

EF / topic 3: *Going places* – ready for the world?

Focus on studying foreign languages, travelling, volunteering, culture shocks, and getting out of one's comfort zone



1) Comments on the reasonability and justifiability of going abroad during a global pandemic

Comment 1

Unless you have been living under a rock, you should be aware of the current situation concerning globalization and its possible side effects including rapidly spreading pandemics like COVID-19 in 2020. While for most people the pandemic is essentially over and there are other things to worry about, the virus has left its marks in the heart of every travel and exchange agency. Having a look at the current situation and possible developments in the future, a lot of exchange students will have to ask themselves the question if the exchange they so desire is even accomplishable, or even more important, if it's justifiable. I would say: Yes it is!

Now that international travel is as close to back to normal as it's going to get, why not give yourself the opportunity for a gap year somewhere around the globe?

Traveling and staying abroad was never easy, that is for sure, especially not as a teenager leaving your family for months to come. There have always been bureaucratic difficulties, visas, and all the precautions connected to a stay abroad.

Furthermore, the worst thing that could happen under most circumstances is a closure of national borders and an increased time abroad. But is that really what you should be worried about in the first place?

With the ever-growing interconnectedness between countries and the significant processes of globalization we have been able to witness in the past decades, keeping in touch with the people you know, might it be family or friends, has gotten even easier due to social media, instant messengers, and video calls.

The experience of staying somewhere else with a host family is one of a kind and should not be regarded as an unnecessary expenditure, as it has great benefits. Not only does it boost your self-confidence and advance your language skills, but it might also help you to see the world from a different point of view.

Exchanging students might even help the countries to get aware of their cultures and establish mutual respect. Even though our world is technologically advanced and economically interconnected, that does not mean that stereotypes and generic preconceptions about people of different ethnic backgrounds and religions are a thing of the past.

Nobody can deny that there are some challenges you will have to meet and eventually overcome when participating in an exchange, but should you even be willing to join in on the experience without wanting to have any struggles or adventurous encounters?

Of course, you will have to find the right exchange company for you. Some might have closed down, some new ones might have opened up, but do the challenges not make it even more rewarding after all?

In conclusion, if you go on an exchange or send your kids on one is up to you, but you should be aware that there are vital opportunities waiting for everyone brave enough to take them. The many advantages and the experience you can get from going on an exchange have not changed while experiencing other cultures and gaining respect for them is just as important as 10 years ago. Just be assured that there are some problems and challenges waiting for everyone trying to give it a shot, but isn't that what it's all about?

Thilo Wittke (EFa / 2023)

Comment 2

Since we have recently begun to recover from a worldwide pandemic, we need to consider the possibility of another one which could be just around the corner. Still, many teenagers have the wish to go on an exchange year, even with a possible pandemic threatening to happen. This is no immature decision because, to my mind, it is their right to go on an exchange year and here is why.

First of all, teenagers are on a path of self-discovery. They are questioning everything around them and their identity. Sometimes it can feel like they suffocate in their own country and need to escape it. An exchange year abroad can seem to be an ideal solution. They can discover a new culture and meet new friends. Additionally, they might even adapt a new mindset and develop as persons. Being abroad can stand for change, but it can also stand for growth. Growth in terms of outgrowing yourself and spreading your wings. Furthermore, doing an exchange year can also have practical reasons. To be frank, it will just look good on your curriculum vitae, especially if you have done volunteering abroad or something similar. Many teenagers are aware of the fact that they can stand out to employers if they show dedication and interest in the company's work. But it does not necessarily mean that teenagers just look for an advantage in the job world. Many of them just want to improve their language and social skills and practicing the language in a native country is the best opportunity you can have. Even though inflation, wars and other catastrophes have caused costs to rise really high, there are still many organisations which offer exchange years for an affordable price and there are a lot of scholarships which can also reduce the costs. Depending on the country, the government also supports especially students who are financially unstable.

Globalisation was a driving factor for the pandemic. But it also helps us to communicate and learn from one another. An exchange year supports young people to find themselves, but it also contributes to mutual understanding which is the basis of every respectful global interaction. It basically lays the groundwork for working as a team on a global scale. All those accomplishments can be achieved if we let teenagers go on an exchange year. Exciting, is it not?

Da-Linh Do (EFa / 2023)

Comment 3

On the occasion of our recent discussion we had about whether it is justifiable or even reasonable to pursue doing an exchange year considering the ongoing pandemic, I am going

to explain to you, why is it vital and highly important that a majority of students gains intercultural experience in the world. Not only for their own good, but for our global peace and global welfare.

To begin with, countless adolescents and young adults were not able to travel and thus broaden their horizons due to the corona pandemic, so recently there has been an incredible amount of young people who are not skilled at all when it comes to their intercultural competences. And that is something we urgently need to change. First and foremost, because in the last few years there has been an incredible amount of migration globally, e.g. due to wars like the Ukraine-Russia-War, it is of greater importance than ever that we teach younger generations to treat people of different nations, cultures, and heritages with dignity and respect, as manifested in the German constitution. I strongly believe that we should consider it extremely questionable if we do not do so. Particularly, as we are an MEDC, so a lack of economic or financial resources is not the impending issue in this case. But our inaction with regards to the provision of those necessary resources that have to be made available to prepare students for experiences abroad. Moreover, it can be hardly overlooked that globalisation is an ongoing and irreversible phenomenon that has affected us positively in the past, but certainly is accompanied by a handful of side effects that were impossible to be anticipated prior to catastrophes like environmental damage and climate change hitting us with full force. By encouraging students to advance their language skills in multiple languages, we are giving them a golden opportunity for conflict resolution: educating them on how economic, social, and political issues can be solved peacefully, as they will have experienced that the best foundation for peace and enhancing our mutual understanding is experiencing each other's reality. Thus we will have a mere respectful approach when having to solve global issues. Instead of taking the easy road of blaming the other party, which certainly isn't productive at all, future generations will be able to create a forum where issues are discussed whilst appreciating each other's contribution. Now, some might say that hypothetically travelling could trigger the worsening of the corona pandemic or even trigger the outbreak of other pandemics. In my opinion that is highly unlikely to happen if we one educated and provided with basic hygiene globally and keep in mind that by creating a global forum for the discussion of issues tackling the lack of sanitation in LEDCs would be significantly facilitated and therefore supporting exchange outweighs its risks by far.

Taking all the aforementioned aspects into account, one cannot deny that intercultural exchange and thus supporting students to pursue exchange years actually should be considered a global duty and a prerequisite for our global welfare and one if the most vital, if not the most vital aspect, of the future coexistence of cultures and nations that differ greatly in their nature but could nurture each other's intellect and understanding.

Maria Chamsi (Efa / 2023)

.....

2) E-mail about taking a high school year during the Covid-19 pandemic

Hello Luke,

I'm so sorry for my late reply! I have had a lot on my plate recently, so I haven't had the chance to take the time and answer your request. I saw you sent me an online article to help you decide if you should partake in an exchange program, so let's see what I can do!

With the current Covid-19 situation we're in, planning an exchange year or even only a term can be quite challenging! So, according to the article, the USA has stopped giving out visas

for a while because of Covid-19 which makes it impossible to take part in an exchange year right now.

Additionally, many companies that used to offer such exchanges in the past, decided to sit out on this and the next year simply because it is too risky amidst the current pandemic.

Moreover, there is also the fact that some host families no longer take in foreign students due to a lack of resources and fearing for their own family's wellbeing, which is a valid factor to be considered before agreeing to having another individual in the house. I'm not saying it is impossible in the coming years, though.

If you just wait it out until programs start again, you can surely go take part in an exchange year! However, like the article recommended, please be careful when choosing a company, as some of them aren't serious and I wouldn't want you to fall victim to them. If you really want to go next year, however, you might want to shorten your stay a little. Maybe go for half a year or three months instead of a full year, this would make it more realistic for you to be able to go due to special Covid-19 regulations set by the local government and the other reasons I have already discussed.

If you ask me, I'd suggest you go after the pandemic will have passed, because it is safer that way. But if you decide you want to go next year, please consider having a look at the attachment to this email, I sent you a link to a website where you can find many serious companies!

In the end I trust your judgement, hit me up if you need any more information or for me to explain anything in more detail.

Karolina Hollon (EFa / 2023)