

## **My very personal experiences as a Comenius assistant at Hjørring Private Realskole, Danmark**

Are you the new Comenius assistant at Hjørring Private Realskole (HPR)? Then it's up to me to send my congratulations, you got the jackpot!

I'm Maike from Germany, 22 years old and the actual Comenius-assistant at this school. I interrupted my studies (German and Physical Education) to work here in Denmark for one school-year and I can promise you a time full of impressions and experiences. In the following text you will get an insight into my assistantship.

### **First contact**

According to my facebook-account, Birthe (probably your mentor, too) wrote me the first message at the end of May 2012. I didn't even know that I was chosen to participate in the Comenius- project and it was very exciting to see what's going on in this school. Of course, my first step was to visit the homepage of the school. Overwhelmed by all this information in Danish, I didn't understand anything. Fortunately I could communicate with Birthe in German, which made things easier for me (but her English is also perfect, don't worry!). She promised me to search for accommodation and some weeks later I had a room at Vrå Højskole.

### **HPR**

It might be a good idea to arrive a few days before the school starts. I used the free days to participate in the Højskole-program and to get to know people, the daily life and the area around. I visited HPR while they had an educational meeting and talked to some of the teachers. It was exiting but I had a good feeling when I started my year in Denmark. It was reassuring to know that there would be people around me who took care of me and could help if things went wrong.

When you spend your first days in school, you will compare things to your own ideas of school. I was impressed by the openness in the communication between teachers and students. They are working very closely to each other, with a lot of kindness and familiarity but also with respect.

In the first days I was disturbed by the way of using laptops and tablets . From the seventh grade students are told to bring their own PC with them. It seemed to be annoying that children were hiding behind their laptops while the teacher was telling something. I got used to it. The school values on a high technical quality in the lessons. Classrooms are provided with smartboards and each child from the 0<sup>th</sup> up to the 6<sup>th</sup> grade has an iPad. IT plays an important part in the daily school-life and the most of the teachers use this possibility. Beside this, HPR tries to teach on a higher level and educate the children in the best possible way.

Like in the classes, the atmosphere between the colleagues is friendly as well. A lot of humor and merriment are waiting for you, when you visit the staff room.

According to your time of assistantship, you will get different timetables during the year. You can help to create your timetable and evince your wishes. You are always together with another teacher. The way you'll work with them, will be different. Sometimes you're the one who is in charge of the lesson, in another lesson you're teaching in a team or you're just following the lecture. It's very exciting to see both the different methods of teaching and the personalities of the teachers.

I got also a plan about some other activities in which I could participate. The school tries to show you a lot of Denmark and its school-system.

I, for example, took apart in three different talentcamps in Greve (Copenhagen), Tolstrup-Stenum

(Northern Jutland) and Rønne (Bornholm). These camps, organized by HPR, are offering possibilities for gifted children. They are taught on higher levels and can connect to students from other private schools. I had different tasks there but mainly supported the teachers' work.

Beside that I was on a class-trip with the 7<sup>th</sup> graders and in autumn I went to Berlin and spent some wonderful days there with the 9<sup>th</sup> graders. During these trips you get the possibilities to get to know your surroundings much better, not only the students, but also your colleagues. My highlight was the trip to Ankara, based on a project with a Turkish school. We went there in March together with 13 students to visit this partner-school. For me, it was one of the greatest experiences I've ever had. HPR let me take part in the international work of the school and I'm sure, that you'll feel the international atmosphere, too.

I also spent one week in an "efterskole". It is a boarding-school for the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> graders and very special for the Danish school-system. It is quite another way of teaching and living together. You definitely can't understand that if you have never been there. I'm very lucky that I got this chance. To understand the Danish way of life you should also visit Copenhagen. My school in Hjørring sent me there for six weeks. I visited the private school in Greve next to Copenhagen and got not only to know the capital but also another school, new teachers and new students.

As you can see, your time here in Danmark will be full of activities!

### **Accommodation and social activities**

But school is only one part of life. As I told before, I live in a Højskole. People are studying here only for one semester: art, photography, music, Danish as second language etc. It is a very international atmosphere here. Students come from all over the world. It is a very busy and a very Danish place. The school will teach you a lot about Danish culture, about values and norms. You'll live in two-bedrooms (don't be afraid, it's almost fun) with a bathroom and get to know a lot of new friends. It is a very special atmosphere and hard to describe, but worth to step into.

You'll get nice food there, a lot of cake, formative conversations and you'll have a lot of fun. It is a big family and everyone is welcome. They make you feel, that you're someone special! During my first semester they also offered a language course in Danish. If you have the possibility, participate! It's a lot of fun, too!

Just after my arrival, I also started to play football on a womens' team. That's not only physical training but also a good way to make friends and get a social network. You should do the same! There are a lot of clubs in Hjørring and even in Vrå. You will find something which fits to you and the teachers at HPR will help you!

### **Practical things**

If you will live at the Højskole in Vrå you can take the train to Hjørring. It takes about 10 minutes and you can reach the stations by foot. If you have the possibility to bring a bike, it might be a good idea! Wellingtons and a warm jacket are as useful as bath suits and sunglasses for the beach (the weather can change immediately). If you stay more than three month in Denmark, you're asked to go to the "statsforvaltning" (government administration) in Aalborg to get the yellow card. Don't forget documentation from the school, a photo, your passport and a letter which shows, that you get some money every month.

Denmark is very expensive, but it is quite cheap to live at the Højskole, because you will get an "all-inclusive-package". Don't worry, your scholarship will be sufficient!

As long as you are open minded and ready to learn a lot, I can promise you a wonderful time! If you have any questions feel free to write me a mail!

I wish you a wonderful time!

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