

## My exchange year 2022/23 in Wylie, Texas

I have always wanted to do an exchange year or go to college in the US so when I heard about an organization that organizes high school exchange years, I took the chance and applied for a spot as an exchange student for the 22/23 school year and got accepted into the EF (Education First) high school exchange program. After I finished filling out my profile at the end of October 2021, I finally got my host family in April 2022 and applied for my US visa.

My exchange year started July 14<sup>th</sup> after a few difficulties with my flight to the US I finally landed in Philadelphia, where a one-week welcome camp from the organization took place. Here I met many other exchange students. We stayed on a college campus, watched a MLB baseball game, visited New York City, went to an amusement park and had a Pep Rally and Prom at the end of camp. After camp we flew from New York to our host families.

I was placed in Wylie, Texas, a small town about an hour away from Dallas. My host family consisted of my host parents, my two host sisters, and their dog Cooper. They were the best; they took me along everywhere and introduced me to everyone they knew. It took me a while to get used to the different lifestyle and new environment, but I was lucky enough to be in the same grade as one of my host sisters and having already met the other exchange student at my school and other people that also went to the same school made the first few weeks of school easier.

Some differences between school in the US and here were, that was able to choose most of my classes like for example forensic science, architecture or psychology, that I only had seven classes in total and that the high school had 2,500 students, so way bigger than schools here. There are other things as well that might surprise people, e.g. there are two police officers at every school, the ones at Wylie East were very nice. In class they mostly work with *Chromebooks* and often also take their tests on there. At least at the high school I went to the dress code was very strict and you always had to wear your school ID. There were also pep rallies and different drills regularly e.g. shooting drills or tornado drills. School was also from 9am until 4:20pm, but only if you didn't have any practice before or after school.

School started at the beginning of August and about two months later was Homecoming. The week before Homecoming the school was decorated and every day there was a different theme to dress up to. The Friday before Hoco most people wear so-called mums, my host mom made them herself, which I think they only do in Texas. There is a pep rally, and many students also wear their mums to the football game that Friday night. Homecoming itself is on a Saturday before people go out for dinner and to take pictures. The Dance was in the cafeteria of the high school, all grades were

allowed to go and the theme that year were the 80s. I went there with my and my host sister's friend group and the other exchange student that went to Wylie East.

In October my host family took me to the Texas State Fair, which is a bit like the *Dult* but way bigger and there are fewer rides. There is also a big statue called the Big Tex. Because one of my host sisters was in the marching band, we went to San Antonio for band competitions and in our free time there we walked along the river walk and visited the Alamo. On Thanksgiving, all the extended family came to the house, we watched football and ate stuffed turkey, mashed potatoes and bread rolls.

Church was very important to my host family, so we went to church on Sundays and to youth group every Wednesday. One thing I must mention is that church is completely different over there compared to here. For them it was a tradition to always go to Chick-fil-A after youth group with your friends. Most of my friends went to the same church and the other exchange students also started to go to the same church more often. At Wylie East the other exchange student was a girl from Sweden and there were also two other exchange students from the same organization at the other high school in Wylie, a guy

from Germany and a girl from Norway. We all became very good friends.



To show my family some traditions we have in Germany, I made my host family Sauerbraten with red cabbage and potatoes for Christmas Eve dinner. In January we even got snow and since that's not a common thing to happen in Texas, school was cancelled

for a whole week. I had dance as one of my classes and throughout the year we had multiple showcases.

In spring I went on a few college visits with my host mom and host sister because she had to apply to college in the summer. We visited Texas A&M in College Station, Baylor University in Waco, UNT and Texas Women's University. It was very interesting to see the different campuses. In spring we also went to various high school sport games for

example soccer, lacrosse, basketball and baseball but mostly softball since both of my host sisters played it. Through the organization I also visited Boston over Easter with other exchange students from the program and I can only recommend visiting Boston since I loved the city. While in Boston we for example walked the Freedom Trail and visited Harvard.

Towards the end of the school year there was Prom and the theme was masquerade. Unlike Homecoming only juniors and seniors are allowed to buy tickets for prom and people also wore long dresses rather than short ones. Before prom all the girls came over and we got ready together, after that we went to dinner together and took pictures before heading to the dance. It was very fun but at the end there was a big thunderstorm and the power went off for a couple of minutes.

Some of the last things my host family did with me before I left was to go to a Rodeo and they also took me to a shooting range. What most people don't tell you about going back home is how much harder it is to leave your host family than your real family and how difficult it is to go back to only speaking your native language. I really loved my exchange year and would have never made that decision differently. I would recommend it to anyone since it is a once in a lifetime experience you will never forget.

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