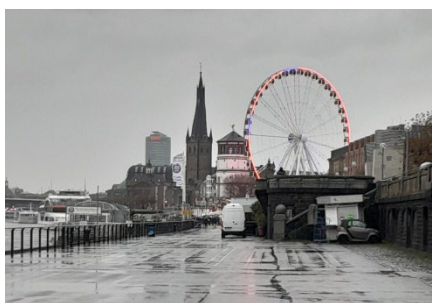


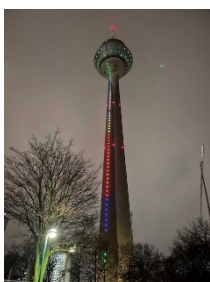
## Etonbury students' trip to Düsseldorf, Germany 8<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> December 2023

At 9:30pm on Friday 8<sup>th</sup> December, after a full day of school, 40 of our German students boarded a coach ready to travel to Düsseldorf. Clutching comfy pillows, slippers, eye-masks and plenty of snacks, the students were ready to travel through the night to arrive at the youth hostel in the city centre around midday on Saturday, accompanied by trip leader Mrs Mwamatandala, Mrs Dowden, Mrs Hilsden, Mr Bamford and Mrs Webster.

Trip leader and head of Modern Foreign Languages department, Mrs Mwamatandala, had organised a packed itinerary from the moment we checked into our rooms so we wasted little time before walking into the centre of the city to catch our river cruise down the river Rhine. The boat was bedecked with festive lights and entertainment inside was a singer who sang a mixture of German folk and Christmas songs. There was even an opportunity to meet Santa (the actual Santa, the real McCoy, the students tell me!)



After the river cruise, we hovered around the edges of the Christmas market where the students had their first opportunities to engage with the important business of shopping in German. For many, this was the first time they had used their German language skills outside of the classroom and they did an amazing job. It was wonderful to see their confidence building as they spoke to the very helpful German stallholders, made themselves understood and bought the items they were after.

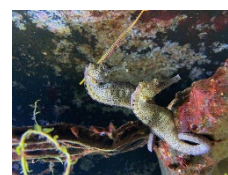


The weather up to this point had been absolutely dreadful, the kind of relentless rain that soaks you through to the skin, but not a single student grumbled as we made our way along the banks of the Rhine towards the Rheinturm. We took the lift to the top of the 240-metre-high concrete telecommunications tower up to the rather classy revolving restaurant at the top and were greeted with an incredible view of the city, which was now a riot of Christmas colours and sparkling lights through the dark, drizzly night.

After taking numerous pictures, we all walked through the rain once again to return to our lodgings for our evening meal. The youth hostel staff were so friendly and accommodating, the rooms were clean and comfortable, with hot and cold drinks available and a small shop for anyone needing refreshment. Although we had all managed to get some sleep on the coach, we had inevitably had to pass drowsily through passport control and camp out in the family lounge of the ferry for a few hours during Friday night so every member of our group went to bed a tired and happy bunch.



Freshly rested, after a German cooked and continental breakfast, we made our packed lunches and headed out once again. This time we were visiting the Aquazoo Löbbecke Museum, a cultural and scientific institution, aquarium and natural history museum. The students got the chance to see all manner of aquatic animals, invertebrates, reptiles and insects and read all about them in German.



Particular favourites were the dwarf crocodiles, a very friendly soft-shell turtle and the naked mole rats who were very cute. Once we had finished at the aquarium, as

we rounded the corner for a short walk in the neighbouring Nordpark, it was a wonderful moment to see all 40 students running hell-for-leather towards a rather elaborate-looking children's playground with Mr Bamford leading the charge!

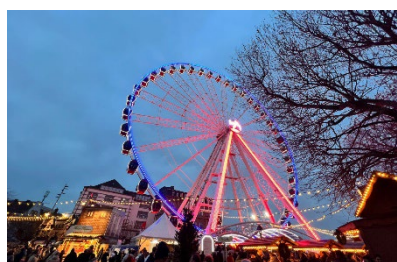
After we ate our lunch, it was time for the main event.....the Christmas market!

With the festive music in our ears and the smell of gingerbread spices in the air, we wandered around the market square and surrounding streets full of wooden stalls, all bearing an array of traditionally handmade Christmas items, food and drink. Many of the students bought gifts for loved ones and one student even managed to exchange one item for another completely holding the conversation in German!



After an amazing few hours at the market, we returned to our youth hostel for dinner and discovered that the reception staff had a selection of games, actually a drawer-full, so a few spirited games of "Uno" ensued until we all needed some sleep.

The following morning, we were loading the coach and saying a fond "Auf wiedersehen" to the wonderful city of Düsseldorf having had breakfast and made our packed lunches. We did, however, stop at a German supermarket to pick up some extra snacks for the journey, with those of us who are more familiar with Germany going in armed with a shopping list of more obscure German goodies we remember from our childhoods and consequently stock up on every time we visit!



We were en-route to Calais to catch our ferry home when the coach driver, Waldemar, let slip that he knew of a rather good Chocolate shop in Belgium that was not out of our way. We all still had a few Euros left so we visited their shop for some last-minute gifts and souvenirs.

We arrived back at Etonbury late Monday evening at the scheduled time of 9:30pm. We were all very tired and full of chocolate but we all had happy smiles on our faces. The students bade us goodnight, mostly in German, and exclaimed that they had had "the best time" and would "absolutely do it again"!

I remember thinking that I hope that they remember this trip as fondly as I remember my first trips to Germany back in the 80s and that a few of them may have started, as I did, a life-long love affair with this wonderful language, country, their culture and their food.

Written by Mrs Webster

Massive thanks to Mrs Mwamatandala, our Head of MFL, who did an amazing job organising the trip to make the most of our time and keep our students safe, German speakers Mrs Dowden and Mrs Webster, and first aiders Mrs Hilsden and Mr Bamford. Honourable mention to our coach driver, Waldemar, for getting us there and back safe and sound.