to move so quickly? It's good to take time to understand what is different, unique and special about Germany and isn't the same back home, and that it's okay for those two homes to exist at the same time.

Do you feel at home yet? Do you think it's possible to have multiple homes – in Germany, in Arizona, or even somewhere else?

I think home is where your connections are and in that sense, I do feel very much at home here. I may not feel settled yet, but I feel connected. For example, I just signed a lease on Saturday and that felt like a big milestone. It turns out that one of my coworkers lives literally just 400 meters from my new place and we've already talked about hanging out. So yes, I feel at home through those connections, even if I'm still adjusting to other aspects of life here.

It's also about progress – things change, but focusing on connections helps. You might lose your flat or job, but as long as those connections remain, it still feels like home.

Have you found a new favourite dish or product here in Cologne?

My family has made beer together for the last nine years and I was interested to live in the land famous for its beer. On my second day here I went to meet my Fulbright friend at a beer house and they served me Kölsch in this tiny little glass. I was like: 'What is this? Is this beer for children?'

I later learned Kölsch originated here, which was surprising, as one of my favourite beers back home is a Coffee Kölsch from a local brewery. So now when I see this weird little beer it makes me think of this weird Kölsch that I love back home.

What was the first thing you did to make your new place feel like home?

I am big on everything having a place so I found a home for everything, even though I'm currently in a spare room. Then I walked the whole Ring street from Mülheim down the Rhine up through the Ring and back to Mülheim, which gave me an overwhelming sense of calm.

What's been your biggest oopsie moment?

I love trains, but when I made a last-minute plan to visit Oktoberfest it ended up being a total disaster. I couldn't navigate the DB, lost about €60 and I never made it. Then a friend recommended that I go to Volksfest in Stuttgart instead which is where the Germans go. I was like: 'Ooh, the insider scoop.' I went there and it was great, so not a total oopsie in the end.

It's also about progress – things change, but focusing on connections helps. You might lose your flat or job, but as long as those connections remain, it still feels like home.



Have you had moments here where you felt more at home than in Arizona?

Yes, especially when I see things that align with my values like the walkability and trains. I've always wanted more of that back home. Also the inclusivity here, especially with Carnival, is just marvellous and something I don't get in Arizona.

Do you think you'll have to relearn how to live when you return to Arizona?

Oh, one hundred percent. This is still a growth stage for me, but I am learning to slow down here. I think Europe is much better at it than the States and there is more focus on connection here too, but it will be a shock to adjust when I return home.

Which cultural differences in Cologne have influenced your sense of home?

I'm not sure if my sense of home has changed, but how I create it has. Slowing down and focusing on quality conversations and connections is something I'll take back with me. They're more intentional here.

Which three words define home to you?

Connection, future and heart.



What was the most important thing on your packing list, and did that change after arriving?

That's a good question. I think the most important things to me were reminders of home. One of my friends made me a scarf to take with me because it's hot back home. Really hot. My friends were like: 'You are literally going to freeze to death.'

My co-workers wrote little cards and notes, so I made sure to bring these too, and I guess Euros. I didn't expect Germany to be so cash based!

As for the things I didn't need, I feel like I should have packed less clothes. I don't have a lot of clothes to begin with, but I don't think that I realised how different the climate is here.

Would you do this experience again, and how would you convince others to do it?

Definitely. However sadly in the States there are not the same exchange opportunities as there are in Europe.

I wish that everyone had the chance to have this experience. So if you do, you should one hundred percent consider taking it. Coming to Cologne has taught me to be comfortable with being uncomfortable, which is something incredibly valuable.

The U.S. elections are, in many ways, world elections and definitely influence international politics. How do you feel about being here while the U.S. elections are happening, and will you be voting?

Yes, I have already voted. I received my receipt yesterday confirming that my ballot was uploaded, verified, and counted. This was my first time voting remotely and I'm grateful for the option. It's surprising to me that some people want to eliminate remote voting, especially since it's such a contentious issue in the States.

Regarding the election, there's only one outcome I find acceptable and I'm confident it will happen. That said, I recently spoke with my mum who mentioned that for the first time the air felt sharp at home. This reminds me why design is so crucial. It's a practice that seeks to understand others and bring people together to achieve progress, whatever that may mean. It's a powerful reminder of our purpose here – how do we cut through the noise and go back to building connections? Design is an important medium for this.

Whether you choose to go far from home or close to home, you should always seek out opportunities to learn something new about yourself.

Do you have any final thoughts?

I think the only other thing that is important to note, especially with folks that are considering studying abroad, is that it's very easy to become comfortable and that doing things because they're comfortable does not mean that you're going to learn or change as a person.

It's okay to be scared of change, but just to experience a different version of what home could be and moments of profound change are incredibly important, especially in a world that feels like it's getting more and more polarised.

So at the end of the day, whether you choose to go far from home or close to home, you should always seek opportunities to learn something new about yourself.

NOT A STRANGER ANYMORE.

BY NOR_A WILLEN

"I don't feel like a stranger here anymore.
Porto has now become one of my homes,
and I'm very proud of what I've done
and accomplished here so far."
(From my diary, 01/02/2024)

For me, home is not a specific place. There is my homeland, of course, but my true home lies within myself. Through certain rituals and routines, I deepen this feeling, no matter where I am. Whether through calls with family and friends or a few meaningful possessions that hold emotional value, I've learned that the feeling of being at home is something I carry with me.

When I decided to spend a semester abroad, I did so with the hope of experiencing life in a completely unfamiliar environment. I'd never lived outside my own country before, and Porto seemed like the perfect opportunity to explore not just a new culture, but also the daily rhythm of life near the sea. The idea of living near the ocean had always fascinated me, and Porto gave me the chance to turn this dream into reality.

As my departure date approached, I spent considerable time thinking about what to bring. Since I was flying, I was limited to just one suitcase and a carry-on, so everything I would need for the next six months had to fit into those two bags. This forced me to think carefully about what would make me feel comfort-

able and connected in a new place. Beyond the essentials like clothes and shoes, I made room for a few personal items that I knew would help me feel grounded and give my new room a touch of familiarity.

Among the items I chose a small lamp to create a cozy ambience, a little bowl, which I was given by a friend, to keep my jewelry, photos of my family, and some incense sticks. Each of these items served a specific purpose: the lamp gave my room the right kind of light, warm and inviting; the family photos were a comforting reminder of home; and the incense sticks, with their familiar scent, helped to bring a bit of my old surroundings into my new life.

When I arrived in Porto, I added a few more pieces to my room – small items from IKEA that matched my style. These additions allowed me to create a space that felt distinctly mine. Though they were just simple objects, they helped me to cultivate a small world within my room where I felt completely at ease.

However, creating a sense of home isn't just about physical things; the connections we make with people play an equally significant role.

As if by fate, I met Emma on my flight from Cologne to Porto. She was also embarking on her semester abroad in Porto, seated right next to me. Although I didn't expect us to become close, we exchanged numbers, and just two days later, we met up and instantly clicked. Emma became my first real friend in Porto, a companion with whom I could navigate this unfamiliar city and share all the initial moments of discovery. Since she was also from Cologne, she brought a sense of familiarity, and we built a feeling of home in our shared experiences and conversations.

Together, Emma and I expanded our social circle, forming a community of friends. These were people who, like us, were eager to explore and embrace the city. Our time was filled with beach days, late-night conversations and lively parties. While some of these connections were perhaps more casual, they were exactly what we needed in the moment – a reminder that sometimes, it's the fleeting relationships that give us a sense of belonging.

This group became my temporary family in Porto, offering companionship and camaraderie in all our adventures. Although over time, I started to miss my closest friends back in Cologne. I started a relationship in Porto, which helped ease some of that loneliness, but there were still moments when I felt a sense of solitude. This feeling is perhaps a natural part of any extended stay abroad. Yet, certain routines helped me regain my balance. Whether it was calling my family and friends more frequently, practicing yoga, or going surfing, staying active and



connected to myself became essential. These activities grounded me and reminded me of what was truly important. Throughout this journey I've come to understand that I can create a sense of home anywhere. There will always be moments of loneliness, but with familiar rituals it's possible to overcome these feelings and focus on what really matters: creating beautiful memories. After all, there's always a way forward, a new perspective, or a solution for any challenge.

In Portuguese, the word 'lar' has a deeply emotional resonance, describing home as a place of warmth, family, and security – much like the German concept of 'Heim.'

"O lar é onde o coração está"
– "Home is where the heart is."

JUSTUS GROTENHÖFER



Meet Justus, a 26-year-old design student who spent five months exploring life and design in Copenhagen. A fan of Danish food culture and photography. During his time he found a home away from home at the Royal Danish Academy.

Discover how he embraced Denmark's innovative design culture, navigated the city's high costs and much more.

How long were you in Copenhagen?

I was in Copenhagen for the summer semester at the Royal Danish Academy, from February to mid-July. So five and a half months.

*Why did you decide to go to Copenhagen?
What was special about the study
programme?*

That's actually what most of the KISDies asked when we talked about it. A lot of them said: 'I'm going to Brazil, I'm going to Taiwan, I'm just going far away...' and when I said I was going to Copenhagen, they were surprised. 'Huh, you can go anywhere, why go straight to one of our neighbouring countries?' But it was pretty clear to me that I wanted to go there. I spent a weekend there with a friend in 2022 because she wanted to look at a university. I had no expectations of the city. I thought Copenhagen would be a bit like Hamburg – yet it wasn't like that at all, it was much cooler. I quickly realised that it would be pretty nice to live there. Like Amsterdam, Copenhagen is an absolute bike city and that's why we spent most of our trip riding bikes. We happened to pass by the Royal Danish Academy and I noticed that there was also a department for visual design there. What I didn't know at the time was that it was a partner university of KISD. When I saw it on Spaces after the trip, I knew that I wanted to apply there for my semester abroad. I also named Vienna as an option, but Copenhagen remained my first choice. When Copenhagen accepted, I was very happy and Vienna didn't matter anymore. Apart from the city, the 'Visual Design and Interaction' program at the Royal Danish Academy got me excited, and I already knew it would be a match.



It's completely normal to be excited or anxious before such a new time because a lot of things are simply uncertain.

OK, what makes Copenhagen cool?

There are aspects of Copenhagen that seem better planned, and the city feels a few years ahead of Cologne. I really like the size of Cologne and that from the city center, most things are only 20 minutes away by bike. It's very similar in Copenhagen, the only difference being that you don't have to fear for your life. For design students, the city is exciting because it feels like there is more focus on how the cities aesthetics. Cafés, restaurants and all kinds of small stores usually had great branding and a design system which impressed me. You can just tell that good design is culturally important there. However it's not cheap, however as a design student you do get free entry to all museums at all times. Although the weather also isn't great at the beginning of the year, it's a huge plus in the city that you can go swimming almost everywhere for free. When the summer arrived, I met lots of new people and the city really came to life, an upon reflection I would say that Copenhagen is one of the best cities in Europe to live in. If it wasn't so expensive! Luckily Malmö, Sweden, is a 20-minute train ride across the strait and is a nice cheap alternative for a day or weekend trip.

I have the feeling that whenever you talk about Copenhagen, the money topic always comes up. Did you get funding?

Let's be honest here. Copenhagen is really expensive. The fact that I already knew this was an advantage, as I knew what I had to be prepared for. However, another point in Denmark's favour is that as a degree seeking student you receive around €800 a month from the state, provided if you work about 12 hours a week on-site. Unfortunately, this does not apply to exchange students.

Erasmus gives you the maximum rate of €600, even if only for 4 months, and I was lucky enough to be able to continue my working student job remotely which helped my budget. Very few of the other Erasmus students worked at the same time, so I know that it's also possible to get by without a part-time job.

I also sublet my room in Cologne which really helped my finances. On the whole, it's up to you how much you want to spend there. When it was still very cold at the beginning of the semester I didn't feel up to riding my bike to the university, so I took local public transport to university. If I ate in the canteen and went for a coffee with friends after university, I quickly spent €35 a day. However if you switch to cycling, you can save around €7 a day – this motivated me to start cycling at least from March onwards. I love food and so I tried many bakeries and ate out more often but, looking back, it was also the best money I spent. The food culture in Copenhagen is amazing.



Was there a defining moment when you realised you had arrived in Copenhagen? Or was it a smooth transition?

My transition was actually quite easy. I remember the first Sunday in my new apartment – I sat on the balcony with my coffee, enjoying the sunshine. In that peaceful moment, I realised that everything was even better than I had hoped for. It hit me that two years ago I had only dreamed about this, and now it was real life and my new home.

How would you define the term 'home'? What makes you feel at home?

It sounds so cheesy and it's nothing special, but for me it mostly depends on the people I'm surrounded by. Roommates, fellow students or whoever else in daily life, if they enjoy spending time with me and we can talk about more serious topics, then I feel comfortable and at home. I'm rather extroverted but I recharge my social battery when I have time to myself. My apartment was an absolute stroke of luck and I can't complain about any of it. I had a small room but a large living room and a kitchen where I cooked a lot, so if needed, I just had good quality time for myself.



I'm also someone who is rather extroverted and likes to be with people, but I recharge my social battery when I have time to myself.

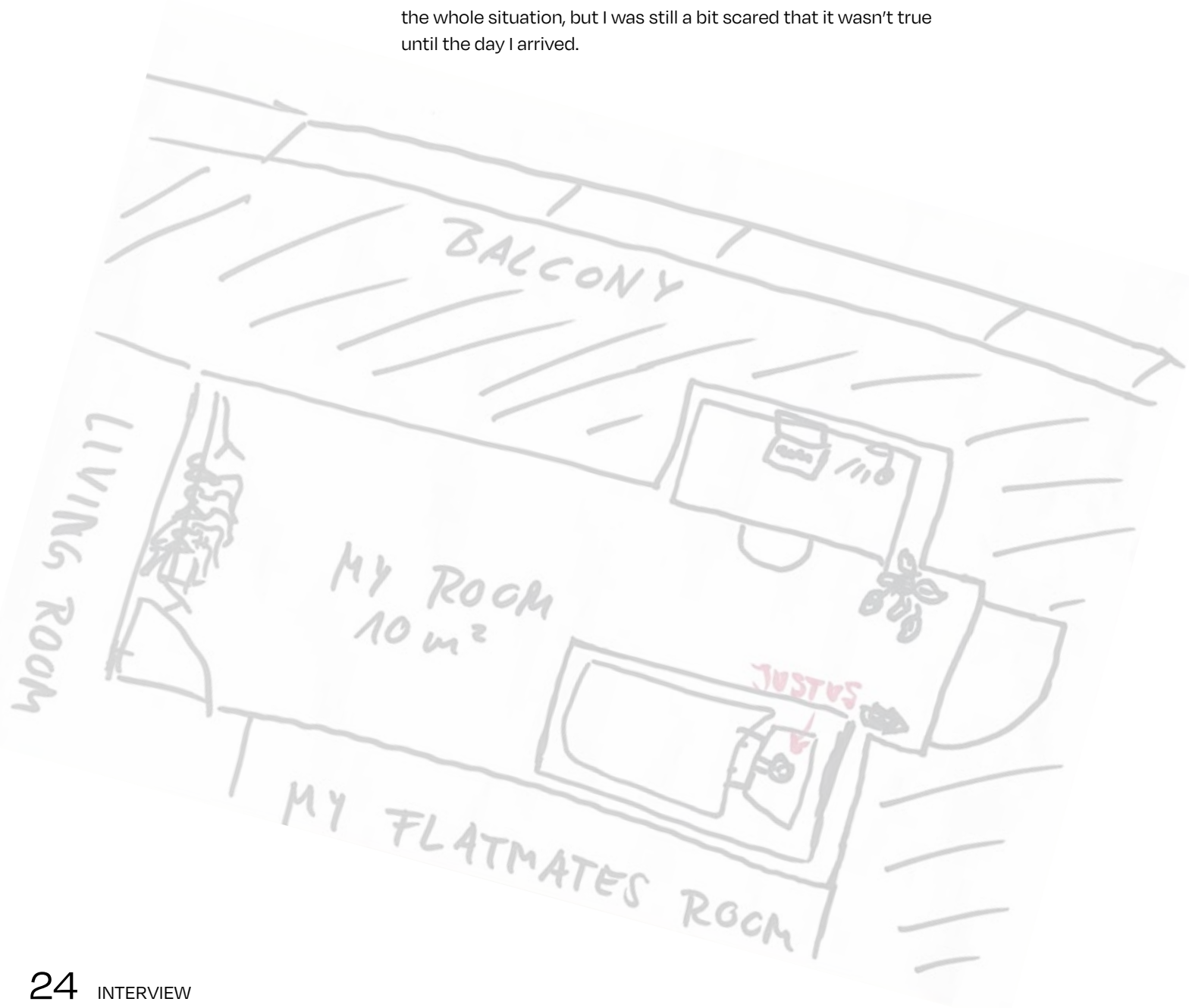


What about accommodation? You lived in one of those student residences, didn't you?

I didn't live in a student hall of residence because they were the most expensive option, at around €1100/month. The housing market in Copenhagen runs via Facebook groups. I tried my luck in about 15 groups, but I rarely got anything back or I quickly realised that some of the ads were fake. I then posted a profile about myself with pictures in the groups so that people could get in touch with me. I was very lucky, a Danish guy wrote to me that he has a contract for an upcoming apartment but needed a second person to share the costs.

I wasn't very sure at first whether this was all true, as he didn't have a profile picture or much information about himself on Facebook and the apartment he was talking about didn't even exist yet. The building was still under construction but was supposed to be finished by my arrival in Copenhagen. After a Zoom call, I felt more secure about the existence of him and the flat.

I wrote to the construction company to make sure that he really would be the future tenant of the apartment. The company confirmed he was, which made me feel much more confident about the whole situation, but I was still a bit scared that it wasn't true until the day I arrived.





In the end, I did move into the new house at the same time as 250 other people my age. The living concept was also pretty absurd, as there were a gym and a sauna, party rooms, a kayak rental and private access to the water channel for swimming. All included in the rental price. The apartment itself was 75 square meters, which is great for two people. However, my room was only 10 square meters. I paid just over €900 per month for everything. The other Erasmus students I met also all paid between €800 and €1000 for their rent, so I was very much on average. My flatmate told me that I was the only one who had posted a profile and that he had no authorisation to post his ad in the individual groups. So I was incredibly lucky that he saw my ad. We also got on really well and the fact that he was Danish helped me to learn a lot about the culture. The only disadvantage was that my neighbourhood 'Sluseholmen' was a bit out of the way. It took me 40 minutes to get to university by bus and 30 minutes by bike, but looking back it was great because I saw a lot of the city every day and was out and about on my bike a lot – which was awesome, at least from April onwards.

Were you nervous about moving abroad, or did you feel comfortable no matter where you went?

I grew up in Cologne and have lived there my whole life. Like many others, I spent a few months travelling after graduating from high school, but I was always on the road with friends from home. So I always had a part of home with me. That's why a semester abroad really appealed to me, to experience doing my own thing.

I didn't get nervous because of moving until a few days before I left, when I wrote a packing list and prepared my room for my subletter. That's when I realised that it was time to go. As Copenhagen is also easy to get to by train, I decided to take the train which was great for mental preparation. I really enjoyed seeing the landscape changing – it felt more relaxing than flying. During my train journey, I planned what to do in the days between arriving and starting classes at university.

In the beginning, I had to stay in a hostel which was strange and the first uncertainties came up, but this is normal when you don't know anyone in the city or what to expect.

It was helpful for me to talk to other KISDies and people who had already been in Copenhagen for a while. On my first real day in Copenhagen, I walked around the city a lot with my camera to get a feel for it again and I walked my route to university. That day, the university had an exhibition to see student projects and different workshop spaces so I got to know people there with whom I was in a class a few days later. They were super nice and helpful and that gave me a great feeling, so from then on I looked forward to the start a bit more confidently.

The apartment situation worked out well in the end. What really helped was that everyone in the house – including my roommate and I – moved in at the same time. This made things easier since we were all new together. On move-in day, my roommate and I spent the evening setting up furniture together. During this time, we quickly realised we would be great roommates. I felt so comfortable that within just a week of moving in, the place already felt like home to me.

*Sometimes you just need to go
with the flow and let things happen
naturally.*



Looking back, would you say it was worth ignoring all the nervousness and just doing it?

I wouldn't say ignore. It's completely normal to be excited or anxious before such a new time, simply because a lot of things are uncertain. It always helps me to talk to people in advance to get different points of view, even negative, to create a more realistic picture of what to expect. Maybe try writing everything down to get a feeling for what worries or expectations you have, and how rational or irrational they are.

Then you are a little better prepared, or perhaps not so surprised, when something happens. That being said, you don't have much control anyway and sometimes you just need to go with the flow and let things happen naturally.

Before going I watched random vlogs about Copenhagen to prepare myself and I wrote a diary for the first time. This really helped to sort out my thoughts through all this time and now I can read back and see my development, which is really nice.

What were the most important things when furnishing your new apartment? What did you bring with you? What were the items to make it feel like home?

On the one hand it was cool that the apartment was completely new, and the furniture hadn't been used by anyone before, but on the other hand the apartment had zero character. There was nothing in it except the freshly made bed, the desk and a wardrobe. The whole apartment was built in a loft style which sounds cool at first, but the walls were mostly unplastered and just concrete and definitely gave me quite a prison vibe on the first night.

I took lots of postcards and photos with me from home, they didn't take up much space in my suitcase and I hung them up straight after the first night so it felt more like my room. I also bought a plant at IKEA in addition to one or two smaller items, which gave life to the room.

I got a small notebook with pictures from friends and a home-made scented candle, both of these then stood on the window-sill and it all felt very cosy once I had set it up. In the end, it's not so much the objects as the fact that I get on well with the people I live with. My flatmate and I started cooking together early on, going out to parties and simply getting to know each other better. He was also super interested in my German culture and in general he is a very welcoming and careful person, which definitely made it feel more like home.



Home mostly depends on the people who are there and surround me. So both as roommates, fellow students and people you see in everyday life.



In retrospect, was your apartment in Copenhagen a home?

Yes. It was really weird to empty the room again at the end of the semester. A lot can happen in five months, both positive and negative, and at the end of the day the apartment and my room was a safe space.

After being four weeks in Copenhagen, I visited Cologne because it was my mother's birthday. And even though I was only home for two or three days, I was looking forward to Copenhagen and my room there again. So it was somehow the case that Copenhagen was more like home for me than Cologne. Looking back, I just had a great time there with lots of great people and by the end, my Danish flatmate felt like a little brother. He helped me a lot to feel more comfortable in the country and showed me more of a typical Danish lifestyle. From the moment that I arrived he made me feel welcome and at the end of my semester he told me that I could stay again, anytime I was back in town.

Did you learn Danish during your time there?

Oh hell no. When I moved I was fully motivated and downloaded Duolingo and felt so ready to learn the language, but that quickly backfired. I could have taken Danish courses at the university, but the times were a bit of a pain because the classes were only on Thursdays from 5 to 8pm. I thought about it for a moment, but the first project at the university was also quite time-consuming and I was still working at the same time, so it was a bit too much for me. I also figured out that I would never use the language again.

My classes were held in English because there were four of us Erasmus students, and I noticed that most Danes speak incredibly good English, similar to the Netherlands, so this switch was not a big deal for them.

Danish is not the most beautiful language and pronunciation is on another level. When reading, you can derive many words from English or German, but when someone starts talking, it's over. If someone had read a sentence that was written on the wall during presentations, for example, I would not have been able to recognise it. Once I tried to describe a neighbourhood to my roommate, but he didn't understand me at all because I pronounced it so badly. Somehow half of each word is left out or swallowed when speaking. The Norwegians and Swedes I met always made fun of the way the Danes speak, saying that they talked as if they had a potato stuck in my throat.

*You are much more in explorer mode
when you haven't lived somewhere your
whole life.*

Do you have a favourite Danish word?

'Hej hej' – pronounced like 'hi hi' – just means 'bye', but it was also quite confusing for me. For example, when I said goodbye to professors or fellow students and just said 'bye', they often replied with 'hej hej'. I thought, 'Huh? I'm not coming, I'm leaving, so why are you greeting me?' It took me a few times to figure it out. But in general simple statements are a bit cuter that way.

'Tusinde tak' means 'thank you a thousand times' and is their version of 'thank you very much'. I also found the phrase 'Tak for i dag' to be a set phrase – It means something like 'thank you for the day'. So there are such nice sentences that you wouldn't say in German or would only rarely say.



Do you think you had to relearn how to live in Cologne when you came back?

No, not at all. When I came back and walked through the door of my apartment, it was an immediate feeling of 'I'm home.' There was no gap of 'Wow, I have to get used to the fact that I'm in Cologne again.' After one night I was back in my Cologne way of life. The first few weeks were nice, because you see all kinds of people again and tell them all about it. Repeating myself 50 times became annoying, but it was nice that everyone had questions. But after three or four weeks, everything had moved on and I noticed that I was struggling a bit. It hit me then that my time in Copenhagen was over. I kept loose contact with a few friends from there, but for sure it wasn't the same as if you would see them again every day like back then. I really missed it and, above all, I missed the city itself. My daily route to the university, the café where I always liked to sit, going swimming after school and stuff like that – It just doesn't work here in Cologne. I realised that it was a completely different life and that chapter is over. I am very grateful that I was able to do all that and that it was such a great time. I would have liked to have stayed for another six months, but I think it was a good thing that I didn't. I think the extreme up and down made it more special. Here you could also visit the Eifel on the weekends or go to Bonn for one day with your friends here, but you don't do it because of your daily-life pattern. That wasn't the case in Copenhagen, you enter explorer-mode when you haven't lived somewhere your whole life. I can really imagine returning to Copenhagen to live there again – perhaps for my masters degree...

ACROSS BORDERS:

Finding Belonging Abroad

BY SARA LOJA

Home, after all, is where my heart meets other hearts that beat to the same rhythm!

Home. Such a simple concept, but at the same time so profound and universal. For me, home is much more than a fixed location, a set of walls or an address where I receive packages. Home is a feeling, an invisible embrace that envelops our soul and whispers to us that we are where we should be. It's a feeling that transcends geographies, crossing seas and mountains, skirting borders and languages, and surprisingly reveals itself where we least expect it.

I'm Sara, a 21 year old who was born in Madeira, a small island in the Atlantic, shaped by the power of the ocean and embraced by the immensity of the sky, and of course with the best soccer star, Cristiano Ronaldo. Growing up there, an only child, with the sea as a constant backdrop, gave rise to an unstoppable desire to cross horizons and discover what else existed beyond that infinite blue line. Ever since I was little, the idea of exploring other worlds vibrated in my heart, as if each wave that kissed the sand brought stories of distant places, whispering

that out there were new horizons and, who knows, other houses.

It was with this thirst for discovery that, from an early age, I took part in youth exchanges, of which there have now been four, in different countries: Lithuania, Croatia, Germany and Cyprus. Each one brought a new city, new people and new themes to explore. However, one of them left a particularly deep impression: a small island in Croatia called Veli Iž. This exchange was a transformative moment for



me, and there, on that island surrounded by a calm, crystal clear sea, which in a way reminded me of my own little island, I found more than fellow travellers, I found a family.

In Veli Iž, I experienced one of the most challenging moments of my life. I felt emotionally fragile, disoriented, and didn't understand what I was really doing there. However, in that strange and unexpected context, I was surprised by Dalila, Ema, Hugo, Catarina and Marta who, without knowing me, were by my side with such sincere generosity and compassion that I was able to call that little piece of land and people home. There, I realised for the first time that home is the people, the support and the comfort they give us, especially in our most vulnerable moments.

From then on, I realised that I had a great capacity to open up to the world, to find a home in every new destination and people. About three years ago, I decided to leave my comfort bubble of Madeira on a more permanent basis and set sail to Aveiro, a charming Portuguese city, where I began my studies in design. I arrived in Aveiro with a mixture of

excitement and fear. It was the first time I had left the place where I was born and raised, leaving behind childhood friends and familiar landscapes. However, to my surprise, Aveiro soon began to welcome me like a second home. Its tiled streets, calm canals and the vibrant colours of the sunset over the estuary quickly became the backdrop to my days and a refuge for my nights. In Aveiro, I didn't just find a place to live while studying. I also found a community that would become an essential part of my life. In and around Associação Académica and GPT, I found people who inspire and support me, who make me feel that I belong there. It's with them that I share dreams, joys and even worries, and it's alongside them that I build the outline of a future family, a new home that I imagine building in this city.

Today, when I say 'Aveiro is my home' while singing the Hino Aveiro, I feel the weight and beauty of each word. I don't know whether it's a quirk of fate or the magic that the city emanates, but there the concept of home has transformed from a physical place to a full feeling. I know I haven't put down definitive roots yet, but I've already left invisible marks and received

so many others back. Every smile, every afternoon spent at Cua and Convívio, every trip to BE and Praça, every conversation under the stars, all these memories set my Casa in Aveiro, and it's all thanks to you: Rita, Pedro, Samuel, Bernardo, Gi, Lina, Guida, Maia, Laura, Duda, Gouveia, Afonso, Gomes, Iris, Joana and the rest!

However, my journey to transform the world at home didn't stop there. This year, I boarded on a new adventure: an exchange semester at KISD. Cologne, with its pulsating history and cultural diversity, immediately opened its arms to me. It's amazing how, in such a short space of time, I felt welcomed by this vibrant city and the people I met here. I quickly formed bonds and had experiences that connected me deeply to the place. KISD has become another home, a new stage of discovery where every day brings learning and bonds, a further proof that home can arise anywhere. All the bars, all the house parties, all the courses, all the kicker and table tennis competitions, all the trips and gossip make this place and these people one of my best homes. Thank you, Sofia, Diego, Anna, Riccardo and all the other members of KISD.

Reflecting on these experiences, I see that home is something built with our vulnerability, our openness and our ability to see the world through the eyes of others. Madeira, the island that gave me my first glimpse of the world, is still my safe haven, a place where I always return to regain my strength. However, this island has also given me the courage to discover new horizons, to risk losing myself and finding myself in other places and in other people.

I know that I can continue to find homes on new journeys, new exchanges and new friendships because I'm certain that the concept of home is malleable, like a flame that can be lit anywhere in the world, as long as there are true bonds to keep it alive.

Every city, every experience, and every face I've met along the way has taught me that you don't need a physical space for something to be a home. The feeling of belonging, of being welcomed, the genuine connection with the other is what transforms unlikely places and fleeting moments into permanent homes, in the memories I carry with me.

Today, if you ask me where my home is, the answer will never be one. My home is in Madeira, in the blue waters of the Atlantic; in Croatia, on a small island that brought me encouragement when I needed it most; in Aveiro, in the streets that welcomed me with a new family; and in Cologne, in the dreams I build.

Today, if you ask me where my home is, the answer will never be one.



LETTERS TO HOME

In this magazine, you'll find letters, written by KISDIES & other students that we gathered in an anonymous open call. Whether addressed to home, loved ones, or their future selves, these letters reflect on experiences abroad and offer honest insights into the highs and lows of life in a new environment. You'll find these letters scattered throughout the magazine.

- To me before moving abroad:

Hi there! It's me, future you.

There's one thing I want to tell you:

I'm so grateful to you. Thank you for not giving up and for your hard work. I truly appreciate that you trusted the process, never stopped

- believing in yourself, and enjoyed the whole journey of achieving your goals. I know it wasn't easy, but you did it! So many fascinating things await you in this new chapter of your life. It's going to be an absolutely interesting journey on the way to your big dreams. You will meet amazing people with the same interests as you. Strangers who will become like family.

- I promise it will be worth all your efforts. You'll find a new home. In this new home, you'll be yourself, in your own space.

Yes, there will be changes, of course. You'll face new emotions, and it'll be challenging at times. Sometimes you'll feel lonely. You'll miss your parents and friends.

That's absolutely normal. Allow yourself to feel all of this — it'll make you stronger. You'll get through it!

- And at the end of the day, you'll feel happy. You'll feel belong. It'll feel like home.

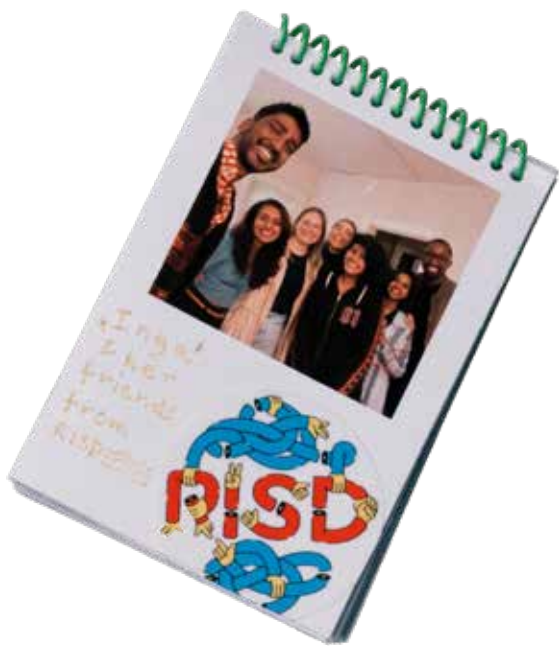
With love, your future self.

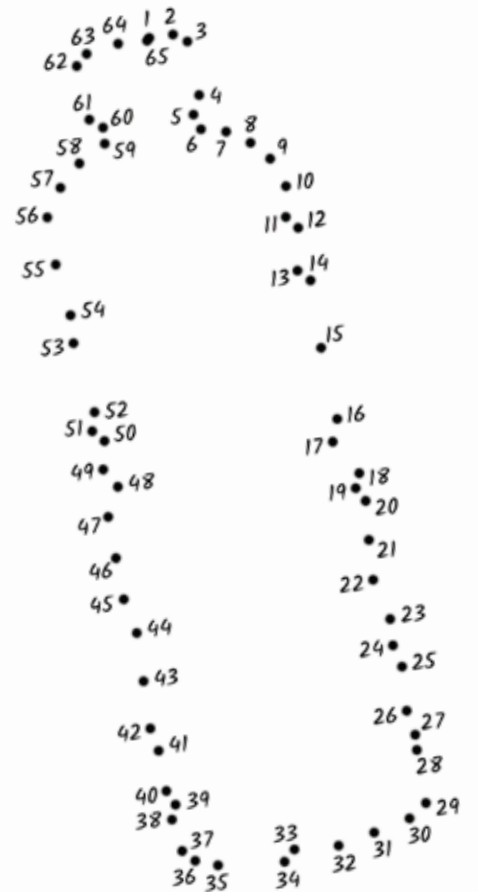
Letter to Home

The last place I consider my home and could actually send a letter to is the flat in St. Petersburg, where I lived when I was a child. Now, another girl lives there. She's about the same age as I was when my family left. Hi there! I hope you also feel at home and make beautiful memories. After having arrived in Germany as immigrants, no place ever really felt like home. Instead, it was and is always the people I love. Spending time with them is close to what it felt like to be in that old apartment: safe and secure, cozy, relaxed and beyond the need to assume a particular social role. It doesn't really matter where we are. Places have increasingly become less and less important the older I grew. At the same time, I realize what a privilege this is. Finding peace with not having a place attached to the feeling of "being at home" is neither a natural given nor an achievement. It is only possible if once life is not predominantly shaped by loss, grief, poverty and uncertainty. I wish life will grant you this privilege, and you'll get to cherish it as such. And I wish the place we both grew up at - that old flat with a long

corridor and rooms with squeaky floors - will be a place many more children are going to feel safe and happy in.

Warmest wishes, R.





A TASTE OF HOME.

BY MATILDA VIGANÒ

When I was packing to move here, one of the things I absolutely wanted to bring with me was a moka.

For those who aren't familiar, it's an Italian coffee maker, 'a metal pot to make coffee on top of a cooker', as an online dictionary puts it. As a true Italian, I love coffee, and I honestly believe our way of making it is the best. The moka is a kitchen essential in every Italian household, it feels like home, like family.

I knew that here it was going to be hard to find cheap and good coffee as much as I do in Italy. The issue, though, was that I knew my new apartment wouldn't have a gas stove but an induction one, so I needed a moka specifically for that. Luckily, I already had one that we'd bought for our vacation home, rarely used and perfect for an induction cooktop. Before leaving, since it also worked on the gas stove, I started using it daily so it could develop that patina that makes the coffee taste better. I was really looking forward to using it in my new kitchen, to be able to enjoy the taste of home.

I don't normally drink coffee in the morning, but I always drink it after lunch. Like a ritual somehow. I was also the designated coffee maker in my family. Now, with the moka ready, I only needed the main ingredient: The coffee itself. I didn't want to arrive here unprepared, so I went to my best

friend's mum's shop. She sells coffee, and a high quality one, so I could at least have something familiar for the first few weeks. She gifted it to me, making it feel even more special. I couldn't wait to also let my roommates taste coffee in the Italian way for the first time in their lives. So yeah, the moka was definitely the most meaningful thing I brought with me.

A few days after moving in, it was finally time to use my moka. That day I was really craving some good coffee. Those first days had been filled with emotions, and my parents had just left to go back home after helping me settle in. I was alone, finally starting to adapt to my new life, and couldn't wait to use my moka to make my apartment feel a bit more like home.

But then, the most unexpected and terrible thing happened. The induction stove didn't 'recognise' the moka, it started beeping and then shut off. I was devastated. Somehow, for me, that first coffee was going to make my new apartment finally feel like home. But it didn't work. I tried again and again, but the induction stove kept turning off. I talked about it with my roommates. They were also excited to finally try this coffee I had been bragging about so much. They'd been

curious from the moment I brought the moka into the kitchen for the first time. 'What is this weird thing?' they asked – the same thing I'd wondered when I saw their coffee machine. It's a very particular and colourful one that I had never seen before. At first, I didn't even realise that it was a coffee machine. Why was it not working? Desperate for a solution, I talked with my best friend again. I asked if her mum, the coffee expert, knew how to fix my dilemma. She said that I needed to buy a sort of adapter for the moka, a small aluminium plate to put under it on the stove that was going to make it work. Since then, I have it in my Amazon cart, but I'm here, almost two months after this terrible incident occurred, and I still haven't bought it.

When I was telling my roommates about this, seeing my disappointment, they didn't hesitate to offer me to use their strange, little and colourful coffee machine. They made me try some coffee from it. It was pretty bad, honestly. But even though it wasn't as good as what I'd have at home, somehow that taste has now become familiar. Since then, that's what home feels and tastes like to me in this new place.



How many pairs of shoes
did you pack?

4.11

How many people did
you have a crush on?

2.13

How many suitcases did
you bring?

2.47



EXPERIENCE
IN NUMBERS



What was the average
price for a local beer?

3.32€

What was your flat/dorm
rent cost per month?

436.11€

How much did you spend on average for a
mensa/cantina/lunch meal?

4.5€

What is the number of calls home
you made in the first week?

5.21

How many photos did you take
during your exchange?

3 550

How many nights per month
did you go partying past 3 am?

3.54

TRIGGER WARNING

*Dear reader, the following letter contains strong themes of **homesickness**, **loneliness** and **isolation** and could be distressing to some.*

If you, or someone you know, is struggling to cope and would like help and advice then there are free resources available to you as a student.

Kölner Studierendenwerk can connect you to a regular counsellor, free of charge.

Call **0221 168 8150** to arrange your first appointment.

Read more: www.kstw.de/en/counseling/psychological-counseling



Nightline is run by volunteers who will answer your call if you need to chat. On Thursdays from 9 p.m. through midnight, English-speaking volunteers are available and willing to listen or talk through whatever troubles you.

The free phone number is **0800 / 470 3500**

Read more: www.nightline-koeln.de



Since the day I GOT ON THAT AIRPLANE, I KNEW MY LIFE WOULD CHANGE. WHILE THE
CLOUDS ARE THE ONLY LANDSCAPE I COULD SEE, I REMEMBERED ALL THE TIMES YOU
MADE ME FEEL LIKE I COULD FLY.

I KNOW I LEFT EVERYTHING BEHIND AND MOVED TO A NEW COUNTRY, WITH NEW PEOPLE
AND A NEW CULTURE. THE THING IS I'LL NEVER BE AT HOME HERE. I MISS YOUR TOUCH AND
THE WAY YOU WERE MY HOME WHEN I FELT HOMELESS. I STILL CAN SEE US ON THAT
SATURDAY WHEN WE FINALLY FACED OUR FEARS, LIKE WE HAD NEVER DONE BEFORE.

I CAN'T FEEL HOME IN THIS COLD COUNTRY. HOW SHOULD I FEEL LIKE I'M IF THEY LAUGH
AT ME IN THE STREETS AND SCREAM AT ME ON THE BUS? I'M WRITING THIS IN MY
FAVORITE PLACE HERE, MY ROOM. THERE ARE STRANGE PEOPLE IN THE KITCHEN IN THIS MOMENT.
I LIVE WITH THEM, BUT I STILL DON'T KNOW MY ROOMMATES' NAMES. IT'S HARD TO TALK,
IT'S HARD TO GREAT CONNECTIONS.

I KNOW IT WAS MY CHOICE TO LEAVE MY COUNTRY, BUT I THOUGHT, THIS TIME, I COULD
FIND A HOME OVER THE HORIZONT. THIS IS ALWAYS MY MISTAKE. I BELIEVE THAT
MOVING OUT WILL CHANGE THINGS, BUT I'M THE ONE WHO NEEDS TO CHANGE.

IT'S PROBABLY MY FAULT, I HAVE NO ENERGY TO GO OUT, AND I ALWAYS THINK THE
PEOPLE WHO ARE NICE TO ME ARE JUST BEING POLITE.

I WASTE ALL MY DAYS LISTENING TO THE CAWING OF CROWS, OBSERVING THE
SLUGS PASSING ON THE SIDEWALK. I SEE PEOPLE LAUGHING IN THE STREET AND
SUDDENLY, I MISS YOUR LAUGHTER IN MY ROOM, IN MY HOUSE. WE WERE BOTH LOST
IN THE MIDDLE OF NOTHING, BUT WE WERE HAPPY NOW I'M HERE, IN THE MIDDLE
OF EUROPE, LIVING ANOTHER DREAM THEY CALL THIS PLACE "FIRST WORLD" BUT HOW
CAN IT BE IF I SEE ALL THESE PEOPLE BEGGING IN THE STREETS?

NOT SAD HERE, I JUST WANT YOU TO KNOW YOU ARE MY PERSON YOU ARE THE
ONE WHO CAN SAVE ME FROM MYSELF HERE IS DIFFERENT. NOBODY COMES TO
CALM ME DOWN WHEN I HAVE A CRISIS, NOBODY SAW WHEN I WAS WHITE
AS PAPER AFTER HITTING MY HEAD ON THE WALL SO HARD THAT THIS ENTIRE
SMALL HOUSE TREMBLED.

TIME IS PASSING QUICKLY, I STILL FEEL I DON'T BELONG. I SEE ALL THE
OTHER INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS TOGETHER, AND I CAN'T BE PART OF IT.

MY HANDS SHAKE, MY EYES AVOID CONTACT. I SEE THE PICTURES, I'VE NEVER
BEEN IN IT.

I ASK MYSELF, HAVE THEY FOUND A HOME IN EACH OTHER LIKE I FOUND
MINE IN YOU?

EMILIE

STARCK BENDSEN



DEN → AUS → ITA → GER

Emilie hails from Denmark, she's 24 with a love for tea and a knack for making any place her home. From Australia to Milan and now Germany, she's become an expert at moving – all with her cat along for the ride.

We sat down with her to learn how she builds a sense of belonging in new communities and what it's really like living between homes as a student.

Could you tell us where you're from and where you've been?

Sure. I grew up north of Copenhagen, where my parents live. When I was 19, I'd finished high school and moved to Australia for six months to study at a university.

After about half a year, I came back to Denmark, moved to Copenhagen, and lived there for about two and a half years.

Then I moved to Milan on an exchange. In the photos, I still had long hair, which I cut off after a couple of months. The first few months were freezing cold, and we were completely unprepared. I wore all the clothes I had and used all the blankets – it was still cold. The first half of the stay in Milan was just that. Then the second half was too hot with mosquitoes everywhere. It was extreme.

Did you always move in order to study?

Yes, it was always study-related, though sometimes also to be in a specific place. Studying there was a good way to get to know places. In Australia, it helped with getting a visa; in Copenhagen, it made affording the city easier. Italy was through an Erasmus exchange programme.

I moved there with my boyfriend, whom I'd met in Copenhagen, and we lived together in Italy. After that, we moved to Germany. I had my flat in Copenhagen, but when our lease in Italy was up, we stayed with his parents, who lived near Bielefeld, while we looked for a flat. I had sublet my Copenhagen flat, so I had to go back, pack everything up, and feed the cat. When we finally had found a place in Germany, my boyfriend rented a van and drove up to pick me, the cat, and all our things up.



Do you feel nervous moving somewhere now? Or are you just a pro at this point?

Not really nervous, but I hate packing. Packing even for a holiday stresses me out, so it's the worst part about moving. If I could move without packing, I'd be fine. But I actually just applied for another exchange and should be leaving in January.

Where to?

I applied to programmes in Sweden and the Netherlands. They give you very short notice, so I'm still waiting to hear back. But it's a 100% study-driven decision; I want to be in these programmes.

Why did you choose them?

They're interior architecture programmes, which I'm very interested in. At KISD, you can do a bit of everything, but it's nice to be somewhere focused on one specific thing if that's what you want to do.

That sounds exciting!

I hope so! I'm excited, but after applying, I felt a bit like, 'Oh, okay, well!' There are so many other things higher stress level-wise. The next step is just waiting to hear back in December. That is all I can do for now. I've wondered if I'll feel more excited or nervous when I know for sure.

Sometimes the realization hits you just a week before you go.

Right! It's like post-exam stress – when you forget to be nervous before the exam and then shake afterwards. I think I'll feel it once I'm on the train to a new country: 'Yep, here we go!'

How long have you been in Germany?

Since September two years ago, so almost two and a half years.

And why did you decide to come to KISD?

I also applied to a design school in Denmark but wanted more options, so Germany seemed like the obvious choice – free tuition and not too far. When we moved from Italy, my boyfriend and I wanted to be in the same area. He applied to universities in Germany, since knowing the language is helpful for his PhD and job prospects. I considered Germany, Sweden, and Norway but chose KISD because it offers more flexibility with course selection, unlike other schools with strict curriculums. It was a better fit for my goals. I knew what I wanted to do.

And you're a regular student, not an exchange student?

Yes, but my entire first semester, people thought I was an exchange student. It was a bit frustrating because I didn't get invited to any Erasmus events, all the exchange students had their little group, and it was challenging to make friends with other regular students who thought I'd just be leaving. I had to keep saying: 'No, I'm a regular student, I'm staying.'

Did that feeling of being in-between change over time?

Yes, coming back after the semester break, people recognised me and were happy to see me, and I felt the same. I hadn't realised how many people I was saying hi to in the hallway every day until that point. By then, they knew I wasn't leaving, which helped with making friends.



What would you say was your biggest 'oopsie' moment on your journey?

Oh, I've definitely had a few oopsie moments! I've lost my passport in some funny places, but I've luckily never really left it behind completely. Once, though, when we were moving to Copenhagen, I packed my passport in one of the boxes. We were on such a tight schedule, and things were a bit stressful. Felix had gone out to grab some more things, and I was alone with my mum when I suddenly realised, oh no, my passport is buried in that box. So, I had to crawl over all the packed stuff and dig it out. Once I found it, I just looked at my mum and said, 'We are never telling Felix about this.' I only told him two years later, and we both had a good laugh about it. But at the moment, it felt better to keep it between us.

So with moving again in January, do you sublease your flat, or how do you manage the logistics and funding?



So does Essen feel more like home than Cologne, even though you study here?

I've done it a few times, and I think I'm fairly responsible when it comes to money and finances, but I try not to worry about it too much. I have friends who stress a lot about budgeting – they'll make Excel sheets and track every little thing. For me, I just do a quick calculation in my head. If the numbers more or less add up, I go with it. And most of the time, it works out. If it doesn't, then I know I'll need to cut back somewhere, but it's usually manageable.

I'm hoping to sublease my flat this time, since I do have my own place now. My boyfriend and I actually live in Essen because that's where he studies. When we first moved to Germany, we got a flat in Essen since it was easy to find something there, and we already had all my furniture. I had enough for a whole flat from my place in Copenhagen, and he didn't bring much because he'd been living with me.

I knew I couldn't commute to Cologne every day – it's just too far. So for the first six months, I subleased a room in Cologne, which is where these photos are from. This one here is the view from my bedroom window, and the other one is from our kitchen. The view itself wasn't great, but I think it made for an interesting photo. The other side was much nicer, though!

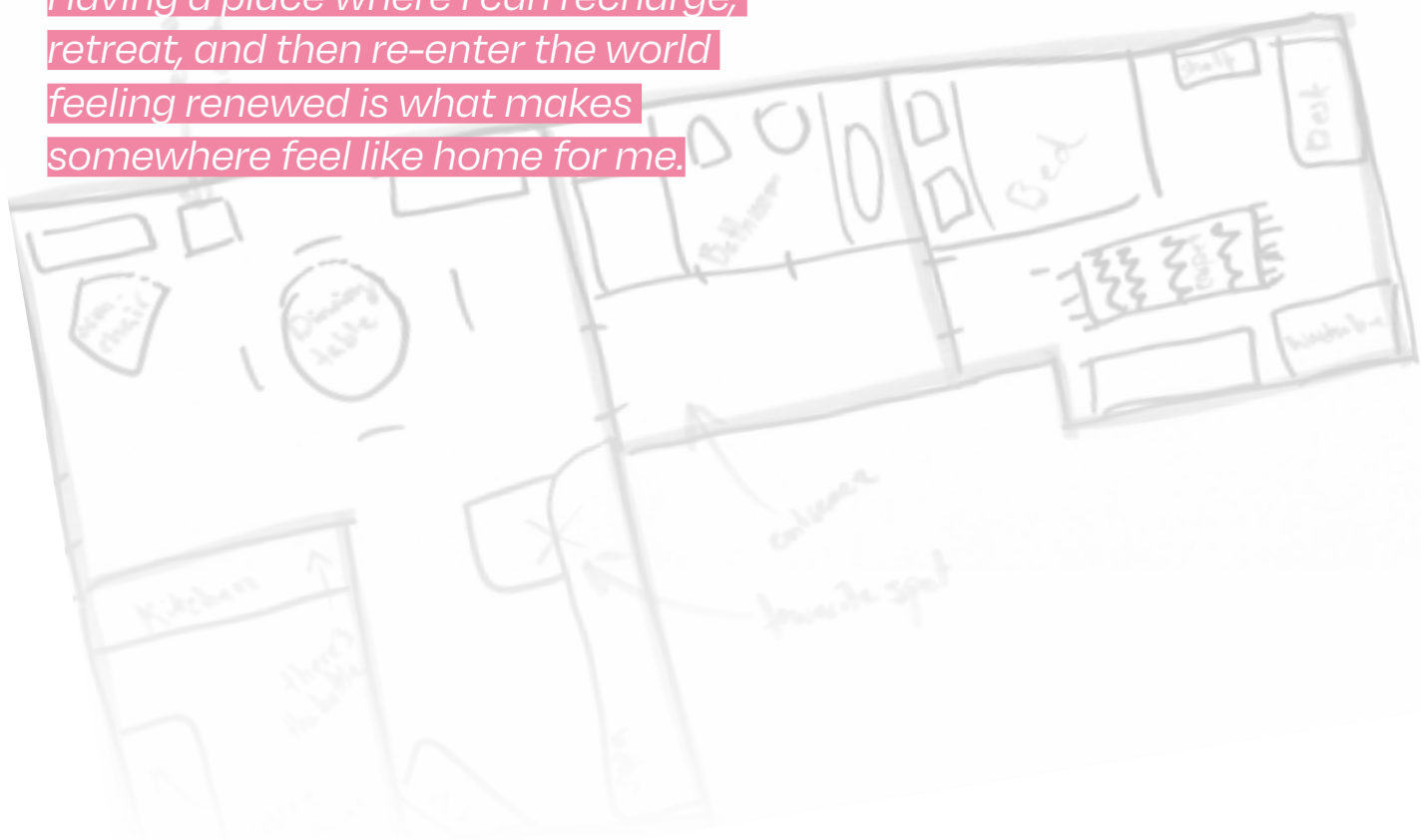


It's a bit up and down – it feels like a different experience, almost a different vibe. I feel more at home in Cologne, since I know my way around better. Here, I have more connections: places I enjoy going, people I know, and things to do. In Essen, my world feels more limited to just our flat. We do get out sometimes, and there are nice things to do in Essen too; it's not that it's horrible. But I don't have the same network or favourite spots there, so it feels less settled.

At the same time, the flat in Essen does feel like home, partly because it's where we have all our things.

In the end, both places feel like home, and yet neither fully does. Whenever I'm in Cologne, I find myself thinking about things I'd like to do if I were back in Essen, and then when I'm in Essen, I miss being in Cologne.

Having a place where I can recharge, retreat, and then re-enter the world feeling renewed is what makes somewhere feel like home for me.



What makes a place feel like home to you?

Yes, it's funny – I've moved around a lot and have multiple places I consider home, but I'm actually very much of a 'home person'. I spend a lot of time at home and don't go out much, so having a place where I can recharge, retreat, and then re-enter the world feeling renewed is what makes somewhere feel like home for me. That feeling doesn't necessarily need to come from a permanent home; it could be a friend's place or even a holiday home. I think I'm maybe more flexible about it than most people. That's also why I brought this tea – it's my favourite, and you're welcome to open it and smell it if you're curious! I bought it in Copenhagen, and I've always kept it on hand since my first flat there. It's my go-to comfort tea, especially if I'm feeling unwell, and it's so soothing.

Is it a typical Copenhagen tea?

Not at all! A friend introduced me to this tea – she's really into tea, and I hadn't tried anything quite like it before. Now it's my go-to comfort tea. I have numerous teas that I enjoy, but this one is the one I keep coming back to. It's part of how I make myself feel at home: I brew a cup, find a comfortable place to sit, and enjoy a moment of quiet. That's when I really feel at ease.

And if I need to tune things out because the room's too busy, I can just focus on my tea and settle in. Most of the things I own have little stories behind them – like my iPad, which I won in a lottery during my first week at university in Australia. And it's been so practical. Anytime I'm somewhere that doesn't have a TV, I can just pull up Netflix on the iPad, put on my headphones, and it's like my own little world. Add some tea and a blanket, and suddenly, anywhere feels like home.

Since you've been to so many places, do you have a standard phrase you learn in each language?

Oh, that's a good question! I think the first thing I focus on when moving to a new country is learning the essential phrases to get by in places like the supermarket. Lately, it's been about the bakery – especially in Italy and Germany. If I can walk into a bakery, place my order, and leave without switching to another language, I've done well!

But it really depends on where you are and your lifestyle. What you need to know can vary. For example, in Australia, I already spoke English, but then I had to pick up the regional slang, which can be pretty funny. I remember talking to the bus driver about buying a ticket, and sometimes even explaining why I wasn't going to buy one, but still ended up with a ticket anyway. There are always those little phrases that make a difference!

Have you been studying German since you came here?

Yes, as regular students, we're required to have a B1 level in German. If you don't have it by the start, you have until the fourth semester. But I don't know anyone who's had issues with it, though.

Do you have a favourite German word?

I like a lot of funny ones, but lately, I love 'einigeln.' It's such a cute word.

That's so specific – it's perfect for you!

I watch a lot of German TV as well, especially those shows where people renovate houses in the countryside. I remember there was an episode where someone used that word, and I had to ask what it meant. Once I found out, I really liked it!

*...and it's like my own little world.
Add some tea and a blanket, and
suddenly, anywhere feels like home.*

Do you see yourself settling down, or will you keep moving?

It's hard to say because I haven't really found a place where I'd settle for good yet. The idea of settling sounds nice, but I also feel like it's often influenced by job opportunities or study options. When I think about it realistically, I feel like I need to stay flexible about where I go.

I truly enjoyed it when I moved to Australia and Copenhagen, moving alone gave me a lot of freedom. Like, when I moved to Australia, I had a disagreement with a teacher and just thought, 'How far can I get from here?'. And that was the other side of the world. But now, since I've been living with my boyfriend for a few years, and we've moved in together, it's not just about me any more. It's a consideration for both of us – can he come with me, or am I coming back? Does he have something to do there, too? It makes it a much bigger decision, with more things that need to align.

Luckily, we both have the same mindset about this, so it's not a big issue. I think if one person wanted to settle and the other wanted to keep moving, that would be a problem, but for now, it's more about coordination.

Do you have a favourite place you'd like to return to someday?



We probably have a few readers who plan to go abroad. Do you have any advice for them?

I think it's tough because even if you go back to a place, it's never quite the same – it's not the same time, or the same people any more. So, for me, it's not really about going back. But my flat in Copenhagen definitely holds a special place in my heart. It was the first place that was truly my own. I had a flatmate, but I was the main tenant, and I got the flat when it was empty. I had to paint it, find furniture, and fill it up myself. It wasn't great in the beginning – some parts were a bit rough, especially with COVID going on. But the last six months I spent there were really special. I was so happy living there, especially with my little cat. That's when I also met my boyfriend, and I had two amazing flatmates. With COVID still around, we didn't go out much, so we spent a lot of time at home, playing board games, baking cakes, and watching TV together. We did a lot of game nights, which was so much fun. In my memory, that flat will always be a very special place. If I could visit it again, I would, but I haven't been back since I moved out.

I think what I often tell myself is that when you move somewhere new, the first week or maybe the first month can feel super exciting and full of energy because there's so much happening around you. But then, at some point, you hit a wall. Everything feels different, you feel far from home, you don't know anyone, and you're tired. You can even feel a bit lonely because you're still getting to know the place and people.

If you're part of a good programme that takes care of you, it can help ease this transition, but I think it's a pretty common pattern. It's good to know about it upfront, so you're not sitting there a month in, thinking, 'Oh no, this was a huge mistake, I should go home.' It does get better, but I remember before I moved to Australia, people told me about this curve – you start great, then things feel hard, but eventually, it gets better again. By the time you're really settling in, six months have passed!

Now that I'm going abroad for a study programme, it's a bit different. But if you're planning to move somewhere or build lasting relationships that go beyond just the people in a programme, you really need to stay for more than six months. It's only after that time that you really start feeling at home in a place.

INGÅ
GRÖNITZ



We chatted to Inga who travelled across the Atlantic to spend three months studying at RISD, a university in the United States. Despite familial connections to the country, she still faced complicated questions about funding and logistics. Read on to hear about life in one of the top art universities in America.

You went to the U.S. during your semester abroad. When were you at RISD?

I went in the winter semester of 2023. Although they don't call it a winter semester there, rather a fall semester, and it only lasts three months – from September to mid-December.

And were you only there to study, or did you also have time to travel around?

I travelled to the States in August and visited family in Colorado, then I travelled to Maine and finally Rhode Island to begin the semester. I travelled a lot after my semester, I spent time in New York, Tucson and even went to Montreal to see a friend from Cologne.

Why did you want to go to RISD?

I had a long list of schools that interested me and couldn't decide. Then I thought: What is the hardest school to get into? Where do I want to try first? And that was RISD. It just seemed like the best option. If that hadn't worked out, my second choice would have been Riga, if I had stayed in Europe.

It's also a matter of having the confidence to do it.

Maybe a rather sobering question: Did you get a scholarship? The USA is much more expensive than Europe.

Yes, well, I planned it at fairly short notice and therefore missed the deadline for a good scholarship from the DAAD (DAAD HAW International Stipendium). That would have been very helpful. In addition, for a long time I had no feedback at all as to whether I had been accepted. The application had to be submitted by 1st of March, and you should actually get an answer within a month. But I didn't hear anything for two months or more and I had already given up hope. I didn't make any financial arrangements because I thought I wouldn't get it. When I finally got the acceptance, I was a bit overwhelmed, especially when it came to financing. It's difficult to find support at such short notice. In the end, I received a partial scholarship – €1,000 – and took out two additional loans. Since I have US citizenship, I didn't have to show the €10,000 that you normally have to have in your account for a visa.

That made it easier. But I had to cover the cost of living myself, and it's extremely high there. If you live in a dormitory, you're automatically included in the 'meal plan', and these room and board costs add up to \$8,600 for one semester alone. To cover that, I took out a loan from the DAKA, which had quite good conditions, and a student loan from the KfW, which also offered better conditions than other loans. Nevertheless, I was unsure whether spending so much money on it was the right thing to do. But now, after the experience, I can say that it was the right decision. The regular tuition fees there are incredibly high – 80,000 dollars a year. Students there often have huge debts when they graduate. We are privileged in Germany and at KISD for having these wonderful partner schools and to be able to go there for a semester without having to pay these fees. It was the right decision for me, but ultimately it's up to each person to decide for themselves. It's also a matter of having the confidence to do it.



When other students hear about it, it probably seems daunting – the sums are really high. In retrospect, would you have done anything differently financially or do you have any tips for others who want to go to the USA but don't know how to finance it?

That's a good question. My biggest tip is to apply early, especially for scholarships. There is the DAAD scholarship, and in theory there are also the Fulbright scholarships, which have even earlier application deadlines. Anyone who knows early on in their studies that they want to go to the U.S. should immediately research all the deadlines. It is very important to find out the requirements early on and to talk to the person responsible for coordinating studies – like Lisa in our case. And don't be afraid to ask questions or to bring yourself up in conversation.

One point that is often overlooked: for many scholarships, you have to apply before you have even applied in the U.S. This is a bit of a catch that no one actively explains to you. You have to find out about it yourself and pay attention to it.

And regarding the cost of living: Yes, it seems immensely high at first. But if you compare it to the costs you will have later as a working person, or if you are used to living in a more expensive city, it puts it into perspective. You have to be aware that it is a lot of money, but in the big picture it is manageable.

You mentioned that you have U.S. citizenship. Have you been to the U.S. before? And was there a big cultural difference, or did it feel rather normal?

Yes, I have been to the US before. But I would say that studying there was not that much of a cultural change. There are a lot of people at RISD who are not from the US. That makes it very international, similar to here. In fact, I had a lot more contact with students who were not from the U.S..

Did you still have difficulties settling in?

Not really. I think it's also different from Germany. At American universities, a lot of attention is paid to making sure you're doing well mentally. Maybe because it's generally more stressful than here. For example, there's a team of psychologists and therapists that you can turn to if you're feeling down. Even everyday things like eating are taken care of, because you are included in the meal plan. And changes in politics are discussed openly. Teachers actively address it, and want to make sure the students feel heard. I have never experienced that in Germany. The students there are also younger. Here in Germany, specifically at KISD, most students are in their mid-20s. At RISD the oldest person in the junior year of the BA programme was 22, and most were around 20. They all start together with an intensive foundation year. Which I really don't know how they survive it – it's super hard. After that, they specialise, for example in graphic design, illustration, video or photography, and then continue their studies for another three years. The bachelor's programme there takes four years in total. They often stay in their year. Only sometimes do particularly talented people from the bachelor's programme take master's courses, for example in typography.



But you were also in the graphic design department, right?

Back to our topic of 'home'. You probably lived in a dorm room, right? What was that like for you?

Exactly. There are also courses that cross subject and year boundaries. That's when you come into contact with others. But in most courses you keep to yourself. There's hardly any team-work there though, you almost always work alone.

Yes. I arrived, dropped my stuff off and cried for a while. But not because the room was bad, more a mixture of many things. I was suffering from extreme lovesickness, and then I arrived and thought: 'What am I doing here? I'm completely alone!' The room itself was... well, carpeted, no windows to open, just an air conditioner. It felt so impersonal. There were three of us sharing the flat, and at first I didn't know how I would cope with it feeling that impersonal. But then I quickly made myself at home. I put up lots of posters and tried to create an atmosphere that made me feel more comfortable.

For me, home is community.



Was that the first step for you in making your room cosy?

Yes, for sure. You have to organise everything yourself. Bed linen, duvets, things like that. On the day I arrived, there was an organised trip in a school bus to a large store, and I went along with the others.

I bought duvets, cleaning supplies and the most necessary things there. That helped me feel a bit more comfortable right away. Later, I went to a second-hand store and got a pot, a pan, bowls and other basics, and then I hung up a lot of posters, including some things I had created myself. That made the room more personal.

What is most important to you to feel comfortable in a place?

Definitely the people. When I arrived, I really had an identity crisis and wanted to fly back home immediately. But then I went out and chatted with a fellow international student on this shopping trip. I immediately felt better – just the feeling that I can talk to others. My roommates were also really lovely. One of them didn't move in until much later, and we thought she wasn't coming at all. She told us that she was so afraid of living with strangers that she stayed with her sister in Boston for a while.

I tried to do something with them every week, whether it was cooking together or a movie night. I even taught them beer pong! Over time, it started to feel like home, especially when we had those moments together. Even when my flatmate sang at two in the morning while she was doing the dishes, it was nice.



If you had to describe 'home' in three words or one sentence, what would you say?

For me, home is community. Being accepted for who you are and doing things together – that's what makes a home for me.

How did you feel when you left Germany?

I was really nervous. Especially about going to RISD. I knew all those videos of people showing off their awesome portfolios to apply there, and I just thought, 'Do they even know who they've accepted?'. I was significantly older than most of the other students and felt that I should already be at a completely different stage of life. I really wondered if I could keep up.

But then I went out and chatted with someone on this shopping trip. I immediately felt better – just the feeling that I can talk to others.

At some point, I just stopped telling people
my real age, because I had seen those
suprised looks so often.





Did you feel that being older than the other students was a disadvantage for you?

Not at all. They didn't even notice most of the time. I was kind of undercover – I just pretended to be 21 for the three and a half months. Some people even asked me if they should buy alcohol for me. At some point, I just stopped telling people my real age because I had seen those surprised looks so often. When I told a friend before I left, she was really taken by surprise.

Did anything really unpleasant happen to you during your time there? Or what would you advise someone going to RISD now?

Unpleasant? Not really. But I could have done a few things differently. For example, I should have filled out the application earlier, and I should have, um, maybe paid more attention to getting enough sleep.

Let's move on to your objects. What have you brought with you today?

It was actually quite difficult for me to choose, because I have often wondered what 'home' actually means to me. I have been to many places and often feel that I can quickly feel at home. I am not really rooted to one place. For me, home is wherever I can put my things. But I always have a few things with me – for example, tiger balm. It helps me to relax and fall asleep better. It's a little ritual that helps me feel at home. Then I brought a small photo album with me. Rhode Island became a home for me – mainly because of the people I met there. My little friend group gave me this album before I left.

What I liked so much about Providence is that everything and everyone is so close together. You could spontaneously go to the cinema or meet up with people. I quickly felt like I was part of a community. I couldn't actually hide at all there. Everyone knew me! It took me a long time to understand how I knew some of these people. Some were fellow students from classes, but with over 100 new faces, it was totally overwhelming at first. Some would say to me, 'Have you done the homework yet?' – and I had no idea which class it was for.

And don't be afraid to ask questions or to bring yourself up in conversation.



What else did you bring with you?

Anja, a very good friend of mine, gave me this. She put it on my desk after we talked about what home means to us.

Anja grew up in Serbia and came to the U.S. when she was 14. She made a little zine about what home means to her. She had taken German classes at Brown in the year prior, and I had studied Russian and Bulgarian for a while and knew the Cyrillic alphabet. And I learned Russian and knew the Cyrillic alphabet, so we wrote messages to each other in German – but in Cyrillic script! That was kind of our thing

Were you similarly nervous when you went to the Baltic Analog Lab Summer school 2024?

Yes, totally. I was really nervous because I didn't know anyone else who was going. My travel plans were a complete mess – I booked everything way too late. I could have flown directly from Cologne to Riga, but instead I took the train to Copenhagen and flew from there to Riga.

At the airport in Copenhagen, I happened to meet another participant. She asked me: 'Do you do media art? Have you been to any film festivals?' And I just thought: 'I'm really not a well-known artist. What am I doing here?'



For me, home is wherever I can put my things.

Did this imposter syndrome then subside after a while?

Yes, definitely. It really helped to get to know the other participants and talk to them. Many of them had similar insecurities. For example, I wasn't the only one who had never made an analogue film – there were quite a few others in the same boat, and I am an artist, after all. I applied and was selected – that makes sense. The more I got to know the others, the more this feeling subsided. I have grown very fond of the people there.

I was also able to show one of my short films. At first I wasn't sure if it was good enough, but the team encouraged me to show it. The feedback was really positive, and that was so valuable to me. This experience showed me how important it is to step out of your comfort zone, even if you feel nervous or unsure beforehand.



Finally, would you consider having more than one home?

Yes, definitely. I don't think home is something you find outside of yourself. I think you carry home with you.

RUMAH

EV

HEIM

NY

HEJMO

ZUHAUSE

CASA

KUMBA

DOM

HEIMILI

HJEM

OTTHON

ETXE

HOME

HUIS

GIDA

UMBANI

KODU

LLAR

MAISON

DOMOV

HOGAR

NAMAI

GCHAR

HEM

KOTI

VALE

WHERE IS HOME?

BY LISA NIKELOWSKI

Home in Transition: The Emotional Journey of Migration and the Search for Belonging

Migration is a journey that goes beyond crossing physical borders. It's a profound shift that transforms our understanding of home, belonging, and self. Whether we move for study, work, or out of necessity due to war and conflict, migration brings with it a series of emotional stages. You carry the same hope for a new beginning but must also face the challenge of navigating an unfamiliar world.



The Emotional Stages: Excitement, Frustration, Adjustment, and Acceptance

In the beginning, migration often brings a sense of excitement. The decision to leave one's home country is filled with anticipation – the promise of new experiences, growth, and opportunity. For those studying or working abroad, the excitement may come from the thrill of exploring a new culture, learning a new language, or meeting people from around the world. For others, especially those fleeing hardship or war, the initial excitement is mixed with relief – a chance to escape danger, a hope for peace and stability.

But as this initial excitement fades, a new phase often sets in: frustration. Once the reality of everyday life in a new country becomes clear, you can find yourself confronted by unexpected difficulties. Simple tasks – like grocery shopping, navigating public transit, or even understanding basic signs – can feel exhausting in a foreign environment. Refugees and other forced migrants, in particular, may face complex bureaucratic systems, language barriers, and

even social stigmas, all of which make adapting to their new surroundings a struggle.

Adjustment and Slowing Down: The Cost of Adaptation

As time passes, however, the adjustment phase begins. Here, no matter your background, you start to find moments of familiarity and routine. Perhaps you discover a favourite café, start forming friendships, or get used to the rhythm of their new environment. But adjustment doesn't mean that life suddenly becomes easy. Basic tasks still take more time and energy, and productivity often slows, as simple things that once felt automatic now require intense focus. This can feel frustrating, especially for those who feel pressured to succeed, to adapt quickly, or to prove the worth of their decision to leave home. This adjustment often includes rebuilding an entire life, finding housing, education, and work, sometimes while still dealing with the trauma of past experiences.

The Search for Home: Building Belonging Amidst Loss and Longing

The stage of grappling with loss. Leaving home – whether by choice or necessity – brings with it a profound sense of absence. The familiar places, the friends, the routines left behind become memories that we carry, and sometimes these memories are tinged with guilt. Whether it be guilt for leaving your families, or the feeling of having abandoned loved ones in danger or leaving behind a culture and community that shaped you. The weight of this guilt can be heavy, and learning to reconcile it with the pursuit of new dreams is often one of the hardest parts of the migrant journey.

This search for belonging and home is especially complicated. You may feel caught between two worlds – missing your home country yet knowing that in some cases it may no longer be safe to return. Home becomes a bittersweet memory, something that cannot be reclaimed in its original form. For those migrating for study or work, the sense of dual belonging may be less painful but still complex, as they build a new life without fully letting go of their roots.

Acceptance and Redefining Home

In time, you may reach a place of acceptance. It's not about losing or replacing one's original home but finding a new kind of belonging. Home begins to expand – it becomes something that can be found in small moments of connection, in relationships, and in the familiar routines we build. This acceptance can be a way of honouring both the loss and the resilience that brought a safer place. Or the acceptance might mean feeling at ease with carrying a dual identity, belonging both to the country they came from and the one they've moved to.

Migration as a Path to Growth and Resilience

Migration, at its heart, is both an internal and external journey. No matter the reason for leaving, it demands courage, resilience, and a willingness to confront new aspects of oneself. Migration allows us to expand our definition of home – to see it not as a single place, but as a feeling, a state of belonging that we carry within us. For some, this journey is about survival and safety; for others, it is about growth and exploration. But for all, migration changes us. We learn to navigate different worlds, to balance identities, to hold both the joy of new experiences and the pain of what we've left behind. In this journey, we come to realise that home is no longer just where we started, nor only where we are now, but a space we create within ourselves – a place we can carry, wherever life may lead.

good afternoon. MIT's 'Preparing for the Mobility' learning agreement recommends I write a letter from myself to myself, so here that is. ¹

What do I want to get out of my exchange? How do I hope to grow from this experience? How can I return six months older and wiser? Time's inevitable machinations hold the answers to these questions, but for now all I can do is sit and think.

I guess the thing that I find myself wanting the most is a network of meaningful and caring relationships with people from interesting corners of the world. This I think is a response to the sense that my friendships here aren't filling my cup in the ways that I quite want them to. I feel that I've got some lovely people circulating here in Melbourne, but it's very much time to leave the cosy confines of the inner north and

laufe gern* in parts unknown. My ² brain feels somewhat undernourished and I have a thorough desire to relish new feelings and experiences. I want to write about them and learn from them. I want to wholly apply my brain to something that feels like me. I want to do things for new people. I want to cook for new ~~people~~ friends. I want to drink with a hilarious gaggle of interested humans. I want to take a wide range of lived experiences and channel them into a piece of work that changes the world in some small way. I want to confi my brain in languages, materials, aromas and more in a wondrous concoction of the new. I want to find a renewed appreciation for my home and I want to come back feeling like I have new energy and a path for myself.

I know that my exchange will exceed these expectations in some ways and will also fall them in others, and that's OK. I'm expecting some brilliant moments of inspired creativity and to laugh really, really hard. I'm expecting to have some times when I miss home and I miss Pedro and I miss the simplicity of Melbourne. I'm expecting a mixed bag and that

sounds perfect to me.

This is all I have for now. ³

*laufe gern - Translated from German.
verb. To walk happily/well

LUKAS
RUPPERT



Lukas is a 32 year old student from KISD with a penchant for adventure. During his ninth semester he chose to study in Cali, Colombia.

Originally attracted by its dangerous reputation, Lukas later discovered a warm community and friendships for life. Read our interview with this intrepid traveller to learn about his experience in the salsa capital of the world.

How did you feel before leaving?

How did your friends and family feel?

I prepared myself by trying to learn Spanish and by improving my English. I went to language classes for one and a half years and I trained with Duolingo. I also participated in the course on intercultural competence by Lisa Janßen to understand what to keep in mind when cultures merge. I prepared myself as much as I could, so I felt safe.

However, my Spanish wasn't very good. My parents were worried about Colombia, especially Cali, which was, a long time ago, considered the most criminal city on earth. That was one of the reasons I wanted to go there – because I thought that if I could survive there, I could survive anywhere. Now I'm proud of myself for handling it and having such a good time. I met so many nice people and my time there completely changed my perspective of Colombia. It has the most beautiful nature. Colombia has the highest variety of plants in the world. The culture of the people is so friendly and warm. For example, when I asked where a classroom was, they didn't just tell me to go in a certain direction. No, they almost took me by the hand, brought me there, and gave me their phone number, saying, 'If you have any other questions, call me, and I'll help you.' Everyone was so helpful and kind.



Which semester were you in when you went?

I went in my ninth semester. I stayed there for one semester plus one more month travelling through Colombia, followed by another month through Panama.

Would you have liked to stay longer, or was one semester enough?

No, one semester was enough for me although I think in the second semester, my language skills would have greatly improved because everything was in Spanish!

And what was the reason you originally chose Columbia?

To challenge myself, learn a new language, and go to a completely new country. I worked on a cruise ship and visited many different countries and places, but never America. So, I chose Colombia. The university there also focuses on industrial design, which aligns with my interest in product design and conceptual design. It offered a different perspective on my field of study.

It made people realise I didn't want to be an outsider – I was trying to connect with them.



*Which program did you go with?
Was it a partner university?*

Yes, it was a partner university. It was part of the university's programme where we can choose from partner institutions. I ended up there through the ICESI exchange programme.

What was the first sentence someone local taught you?

In Colombia, they speak Latin American Spanish, but in Germany I learnt European Spanish. I think Colombian Spanish is much easier actually – they use fewer words and speak more clearly. In Cali, they speak very slowly but further north towards the Caribbean, I found it harder to understand. When I arrived in Cali, I learned some local slang from young people, and using those words as a joke helped make conversations much easier. It made people realise I didn't want to be an outsider – I was trying to connect with them.

*Where did you stay during the semester?
What was the first thing you did to make yourself feel at home?*

I was asked beforehand if I wanted to stay with locals, other international students, or a mix. In the end, I stayed in a large student house, which was really nice because it housed both groups. The house was very close to the university and I was picked up from the airport and driven to my new student flat. The very first thing I did to make myself feel at home was smoke a cigarette – haha!



Were there moments in Colombia when you felt as at home as you do in Germany?

I felt very welcome. I arrived two weeks before the semester started, so I had time to get to know people in the student flat and build relationships. I created a sort of family-like space with the people around me. They showed me around and made me feel comfortable. The university also organised trips to clubs, museums, and other places to familiarise us with the culture. After 6 months I felt very close to the place, but it was never quite 'home-home' because I'm very attached to my family in Germany.

How would you define 'home' in three words?

Warmth, close people, and safety.

Do you think you could have multiple homes?

Yes, I think you can have multiple homes. When you can adapt to any environment, embrace new cultures, and open up to people, anywhere can feel like home. But my heart will always want to return to Germany because of the people I love here.

Was it hard to transition back to Germany?

It was a much harder cultural shock coming back to Germany than arriving in Colombia.

I was used to the poverty there – the stark divide between rich and poor. In Germany, everything seems to be structured at first sight. People are dressed smartly and everything feels expensive. When I arrived at the airport, my mum called and asked what I wanted to eat. I was so overwhelmed by everything I told her, 'I can't answer that right now. I'll call you back.' It took some time to readjust to German culture.

Do you think you faced any challenges as a European?

Everyone immediately assumed that I'm really rich because I'm European which meant I sometimes struggled to integrate. I tried to connect with people on the streets and those from poorer backgrounds because they are far more numerous than the wealthy, but the university I attended was a private institution, so the students there were mostly privileged and had to pay high fees, much more than we do here in Germany.

What differences stood out most between Colombia and Germany?

The safety. In Germany I don't worry about walking alone at night but in Colombia, when it gets dark, people don't go out – it's too dangerous. However, Colombia's social values are inspiring. People there support each other, even if they have very little. For instance, you will see people opening a bag of sweets and selling single chewing gums on the street. People don't buy it because they want chewing gum – they buy it because they know the seller needs the money. It's such a nice, supportive act.

You said you prepared yourself for culture shock before going to Colombia. Do you think this preparation helped?

Yes, it helped me feel safer and more confident about going. It was a lot of preparation – I didn't know that most people in Colombia don't speak English! Before going I met some Colombians here in Germany who introduced me to the culture. Also, Colombia is a very warm country – not just in terms of weather, but the people are warm-hearted, which made it easier for me to adjust.

*They're happy with what they have and
make the best out of it. It's a lesson
I brought back with me.*



I'm keen to explore more places and learn about different ways of life.

Was there a time during your exchange when you thought, 'I can't do this' or wanted to go home?

No, not once. I enjoyed it from the first moment. I never felt homesick. I had a lot of fun exploring a new culture and meeting so many new people. I did miss my family, but it wasn't enough to make me want to leave.

What do you miss about Colombia?

The people. They're so friendly, and open-minded. They are willing to share, even if they don't have much. I also miss the simple life. People there are not as focused on material things as in Germany. They're happy with what they have and make the best out of it. It's a lesson I brought back with me. I miss Colombia's nature and the climate there too. German winters are definitely too cold.

What advice would you give someone thinking about studying abroad in Colombia?

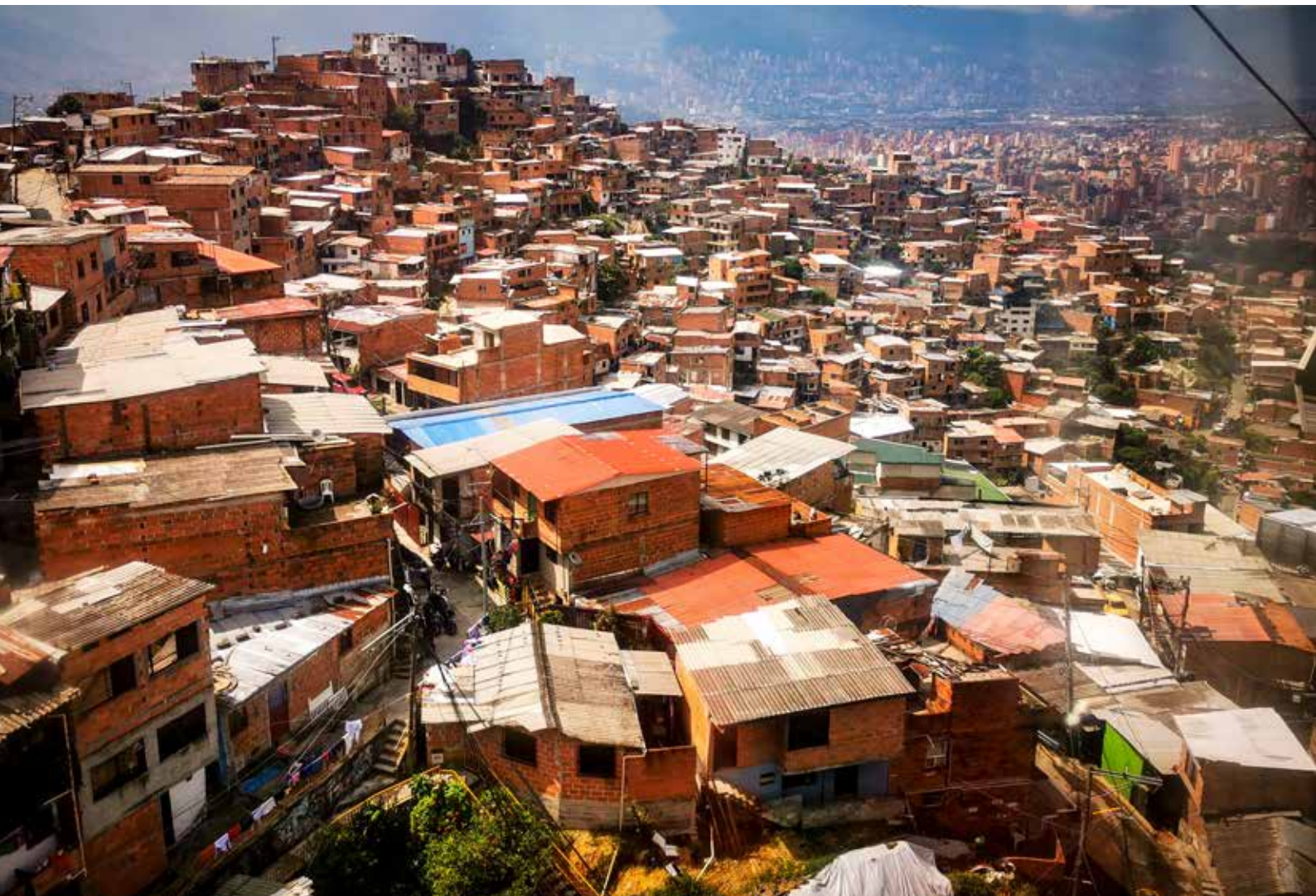
Don't be afraid. It's not as dangerous as people say, but you do have to be cautious and aware of your surroundings. You should learn the language before going because it will make your life much easier. Go with an open mind and be willing to adapt to a different culture. Colombians love foreigners who try to integrate and appreciate their culture. If you have the chance, travel within the country – it's stunning.

How has this experience influenced your view of the world?

It has broadened my horizons. I now see how differently people live and how happy they can be, even with less. It's made me more grateful for what I have and more open to other cultures. I also have a better understanding of how important it is to help one another. That's something I'd like to bring more into my own life and community.

And what about your view of Germany?

I appreciate Germany much more now, especially the safety, structure, and opportunities we have here. But I also see areas where we can improve, like being warmer and more welcoming to people from other countries. Colombians showed me how much kindness and openness can make a difference.



Did you bring back anything special from Colombia?

I think the most meaningful thing I brought back was a tattoo, as well as some photographs I took there. Colombia's nature is stunning, and it made me reflect on how we all share the responsibility of protecting our environment. So, while I didn't bring back many physical items, I returned with a stronger appreciation for nature. I also left most of my belongings there, including large furniture I had built myself, which I gifted to a friend.

Did you discover any new favourite products or dishes in Colombia?

Yes, I learnt a recipe for Arepas that I now share with my family and friends. It's made with maize flour and cheese, served with tomato sauce. It's a very simple, affordable dish. My Colombian girlfriend at the time taught me how to prepare it, and we often made it together. I now cook it for friends as a way to share my experience with others.

Would you do it again? What would you say to convince someone else to take part in an exchange programme?

Absolutely, I'd do it again! Though next time, I'd love to visit another country nearby, like Ecuador, to experience a similar but distinct culture. I'm keen to explore more places and learn about different ways of life. I was the second design exchange student in this longstanding university partnership, and I learnt so much. The professors there were incredibly kind and helpful, it's a life-changing experience that everyone should have if they get the chance.

Would you recommend this experience to others?

Yes, I'd recommend it 100%. It's not just about academics – it's about personal growth, learning, and understanding different perspectives.





RICCARDO
COSSU



ITA → UK →

SWE → GER

After growing up in Sardinia, Riccardo moved to London to learn English and fulfill dreams of becoming a footwear designer. Now 27 years old, Riccardo arrived at KISD as a MEDes student with a colourful journey behind him.

From Glasgow to Stockholm, discover how moving abroad shaped his creativity, taught him resilience, and led to deep friendships with people across the globe.

Tell us about where and why you moved abroad?

When I was 18, I moved from Sardinia to London. I dreamed of becoming a footwear designer and although I could have pursued it in Italy, I wanted an international experience and London felt like the place to start.

In London I discovered the Glasgow School of Art, where I studied for two years. As part of the MEDes programme I then spent a year in Stockholm, Sweden, which was an incredible experience, and now I'm here at KISD.

How did you feel before leaving home? Has the feeling of leaving changed after moving several times?

So the first time I moved, I was very young. I come from Sardinia, which is a very big island, but there are not many people living there. My hometown is 25,000 people, it's called Iglesias and when I moved from there to London, it was a shock. But I felt I had no option. I didn't feel completely at home in Sardinia – It's not a place with big opportunities and, if you have a dream, it feels impossible to achieve it. So that's why I left. I had to learn how to live in the world outside of where I grew up, I had never experienced different cultures but I knew that it was important to me to try. The hardest thing at first about moving to London was learning to live surrounded by a lot of people. Eventually I kind of fell in love with that but to begin with I was very, very shy... I wasn't able to speak, I would have never been able to take an interview like this many years ago. After London, I think I liked myself. I felt home. I met people with similar interests and I discovered that the world is full of fascinating stories. Now, after living in four different countries, I don't feel tied to a single physical home, nor do I think I'd want one. I still want to move around, discover new places, and connect with people and their stories.

Now, after living in four different countries, I don't feel tied to a single physical home, nor do I think I'd want one.

When you left for the first time, it sounds like it was a big change. How did your family, friends, and community feel about you leaving?

As many people know, Italy is a country in which the family comes first, but I wasn't as connected to them as they were to me. It was actually hardest for me to leave my grandparents, but my parents were very supportive.

As for friends, it wasn't as difficult because I found it hard to socialise back in Italy. I didn't really have a close friend group that I saw every day, which was part of why I wanted a fresh start in a new place where I didn't know anyone.

Leaving was still challenging, especially since I went to London not only to work but also to learn English so I could eventually attend university. My first job in London was at a restaurant, and I remember crying on my breaks. In fact, I only lasted three or four days because, one lunch break, I just left and didn't return – I called my mom, crying, wanting to come home.

But about a week later, I found another job, and I stayed in London for four years.

Where do you see yourself more long-term?

I think the place I would go back to and live in again would be London. Out of everywhere in Europe, even if technically it's no longer European, I think London offers the most opportunity. Whatever you want to pursue, you can make it happen there. It's not just a cliché from movies or books – London truly feels like a place where anything is possible. So yes, London would be the place I'd call home.



How would you define 'home' in three words?

I'd say friends, opportunities, and... that last one is tough. I guess opportunities, for now, are what makes somewhere feel like home to me.

Which items have been most important for you to keep with you through all your moves?

So definitely my sketchbooks, that's a thing I always take with me, also some letters from friends I met around the world. I frequently worked in hospitality, and often when I moved there would be a goodbye message or something cute on the till roll. I keep things like this and I always carry them with me because it feels like I'm taking the positivity of these people with me, and these are the people and things I care about most.



So, you chose to go to a university that was part of the MEDes programme. Was that because you knew you wanted to travel, or was it a mix of wanting to travel and being interested in the programme itself?

The main reason I chose the MEDes route was that I wanted to become more than just an Italian footwear designer, I wanted to have a wider world view. Many successful designers don't actually study fashion formally to launch their own companies and careers so I wanted to study design in a broader context.

MEDes gives me the chance to study in two different countries, and I was already living away from Italy so there was no doubt I would experience at least three new cultures and design programmes. I knew that I would connect with people from around the world, which I believed would be more valuable than just learning technical shoe design.

As it turned out, I actually learned how to make shoes while in Sweden, so it felt like a double win!

Do you find that your Italian heritage influences your design decisions and your passion for it?

I don't know, but I believe that when you grow up in Italy you are surrounded by beautiful things and also a lot of judgement. I think this can push you to think about everything you do, how you present yourself, what you wear – always paying attention to detail.

This experience naturally led me to design. It's like you're unconsciously producing and creating, not necessarily knowing why but doing it anyway. It's a way of living, a mindset where you're always working toward something aesthetically pleasing, almost without even realising it.

So you moved to London in order to learn English, what was that process like?


I wanted to study in English, so moving to England in order to learn the language fast made sense to me. At first I only knew the basics – things like ‘Have you got’ or ‘Do you have,’ and just a handful of words for very basic communication. I worked full-time in a restaurant, often 12 hours a day, and every Tuesday and Thursday, I’d go to a part-time English course at a local college. I learned there and also practised with some Italian colleagues who would help translate for me.

It was a fast and intense way to learn, but not knowing the language shouldn’t hold you back from moving to a new country. You go into ‘survival mode,’ and you find ways to communicate, whether it’s through body language, pointing to objects, or even using technology like Google Translate to help you say what you need.

When you go back to Sardinia, do you feel like you have to relearn how to live there?

I only see my parents ten days a year. It is usually twice, for five days, maybe once in summer and once for Christmas, but usually summer. I like being there, but I struggle after two days because Sardinia has a very, very slow pace of life. Now that I’m used to meeting so many people, I struggle to stay there. In fact, this summer actually is the first time in eight years that I stayed there for the whole summer.

My mum almost killed me. I kind of entered this weird depressive mood because I didn’t have all the things that I’d got used to, the mentality of ‘Do whatever you want because nobody’s thinking about you’ just isn’t true there. In Italy, you are often judged.



It was a fast and intense way to learn, but not knowing the language shouldn't hold you back from moving to a new country.

*To be honest, I hate being in my room.
I try to avoid staying in the house as much
as possible and I feel home when I'm
somewhere surrounded by people.*

*Do you feel more at home away from
Sardinia?*

I'm always more home when I'm outside of Sardinia, yeah.

*How does your experience at KISD compare
to your time in Glasgow and Stockholm?*

When I was in Glasgow, it was my first university experience, and it felt quite strange at first because it was very different from what I expected. In Italy, university is usually very structured – lectures, classes, and exams. But in Glasgow, we worked on one project a month, more or less, and we were free to approach it however we wanted. I liked this method, but it took some time to get used to.

When the time came for my first exchange, I remember telling myself that any place would be fine as long as it was somewhere new and I could learn from a different culture. I ended up choosing Stockholm because I wanted hands-on experience, and that university had some of the best workshops in the programme. And it was true! Once I arrived in Sweden, I was practically smiling from the moment I landed until the day I left. The school was amazing, open 24/7, and I spent countless hours there. Everyone was supportive, and any idea you had, there was always someone willing to help you make it happen. My goal was to learn how to make shoes, to eventually start a shoe company, and I got the chance to really dive into that. It was hard work, but if you put in the effort, you could achieve what you wanted.

Then, I chose KISD because I wanted another vibrant environment. Stockholm was beautiful and very relaxed, but after three years, I missed the energy of London – never sleeping, always surrounded by people, constantly busy. Here, I feel a bit of that same energy, like a smaller London, but now with the awareness and experience I've gained over the years.

I'm not the same person I was four years ago, trying to find my footing in a fast-paced environment. I've been to different places and learned how to adapt to new situations. I surprise myself sometimes – I talk to so many people here, and instead of feeling stressed, I actually enjoy it.

So yes, I'm really happy to be here.

What was your biggest oopsie from anywhere?

I was in Portugal during the annual MEDes workshop and we were playing football at the beach.

In Italy, if you play as a striker you are called a bomber, okay? One of our team members was from the middle east, and without thinking I shouted 'Bomber, Bomber, pass me the ball'.

Everybody that was around me, especially those from the UK, were like 'What are you doing? Don't say that'. To me, a bomber was the best player, so actually it was a compliment to the kid. But it was a massive oopsie moment, very embarrassing and obviously not on purpose.

Each time you moved to a new city, what was the first thing you did to make your new room feel like home?

To be honest, I hate being in my room. I try to avoid staying in the house as much as possible and I feel home when I'm somewhere surrounded by people. So I never do anything to make my room cosy. My room is usually a disaster because I only use it to sleep, and I'm rarely in the house.





So, does 'home' feel more connected to people for you? Is there a place in the city that feels like home?

Definitely. University feels like home, especially when I'm in the Stube or the courtyard, just talking with everyone. Being out at friends' places for parties or gatherings also feels more like home to me. My own space rarely gives me that feeling, but as long as I'm around people, I feel at ease.

What was the first sentence you learned abroad?

When I was in London, I was going through a rough time – I'd ended a relationship, was adjusting to a new job, and feeling pretty overwhelmed. I had this Japanese coworker who I confided in a lot. I didn't know her very well, but for some reason I really trusted her. One day, she told me to 'be positive' and even wrote it down for me in Japanese with the English translation on a small piece of paper. It's something I've carried with me ever since and a phrase that I remind myself of often.

You've moved quite a few times. How do you manage each move? Do you have a specific strategy for reducing the things you own to make moving easier, and does it get physically easier each time?

When I first moved to London, I only brought two suitcases – a big one and a small one. It wasn't much, but I ended up staying there for four years. At some point, I thought: 'This is it, this will be my home,' and I started accumulating a lot of stuff, buying things I liked or found interesting. I think that was partly because I never really owned much back in Italy, so having my own money felt like freedom.

When I moved to Glasgow I realised how much stuff I'd gathered. I packed fourteen huge boxes and then had to hire a van and a driver to ship everything. It took forever, and I even called my parents at one point because I felt so overwhelmed by the quantity. My family had to help me pack because there was just So. Much. Stuff.

Then, when I started the MEDes programme, I decided to let go of a lot. Those fourteen boxes turned into eight, I left some of them with friends in Glasgow and shipped a few back to Italy. When I moved to Sweden, I took just three boxes, but I ended up collecting more things there, too.

Now, I've shipped some of those to Germany and a few back to Italy. So at this point, my belongings are scattered over Europe, and I realise more and more how little I really need.



I'm not the same person I was four years ago, trying to find my footing in a fast-paced environment. I've been to different places and learned how to adapt to new situations.

Since leaving Sardinia, have you discovered any favourite dishes or products abroad?

Margoug. It's a traditional Kuwaiti stew that I first tried in London through a friend from Kuwait. It's usually made with lamb, and instead of pasta or rice, it has a whole piece of dough that cooks in the stew. When you eat it, you cut the dough into whatever size pieces you want. I love making massive pieces that totally fill my mouth. It's amazing.

And in Cologne? Have you found a favourite here?

In Cologne... oh, Currywurst. My flatmate goes to this butcher, which is apparently one of the oldest in town, and some weekends he comes home with Currywurst made by this butcher – I love it.



And what are your plans for the future?

My dream for the future is to start my own creative company. Moving and studying abroad has always been about meeting people, learning from them, and building connections that might help make this dream a reality. Even though I've been surrounded by designers, my interests lean more toward business and marketing. I wanted to immerse myself in a creative environment, and MEDes has given me exactly that, helping me find people who share a similar vision. So, that's the plan: to take everything I've learned, find a team with shared interests, and eventually run my own company.

The MEDes programme is something you have to want – it's a commitment to continually push yourself outside of your comfort zone. Once you start doing that, you'll never stop.



Do you plan to live outside of Europe?

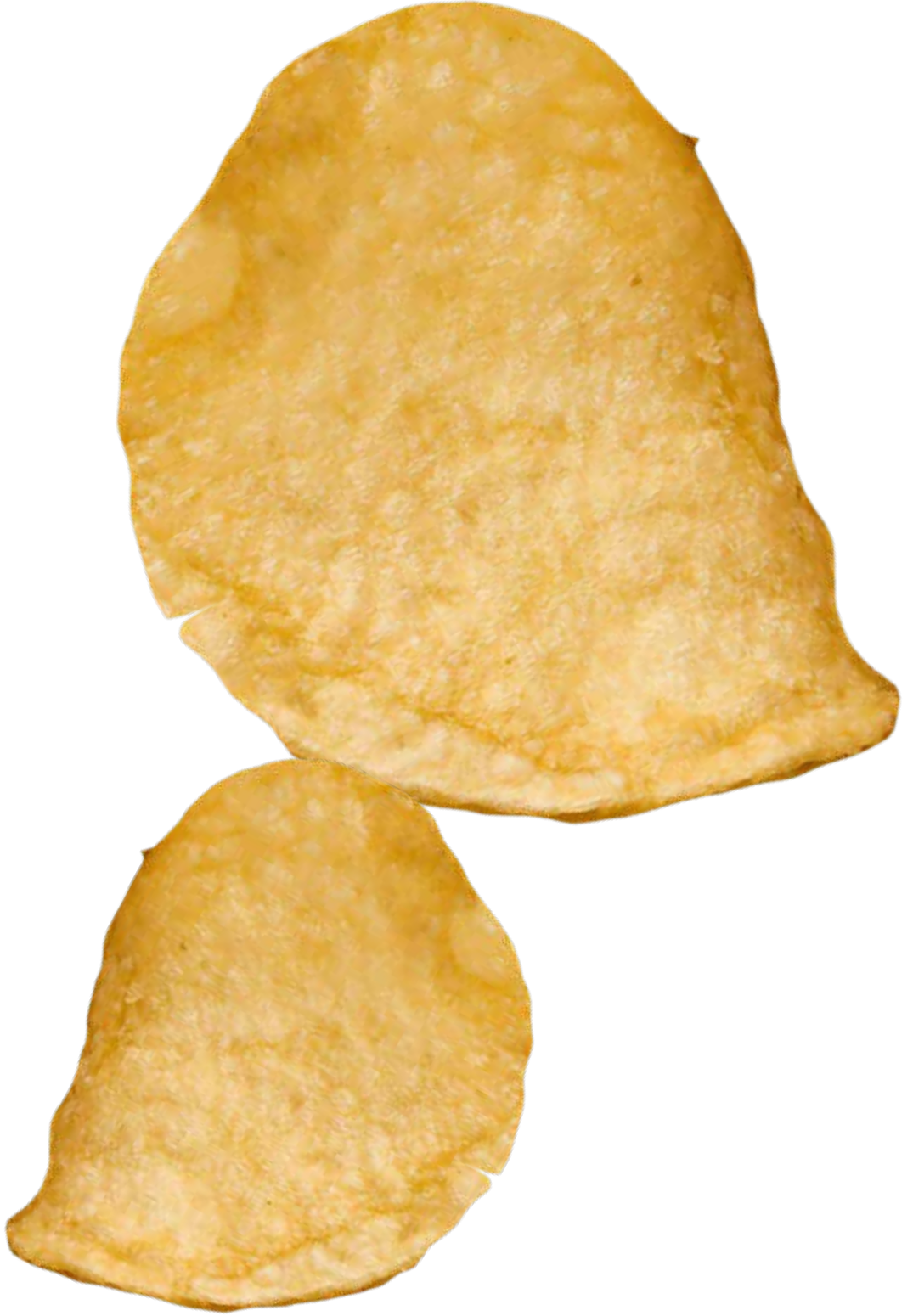
I don't know. I think that might be a bit too much at the moment. One of the best parts about living in Europe is that I've built friendships across different countries, so there's always someone I know here who could help me, even with things like storing stuff. I like being connected to people and keeping in touch with friends. I actually make it a point to regularly catch up with friends from France, Morocco, Italy, the UK, and even Australia. I schedule video calls nearly every day to stay in touch with everyone.

But if I go to America, for example, I think I would go crazy. So many new people... So right now, I would just stay in Europe.

Given your experience, would you do it again? And if so, how would you encourage someone else to move abroad or join the MEDes programme?

Honestly, I don't know if I could truly 'convince' someone. But I can share my experience and hope that might encourage them. The MEDes programme has given me invaluable opportunities and brought so many interesting people into my life. But it's something you have to want – it's a commitment to continually push yourself outside of your comfort zone. Once you start doing that, you'll never stop. I think that's the biggest lesson I've learned from moving around: taking risks, trying things you thought you'd never do, and growing from that.

KRISPIES



Want to go abroad? Let your taste buds guide you.

What are the KRISPIES?

The KRISPIES will help you to choose where to go as an exchange student. Stop thinking about whether you know the language or if the weather will be nice and instead start thinking about the snack options. Get to know the prospects of a place through salty, crunchy flavour combos that will broaden your horizons.

We have conducted a totally scientific and thorough study of the weird and wonderful crisp flavours offered at some of our international partner universities. We asked KISDies to anonymously nominate a crisp from their home country or place of exchange as a must-try temptation to future travellers.

What counts as a crisp?

The parameters for entry are pretty generous, we accepted any nomination fried and served in a snack bag.

How were they rated?

Each nominator was asked to rank their crisps' saltiness, sweetness, sourness, umami, bitterness and spiciness from 1 – 5. They were also invited to comment why their crisp choice is the best in world and where it can be found. * RARE * indicates that this crisp has not yet been located in Cologne...

Now what?

Has anything caught your eye? Why not choose a place that sounds tasty, and check out KISD Abroad on spaces for more information.



Bombay Spice Mix "It has many different things in it (sev, peanuts, puffed rice, chickpeas and more) so if you are sharing it with friends everyone can pick out things they like. It's very crunchy. Try using it as salad seasoning!"
 > Most Asian shops and kiosks

② Salty ⑤ Spicy ③ Umami

INDIA

Ādažu Čipsi, Dill "They're a national treasure. Since the 70's, they have experimented with new flavours but there is one classic that has stood the test of time – dill. Latvia's obsession with dill is well known. We put dill on everything savoury (especially potatoes). We even combined our love of craft beer and our love of dill into an idyllic brew of dill saison. But nothing will beat the good old dill flavoured potato crisp. They are not too salty, not too oily, fully vegan and very flavourful."
 * RARE *

③ Salty ③ Umami

Koikeya, Roasted ume plum "They're sour and salty but your mouth is not burning. You just want more with every single time eating it."
 * RARE *

④ Salty ② Sweet ⑤ Umami ④ Sour

JAPAN



Kichererbsenchips, Meersalz "They're not so oily, so unbelievably satisfyingly crispy and not as intensely flavoured as regular crisps."
 > DM

④ Salty ② Sour

GERMANY

Bamba, peanut flavour "Their consistency reminds of the German 'flips' but with less peanut flavour."
 * RARE *

③ Sweet

ISRAEL

Taytos, Bacon "I tasted them for the first time in Dublin while sipping on a pint of Guinness. Those crisps have crack in them. Seriously. I ate an entire bag in one sitting. 10/10 – Not too salty, they have just the right amount of crisp in every bite without being too dry, the bacon flavour creates a fine umami flavour which pairs wonderfully with any beer, especially stout!"
 > British food shop, Schildergasse

③ Salty ③ Umami

IRELAND

Lays Bugles, Original "Everyone likes them. They might not come from Denmark, but everyone eats them there."
 > Rewe, Zülpicher Platz

③ Salty ③ Sweet ④ Umami

DENMARK



Hot nuts, Original "Tastes like México <3 "

> Hola Mundo, Luxemburger Straße

③ Salty ④ Spicy

MEXICO

Walkers Squares, Salt & Vinegar

"Crunchy, salty, totally processed and addictive. A must try crisp to all fans of vinegar on their chips. Best eaten with a cold coke or pint of lager!"

* RARE *

⑤ Salty ④ Sour

ENGLAND

Sørlandschips, Spansk paprika

"They have a huge range of flavours, but my personal favourite is the 'spansk paprika'. They're made from real potato slices and are therefore slightly thicker – Nothing else comes close to the taste. There's also parsley on top, I think that might be the secret. A friend of mine goes to Norway once a year and always brings me back 5 bags – beats Christmas and birthdays put together."

* RARE *

③ Salty ③ Umami

NORWAY



Pofak, Chitoz "They're so special."

> Iran Impex, Marktstraße

④ Salty

IRAN

Pringles, Hot n Spicy

> Most German supermarkets

③ Salty ④ Spicy ② Umami

USA

Ooh Mala, Potato chips "Spicy and numbing, this is hot spicy noodle soup in form of a crisp! There is nothing better. Can't be shipped to Germany but maybe I'll order some to the UK, I forgot about them and now I want them so badly..."

* RARE *

④ Salty ⑤ Spicy ⑤ Umami

SINGAPORE

Suhariki "Versatile flavours ranging from Cheese, Sour Cream, Lobster to whatever one can imagine, they're easy to make at home too. Flavourful, perfect for snacking but also used as a topping. Comes in a small package size, but whenever you think 'Oh no I finished my pack!' You can extend the experience by eating the leftover crumbs."

> Mix Markt

④ Salty ② Spicy ④ Umami

UKRAINE





Home, is where I want to be but I
guess I'm already there?
Not original, but pretty damn famous
for a reason. Sometimes it feels like I
spend my life wondering if I'm there
yet. Like that sitcom skit where the
kids are in the back of the car
whining at their parents
'are we there yet??' except
in my scenario I'm the kid AND
the parent. Hell, maybe I'm even the
car too. People don't tell you
how scary it can be being the
master of your own destiny, the
driver and the passenger of your
own life... I'm going off-topic here
but the point stands.

Most people will tell you that home
is found in loved ones, community and
all that jazz- I moved away from
everyone I knew and loved because I
met a boy. Classic.

He's a very lovely boy, the best, and I love
him deeply but I didn't feel at home
until I built my own life. Found purpose in
this new and strange society. felt needed
by people.

Received my first spam mail.
Got called by a friend in a crisis.
Bumped into someone I knew on
the street. Found a job.
Made it home, drank. Lost my keys.
Lost my card. Found my card.
A friend came to stay. family visited.
The other day I was in Aldi and
an old man tried to ask me a question,
in German, and usually I would have
cut him off in English and apologised
that I couldn't understand. But
then something wonderful happened-
I realised he was asking where
the kobs were. He probably thought
I was mental, I was fucking
grinning like a Cheshire cat when
I was able to lead him to the
aisle. That night I walked home
on air. 'Wow', I thought, I'm really
going to get there one day.
I'm going to be standing in a pub
and actually have a clue what's
happening around me.
I realised that if my relationship failed,
the one that led me here in the first place,
I'd probably stay. Home. I guess I'm already
there?



MATEA
VARVODIC

Matea is a Master's student at KISD and the trailblazer behind the university's Erasmus partnership with Zagreb. Matea set out to connect her academic studies with her Croatian roots, by forging a place for herself there. During our interview she explains the process of bridging two cultures, and how important this year abroad was to her personal growth and connection to her family and heritage.

Can you tell us a little about where and why you studied abroad?

Yeah, of course. During my bachelor's degree I spent one year at the University of Zagreb in the Department of Architecture, where I studied industrial design – That's what they call their design studies.

I grew up in Germany but both of my parents are from Croatia, so I really wanted to study in the country I come from. I've been there often for family visits and holidays, but this was something completely different.

First, I asked Lisa Janßen, 'What about studying in Croatia? Is it possible?' But when I started this journey, KISD didn't have a partnership with any Croatian universities. Despite this, Lisa was so positive and offered to help arrange one, but she also warned me that it wasn't the easiest process. To start, I needed to find a contact at the University of Zagreb that Lisa could communicate with. Another option was to go as a free mover, but then the financing and accreditation of the credit points would have been much more difficult. So, I was determined to try the Erasmus route. It turned out to be a very long journey. It took me about two years just to find out who was in charge of the whole Erasmus programme at the university in Zagreb. But after that, I was able to put them in contact with Lisa, who arranged the partnership that still exists today.

So, you started the partnership with Croatia and are the reason it exists? Cool!

Yes, I guess so! It's actually hard for people to go to Croatia because the majority of the classes are in Croatian. But they adapt a little for incoming students. Since my family is Croatian, I already knew the language, which made it much easier.

Are there international students in Zagreb who don't speak Croatian?

I was the second international student to go to Zagreb. One semester before me, there was a girl from Turkey, and she couldn't speak any Croatian at all.

The school assigned her a buddy who translated a lot for her, and some professors were able to hold parts of the class, like the feedback sessions, in English. But all of the theoretical courses, like design history, were in Croatian. So, yeah, it depends.

I think it's possible, but don't go with the expectation that all your courses will be in English. Actually, right now, I'm in a similar situation because all of my courses are in Japanese, and I didn't know that before arriving in Japan. (Matea is currently in Japan as part of a Master's exchange programme.)

If I had known beforehand, I would have had different expectations and prepared better, but somehow I'm surviving. There are people who translate for me after class, or I use a translation app, so I know it's possible. You just need to be motivated and prepared. It's a really good idea to download a translation app and try to learn some of the language basics before you go.

I just want to say, if you're not certain about the language, the professors are really understanding and open to find a way for you not to fail. It is not a barrier. You can find a way.

Zagreb sounds like a hidden gem – would you recommend students go there to keep the partnership alive?

Yes, yes, yes. I would recommend it because Zagreb is an incredibly beautiful city. It was, I think, the best time of my life so far.

It's the perfect size. It's not too big, not too small. The city has so many things to offer. It's close to the sea, you can do lots of trips, and it's close to Budapest, Vienna, and many other capital cities, so it's the best place to travel from. Their Erasmus programme is pretty well-organised, and I think the only thing to consider is the language.

How did it feel to leave home, and how did other people feel about you leaving?

I think my situation is a little unique as I'm actually from Split, a city in Croatia. I was already really familiar with the country, but this time it felt different because I saw it from the perspective of actually living there. I was very curious as I had heard a lot of negative things about the structures and institutions before going, but I wanted to try it out for myself. Overall, I felt very positive and I was grateful for the opportunity – it helped that everyone encouraged me to go and my family fully supported my decision. My friends came to visit me while I was there too, so we went on so many cool trips together.

In your opinion, what makes somewhere feel like home?

I think it's the people surrounding you, which means you can find home anywhere, really. It's about who you meet and how you get along with them, and also a little about how well you adapt to the surroundings. If you have the right people around you, home is with them.

So, I already knew Croatia, but this time it felt different because I went knowing I want to live there someday.





What was the greatest difficulty you faced during your move to Zagreb?

I actually had a problem when I first arrived in Zagreb. It turns out that the dormitories require a doctor's check. I didn't know that, somehow I missed the information.

It took 12 hours to drive there from Cologne, and I arrived in the middle of the night, ready to head straight to sleep. However, when I got to my room, they wouldn't let me in because I didn't have the doctor's check. I was lucky I could call friends in the city and crash at theirs for the first night. The next day, I paid whatever doctor I could find to sign off that I was healthy enough to enter the dormitory. Of course, they did a quick check, but that's how things worked at the time.

It was insane, and it was a pretty difficult start. Oh, and of course, the dormitory itself. You should know that it's very cheap, but there are two people in one room. So, be prepared that you'll be sharing a room of 11.2 square metres with another person.

It's hard. You have to really adapt and ideally find someone who has the same sleeping rhythm as you and similar interests. So maybe that was the hardest part – living in a dorm with someone I didn't know at all beforehand.



Did you find that leaving your comfort zone like that also had rewards?

Of course, it's a two-sided sword – is that how you say it in English? I had a lot of sleepless nights because my roommate woke up at seven, and I usually came back at two or three in the morning because that was when I wanted to experience all of Zagreb and did a lot of partying. It's impossible not to wake somebody up at seven in the morning or when I came back at two or three in the morning to wake my roommate up because it's such a small room. So, I was very sleepy for a lot of my studies, but we are still friends, so I think it worked out well in the end.

***If you have the right people around you,
home is with them.***

Did you feel like you had to relearn how to live in Cologne?

Actually, I don't live in Cologne; I live with my parents, and that's even harder – going home and having your mother say you should do the dishes after one year of independence. So it was very, very hard for me, and I want to go back as soon as possible, but first I have to finish my studies. I think it's the biggest difference between studying for one semester somewhere and for a year. In one semester, I had only just got into my routine, found the places I liked, and discovered a café where I liked to work, that kind of thing. But then the routine became really established after one year there, and it felt very abrupt coming back to Germany.

So, you plan to head back to Zagreb soon?

It's the plan, but looking at the economy now, maybe it won't work out right away. The prices for houses have been rising since 2021, when I was there, and it's very hard to find a flat.

Do you think that it's possible to have multiple homes?

Yes, I think multiple homes are possible because my whole life, I've lived torn between two places. My whole family lives in Split – my grandparents, aunts, cousins, everyone. It's just my parents, their siblings, and me who live here in Germany. Growing up, I visited Croatia multiple times a year, and I formed friendships in both places. It's very hard because you don't know where you belong – you miss out a lot in both places. It feels like you can never have everything. So, I think it's possible, but I have decided that I ultimately want to settle in one place.

Upon reflection, would you do it again, and how would you encourage someone else to put themselves outside their comfort zone and do an exchange?

It can only be positive because even if it's a mess-up, you learn something. I think I grew a lot, I learned a lot, and I met some incredibly nice people. Especially in relation to Zagreb, it's the perfect place to study. It's not very big, but you experience a whole new culture that's very different from life in Germany. Especially for anyone interested in travel because it's such a well-connected part of Europe. The university itself has a lot to offer, including many hard-skill courses that are not available in Cologne, which really complimented my studies at KISD. They are very creative and maybe a little speculative too.





*I think I grew a lot, I learned a lot,
and I met some incredibly nice people.*

How long did it take you to get there?

I drove for maybe 13 hours. 12 and a half.

And how many suitcases did you take with you?

Only one.

And how many did you bring back?

I don't know exactly, but my car was full when I drove back to Germany.

What was the most important thing on your packing list?

I think it was my blanket. I have a very nice down duvet that keeps me warm in winter and not too warm in summer. Honestly, I would recommend that everybody gets a great duvet. It's quite expensive, but it's totally worth it, and I brought it with me to Croatia.





Was there something you forgot to pack?

Loads, but only small things like camera lenses, so thankfully my family sent everything to me by post.

Did you discover a favourite dish or product?

There were two restaurants that I visited the most: Batak, and my favourite, Noturno. It's right in the city centre, and they really have something for everyone. You can't go wrong.

What was the first thing you did to make your new room feel like home?

I bought battery-powered LED strip lights, which I put all over my bed. Then, when I arrived home at 3 AM, I didn't need to use the big light. It gave the room a cosy vibe, you know?

What was your biggest 'oopsie' moment?

Ooooh. Probably not finishing all of my courses when I was in Zagreb. I delayed a lot of exams until September and somehow managed to have them online, but technically, I should have finished university before the summer.

Actually, there was another thing that wasn't great: My car number plates were from Split, another city in Croatia, and when some friends invited me to play rugby in front of the Zagreb Stadium, I parked my car there. That's something you shouldn't do. It's like parking a Düsseldorf-registered car in Cologne – very dangerous – and I didn't realise until I drove home that all four of my hubcaps were missing. Someone had stolen them because of the rivalry between the two cities!

How would you define home in three words?

People, places, and the sea.

ARDA KERTMEN



We spent the afternoon with Arda, a 28-year-old from Istanbul who arrived at KISD as an exchange student, and never left.

Arda started his life over when he moved to Cologne. He's now a regular student here and speaks candidly to us about the highs and lows of transitioning to a new city, country and culture.

Which semester are you in?

Uh, it's a bit complicated. Officially, I'm in the ninth semester, but I have actually studied for around ten semesters now. I first arrived at KISD as an exchange student and later, I applied to switch to a regular student, which messed with the timeline. My application was rejected the first time because I needed a one-year residency before being eligible. So, I stayed in Germany, took German courses, and reapplied. This caused a one-semester break in my studies and why, technically, it's my tenth semester, though there's a one-semester gap in my timeline.

So, you arrived at KISD as an exchange student from Istanbul. What was your university journey before arriving at KISD?

It was almost my last semester in Istanbul when I started my exchange with KISD. I studied two semesters at my first university, then transferred to my second university, where I studied for three years, or about eight semesters. I came here in the ninth, so if all goes as planned, I'll graduate in my 20th semester.

Yeah, that fuck-off party turned out to be a big joke because I never came back, actually.

Why did you decide to come to Germany?

Actually, it was because of my ex-girlfriend. We were together for quite a long time, and she wanted to do an exchange semester. I realised a long-distance relationship, for me, would be very difficult, so I decided to go to the nearest place to her that I could. She was heading to the Netherlands, so I checked which universities my school had exchange agreements with. The closest one was in Cologne at KISD, then Copenhagen, and then a few others like Greece. So it was really just a practical decision to go to the nearest place. And then we broke up, just before the last exam. So I was in this situation where I'd already completed all the paperwork – the exams, scholarship applications, visa process, and everything. I could still go, but did I want to if she wasn't going to be there? I wasn't sure.

All my friends encouraged me, saying, 'You've already done all this work, so just go!' They even threw me a huge fuck-off party, and that's what finally convinced me. I thought, 'Alright, it's only six months. Worst case, I'll just come back!' Yeah, that fuck-off party turned out to be a big joke because I never came back, actually. It's been five years now.



Do you feel comfortable here now?

Yes, I do. I decided to stay.

The turning point for me was at the end of my exchange year. I applied to become a regular student at KISD – I wasn't certain that I wanted to stay, but I thought I'd give it a shot and see what happened. I still remember waking up at a friend's place and checking my phone, only to find a rejection letter. That was when I realised I didn't want to go back to Turkey. It was a real wake-up call because my first application was weak; I hadn't put much effort into the portfolio. At that point in my life, I wasn't giving my best. But this rejection made me realise I needed to work harder if I wanted this.

So, I decided that for the next application, I would give it everything. I put in weeks of work to make a strong portfolio. Then I learned about another chance to apply for the status change in December, so I went for it again. But I was rejected by KISD a second time. I called KISD and had a long conversation with the committee head, and he shared three main points. First, he suggested that, since I was close to finishing my degree in Turkey, it might make more sense to graduate and then apply for a master's at KISD instead. Second, he mentioned that, since I'd only been there for two semesters (one of which was disrupted by COVID), I hadn't worked closely with most professors, so they didn't know me well. Then there was a third point, which I'll keep private.

After we talked, he said he'd take the weekend to discuss it with the professors again. Then, on Monday, he called me and said, 'Arda, go get yourself a bottle of champagne and celebrate – you're in.' I didn't have to apply again, as the second application worked out after all.

If I'd been rejected again, I probably would have gone back to Turkey. Germany is nice, but the main reason I wanted to stay was because of KISD. It's been four years since then.

Why was KISD so important to you?

It's a combination of familiarity, a bit of home and quite a bit of escapism – in a very productive way. Even when things happen in my personal life, at KISD I know what I want to do. I work on those things, and that kind of keeps me sane, I can't just sit and do nothing – I'd go crazy staring at walls

How did everyone feel about you moving abroad? Was this your first time living away from home?

It was my first time living abroad, yes, but I'd already been relatively independent. Before I left, I wasn't home very often – I had an old truck that I used to travel around with and do different things. So, in a way, I was already used to being away from home; obviously now the distance has increased.

My relationship with my family, especially during my teenage years and early adulthood, was a bit shaky. But ironically, after I moved here, things improved. When I was in Turkey there was more friction, but moving away made me start appreciating them more. You miss them, you mature, and you gain perspective.

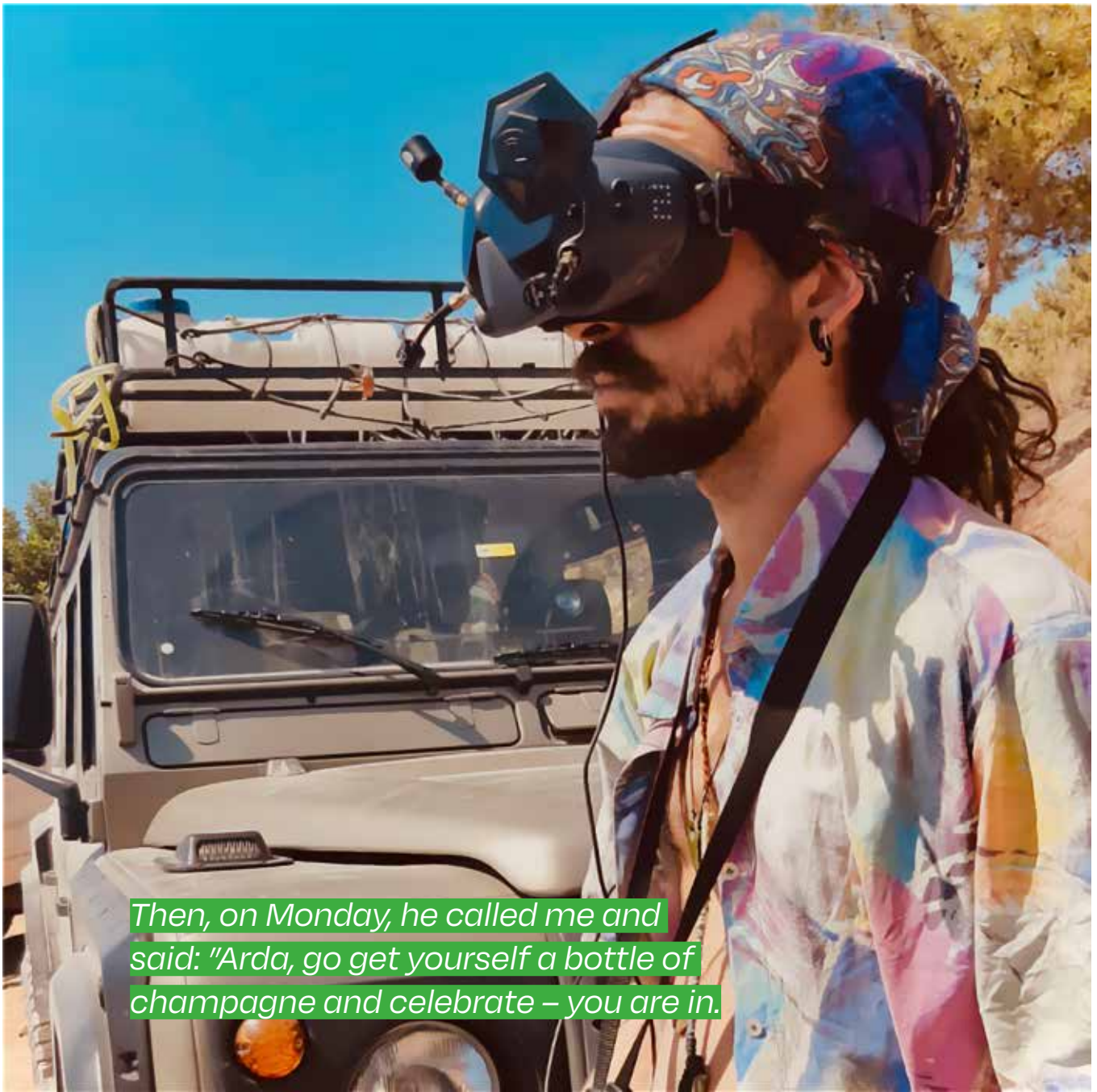
One of the hardest parts of living abroad is seeing my parents age and knowing that they're gradually having less energy. Now that I could be spending quality time with them, I'm not there, which is a bit heavy for me. I feel it more each year.

However, when I chose to leave Turkey, my family was very supportive, and so were my friends. Some close friends were sad because things would change, but it was also common to leave, some friends went to the U.S., some to the U.K., others elsewhere. Some stayed abroad and others returned, so we were used to this process of saying goodbye and later reuniting for holidays and special occasions.

We've managed to keep those friendships going. I still stay in touch with them, but it does require mental effort to maintain friendships and, in a way, live two lives across two different cities. Besides family and friends, I also have business commitments back home that I try to manage from here, so it often feels like I'm splitting my attention and energy between two lives.

It can be overwhelming, even though I can go back and forth if needed. It's always in the back of my mind.





Then, on Monday, he called me and said: "Arda, go get yourself a bottle of champagne and celebrate – you are in."

When you go back to Turkey, do you feel like you have to relearn certain things? Does it feel foreign in any way?

There are definitely some small nuances. Occasionally, I wait at the red light in Turkey to cross the street and people make fun of me because it's such a German thing to do. Or when I'm driving, I just stop and wait for someone to give me the way, which never happens in Turkey.

Would you consider Turkey your home?

Yes.

And Germany?

Not Germany as a whole, but Cologne specifically – Yes.

So you can have multiple homes?

I think so, yes.

How would you define 'home'?

I think it's a mix of things – mostly how comfortable and familiar I feel in a place. It's about how well I know and am used to the place, and also a sense of family. Having opinions and experiences shaped by time spent there is important, too. There's a collective experience that builds familiarity over the years, and it all adds up to a sense of home.

If you could define 'home' in three words, what would they be?

Cosy, safe, and intimate.



Was there a moment in Cologne when you realised, it felt like home? Or was it more gradual?

I think it happened slowly. But I do notice it when I go far away and then return. It's like the moment I see the Cologne Dom or the crane houses – it hits me that I'm home. Those familiar landmarks bring a sense of comfort. I think it's that visual reminder that grounds me and makes me feel like, 'Okay, I'm back. I know where I am.' It's a relief, in a way.

Have there been moments when you felt more at home here than in Turkey?

No. Turkey is different, a part of my heart is there, and I think it always will be.

What about mistakes from moving abroad? Anything you regret or consider a big 'oopsie' moment?

I didn't realise how hard finding a place to live would be. I spent months crashing on people's couches – people I'd met at bars, even a Tinder date where I showed up with my luggage because I had nowhere else to go. It was tough, but in a way, I wouldn't change any of it. One of the people who let me stay on his couch became one of my best friends here, and he played a huge role in my life in Cologne. So as rough as it was, it all worked out.

What was the first thing you did to make yourself feel at home when you finally found a place?

My bedsheets. I brought them with me and the first thing I did was put them on the bed. After that, it all fell into place. To me, everything else feels temporary, but bedsheets are permanent.

Even when things happen in my personal life, at KISD I know what I want to do.

And how many suitcases did you bring?

One.

What were the essentials on your packing list when you moved? Anything you felt like you absolutely had to bring?

I get cold very, very easily.

During the winter, I basically live in snow pants and a snow jacket, so I made sure to bring those. That was my entire approach to cold weather – just bundle up in snow gear. Now that I'm a bit more experienced, I've added thermal layers and all that, but back then, snow pants and a snow jacket were non-negotiable.

Do you remember the first word you learned here in Germany?

Beyond the basics like 'Danke', the first one that stuck with me was 'Umsteigemöglichkeit'. I was fascinated by how it sounded. I kept hearing it on the train, and for a while, I didn't realise it was two separate words. Eventually, I had to ask someone to decipher it for me.

Have you discovered any favourite dishes or foods since you've been in Germany?

Definitely. Weißwurstfrühstück. Fucking amazing! Incredible breakfast. Yeah, so simple, a few ingredients, but amazing.

Can you tell us about your time at the Food Lab?

Sure. I was the Food Lab tutor for two years, and we organised a number of events, from catering to workshops – like the KISD sessions. My main goal was to make the Food Lab feel like a bigger part of life at KISD. It's physically located a bit out of the way, near the construction and prototype labs, so it felt distant from the main community and social life at KISD. I wanted to bridge that gap, not just by organising events, but by being the person who connected people to the Food Lab. I'm really happy with how it's grown and especially with the person I passed the role onto – they're doing an amazing job.



How did you get involved with food in the first place? Have you done anything like that before?

A little. When I was travelling, I'd sometimes work in kitchens at hostels or camping sites in exchange for food and accommodation, but it was pretty minimal experience. I didn't have any formal training – I just liked kitchens. I enjoy problem-solving and working with people, and when I saw Ronja, the previous tutor, organising dinner parties and other events, I went up to her and said, 'Count me in. If you need anything, I'll help!' We did a few events together, and eventually, she had to step down, so she asked if I wanted to take over. I agreed right away, and honestly, it was one of the best decisions I've made.

Weißwurstfrühstück. Fucking amazing!

Do you think that German culture has influenced your sense of home?

I don't know if this affects my sense of home, but I notice that people here move around much more often. In Turkey, it's rare to move one flat to another.

So I think living here and seeing constant motion around me from house to house made me realise that a house is very temporary and perhaps the concept of home is not attached so much to the building or the physical space, but more to the things inside it. The furniture, objects... the things that we take with us when we move.

Another thing that's still mind-boggling to me, is the speed and the pace at which people go from one city to another; I like Cologne and I don't plan to leave the city for a while. If there was a nice opportunity in Hamburg, to me, it wouldn't be a question, but many people here would close their entire life and move to Hamburg overnight. I still don't understand this.

How would you convince someone to study abroad or participate in an exchange program? What would your argument be?

Starting a new life from scratch is empowering. Even if you don't choose to stay there, you will develop self-confidence in the process of building something new. For the rest of your life, you'll know 'if everything goes to shit, I can do it again'. You can decide not to put up with bullshit any more because there's power in knowing you can walk away.

It also changes your perspective on life back home. You realise that the challenges and pressures you face in your hometown aren't as insurmountable as they seem. You might feel stuck at home, thinking you have to accept everything as it is, but once you go abroad, you understand that it's okay to leave behind situations or people that don't serve you well.

For example, after my first experience abroad, I returned home and cut ties with certain people I realised I didn't want in my life. Before, I might not have had the strength or conviction to make those changes. But the experience gave me the confidence to assert what I truly want and need in my life. So do it. This skill will change your life

BURCO MORIHIRO



Japan might be her home, but 22 year old Burco, has left her comfort zone to study at KISD for a year. Throughout our talk we discover her passion for dance, and how she brings her creative energy from Musashino Art University to Cologne.

From culture shocks to rediscovering home in unexpected places, Burco's story is filled with the small daily connections she makes between the life she left behind and her life at KISD.

When did you arrive in Germany?

I came to Cologne about three months ago, but I left my things at my friend's place and then went to Italy for a month before starting this semester.

How long do you plan to stay in Germany?

I'm here for one year, and I'm already two months into that.

Why did you choose KISD

Have you heard about the GDI, Global Design Initiative workshop? Every year, five partner universities, including my home university and KISD, hold the design workshop. Last year, the workshop was hosted at my home university, this year in Singapore, and next February it will be held here at KISD.

I met some good-vibes KISDies, as well as Prof. Heidkamp and Prof. Sebastian, during the workshop in Japan. I loved their atmosphere, and the concept of KISD was interesting. Also, it was my dream to come to Germany.

Do you think KISD was a good choice for you?

Yes, definitely.

And is it your first time in Europe in general?

Yes, it is. It's quite a big change.

What was the biggest culture shock for you?

I had one episode that gave me a bit of culture shock.

In my first week at KISD, I went to use a restroom on the ground floor and noticed that there was a toilet labelled 'all gender', but it looked like it was also a men's restroom. I couldn't find the women's toilet (because it was behind the door near the security room), so I went in and suddenly a man walked in and used the restroom too. I ended up waiting in the stall for a while, thinking, 'Oh, this must be the German way – very inclusive and open!' I told myself it was just part of adapting to German culture. However, about a week later, I finally discovered that there was a women's restroom in the corner all along, it was just out of sight! Looking back, I realise some guys were probably surprised to see me in there. I would even greet them in the restroom, casually asking if all-gender restrooms worked differently here than in Japan! I did wonder if people assumed I was transgender.

I'd never experienced being misinterpreted like that before, so it was strange... and hilarious in hindsight.



I guess you never experienced that in your hometown?

We don't really have an all-gender toilet like that in Japan. There was a place in the middle of Tokyo, Shinjuku, that tried to introduce an all-gender restroom. It caused a lot of controversy on social media because the building was located right in the city centre, where the environment can be a bit rough.

The feedback on SNS was, 'In an area where some people are aggressive, the same restrooms for men and women would trigger problems.'



How did you feel before leaving Japan?

I was worried that I might get homesick because when I was in junior high, I went to the U.S. for a summer camp. At the time, I couldn't speak much English – just a little bit.

During the camp there was no internet, so I couldn't use any translation tools or message my family. This situation magnified my homesickness. I remember that I went to the centre of the lake with a paddle board and cried. I also went to Australia for half a year when I was in junior high, and I felt very homesick then too. So I thought, 'Oh, maybe I'll get homesick again', but I didn't so I'm feeling my growth.

Do you feel more comfortable going to other places now?

Cologne is very comfortable. I'm really enjoying so many new experiences and meeting new people. But I do miss my family and friends a lot. That doesn't change. I'm not sad, but I do miss them.

Do you think at the end of your stay, you might call Germany a home?

I don't know yet.

What do you think makes somewhere feel like home?

If there's anywhere I want to go back to, it's my home. That's where my precious people are, and I want to go back to live with them. That's what home means to me. This is about people.

So home is not just one place for you?

No, I think it can be multiple places.

What is your favourite German word or phrase?

'Wie heißt das hier?'

Can you think of one thing that you regret when you came here?

I didn't decide on my daily tasks when I came here. Now, I've finally got into a routine of journaling, Duolingo, Drops, and exercise. Even on days when I don't feel motivated, I am proud of myself for completing these tasks. It's not a big regret, but I wish I had been able to start accumulating them from the beginning.

It was important for me to create a cosy atmosphere.

Which object did you bring to show us?

I brought a very convenient cabbage peeler and shredder. It's called 'キャベピー MAX' (Cabba Pee MAX). And also, soy sauce. If I have these two with me, I'm not going to struggle to eat good food.



Were these the only things that you really wanted to bring?

Oh, I do have some other things, like clothes, a laptop, and my camera, and so on, but I don't really feel at home from those things. What really makes me feel at home is the sense of taste – it supports me every day.



*That's where my precious people are, and I want
to go back to live with them.*



Did you forget to bring anything with you from Japan?

Actually, I received a big package from Japan a while ago with all of my winter stuff inside. I thought it would be easier than bringing everything with me on the plane, but it turned out to be a huge hassle. I had to go to customs to pick up the package, but when I got there they told me I needed to bring several documents, so I had to go back again to sort everything out.

How many suitcases did you actually bring to Germany?

One suitcase, one duffle bag, and one backpack. But it wasn't enough!

Was there anything you did when you first arrived in your room to make it feel more like home, even if only temporarily?

At first I focused on making the bed comfortable, with pillows and a nice blanket. Also, lights – not too white, but more relaxed. It was important for me to create a cosy atmosphere. I kept my suitcase hidden because it felt like I was still travelling.

How have your daily routines changed since your move from Japan to Germany? Are there any differences?

Yes, it's been different for me. My motivation for health has changed. I can see a lot of nature, so I'm very eager to be active. Also, we have many opportunities to attend sports classes, so I've been going to a lot of dance classes.

What kind of dancing do you do here?

Classical ballet, contemporary dance, and Zumba.





Did you bring an interest in dance with you from Japan? Was it something you anticipated doing in Cologne?

Does dancing here feel the same as it does at home in Japan?

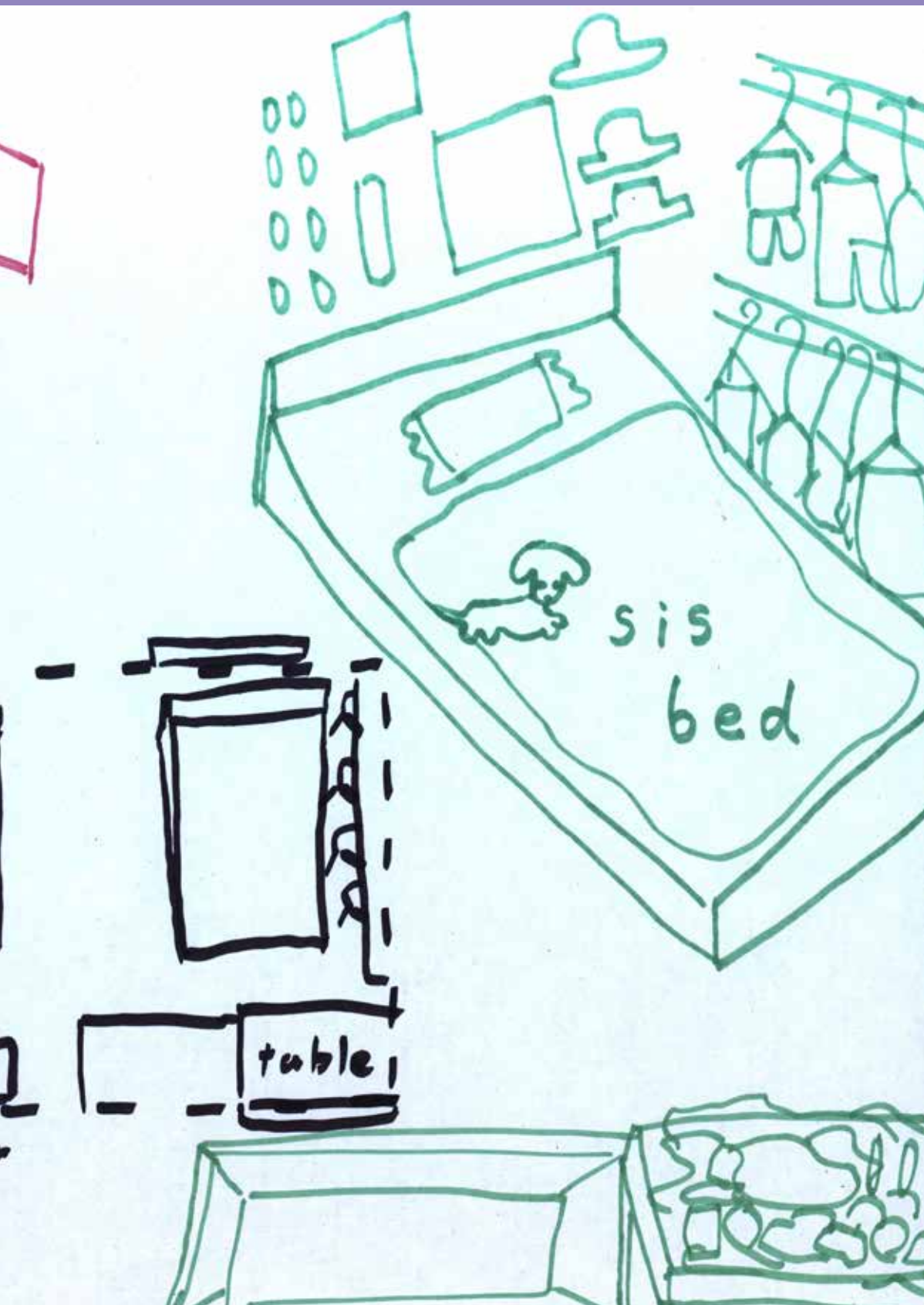
Are you comfortable showing us some of your dancing?

Yes. Actually, I didn't bring my ballet shoes with me, but when I arrived here, I found a ballet class, and then my parents sent me my ballet shoes along with other things.

Dance goes beyond borders and we don't need words when dancing, it's a form of body language. I do ballet, but I also love improvisational dance. It always gives me a good feeling. Communicating through my body makes me feel closer to others, more easily than with words.

Yes, I have a lot of videos on my Instagram (@gobouburco) including from the Tokyo Art Festival, where we did the Tokyo vegetable dance.





Do you have photos that remind you of home?

This is a beer, a draft Kirin Ichiban. I drank this last Sunday, and the flavour reminds me so much of Japan. As soon as I tasted the beer, all the memories from Japan suddenly came flooding back – drinking with my friends, with my family, at festivals, in the car, and many other moments. It was like an unconscious wave of memories. It made me feel connected to my past, even though I'm far away.

Which restaurant was that?

Takezo. It's here in Cologne, and I can highly recommend it. Everyone working there is Japanese.





Dance goes beyond borders. We don't need words when dancing.

How would you define home?

For me, home is all the people who have been part of my life. Coming to Germany, I left behind all my friends and family in Japan. At first, it was like a completely new world, with a sense of freedom, but at times, I also felt a bit ungrounded, like I was floating. However, there have been moments here that have helped me feel connected to both my past life and this new one. It feels like life is always connected by invisible threads. That's why, for me, home is not one place. It's wherever those threads lead.

Would you recommend studying or living abroad to others?

Yes, definitely. Only by stepping away from home can you really find yourself.



RESOURCES & IMPRINT

<i>Language courses</i>	TH Köln offers free language classes in German, Chinese, English, French, German Sign Language, Italian, Swedish and Spanish. There are sometimes integration courses offered by KISD Abroad, just join the Space to be notified of any upcoming programs.
<i>Mental health and wellbeing</i>	If you, or someone you know, is struggling to cope and needs someone to talk please access the free resources available to you. Scan the QR code to be directly linked to them.
<i>Partner universities</i>	KISD has more than 45 partner universities, which means students have access to the study programs of universities from around the globe for no added cost. It is also possible to nominate new partnerships, read more and enquire using the KISD Abroad Space.
<i>Erasmus exchange program</i>	The Erasmus Program is a European Union initiative that allows students, educators, and young people to study, work, or volunteer abroad. Now part of Erasmus+, it funds millions of participants from both inside and outside the EU.
<i>Fulbright scholarship</i>	The Fulbright Scholarship is a prestigious international exchange program funded by the U.S. government and operating in 160 countries. It offers grants for students, scholars, and professionals to study, research, or teach abroad.
<i>DAAD scholarship</i>	The DAAD Scholarship is a German government-funded program supporting international students, researchers, and professionals to study, research, or gain training in Germany. It offers financial aid, living allowances, and opportunities across diverse fields.
<i>MEDes program</i>	The MEDes network encompasses seven European universities in Milan, Helsinki, Glasgow, Paris, Aveiro, Stockholm and Cologne. Students can choose to study the 'European design' route at KISD and after their fourth semester they will study the following two years at two partner universities, before returning to KISD to complete their masters.

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