

IMGE International Games Exchange 2011 Kentucky Horse Park, Kentucky Jessica Wallin

First off, I'd like to thank anyone and everyone who had to do with the organization of this trip, as I could imagine that it took countless hours of hard work to make the games exchange happen. The people who put the trip together gave 20 riders from all corners of the world the ability to come together and make life long memories and friends. From the initial try out in Thorsby, to the competition in Kentucky, the experience was irreplaceable.

Training Camp, Kitchener, Ontario

Upon our arrival at the small Kitchener, Waterloo airport, Jazz, Kristen, Jordan and myself were greeted by our other team mate Jacquie, Tom Radcliffe, and Jacquie's sister. It was a short drive to the house we stayed at during our time in Ontario, which was the house of our chaperone for the trip. By the next morning, I think it's safe to say that we all felt at home, as Sandra and Tom welcomed us like family. For our 6 day stay in Ontario, we practiced hard which most defiantly paid off at the WOR regional PPG competition, where we placed second among 7 other masters teams, on ponies that we had met only a few days before. By the end of the week, our team was like family. We all got to go to a Brad Paisley concert in Toronto, which was super awesome!! We got the chance to practice with the Guelph pony club and we got lots of experience riding different ponies to prepare us for the competition ahead. All in all, the training camp in Ontario was a huge aid in our teamwork and performance in Kentucky for the final competition.

Tour in the United States

We arrived in the Dulles airport on July 12th, which was a short flight of just over an hour from the Toronto airport. We were greeted by the Australian team, which our team instantly bonded with. We were all good friends by the end of the 2 hour bus ride to our first BBQ/meet and greet, in Virginia. We met the GB team at the airport as well, and we all loaded up on our tour bus out to Virginia. We got to the large house to be greeted by the United States team and some members of the pony club. We were all assigned to our host families that we stayed with for 3 days. We were all mixed with other teams so we could start making friends. The host families were all very welcoming to us. I could go on and on about the fabulous tours that we were lucky enough to experience, but that would take way to long. A few tours that I specifically remember was the trail ride at Marriott ranch, the tour around Washington, and our stop along the way to Kentucky, along with the Virginia beach day. The second day we were there, we were up for an

early morning trail ride at the Marriott ranch, which we all got to relax on auto piloted horses through the mountainous terrain of Virginia. Later that day we had a cookout and played around with the teams as we all got to know each other a bit better. The most historical tour we took was the Washington, D.C tour, which we toured around the city in our bus. We got to see the pentagon, the white house, the parliament building, and we got a tour of the monument. We all got to have a beach day at Virginia beach, which involved hot weather, shopping, beach volleyball, and the ocean! I don't think we could have asked for a more laid back, hang out and have fun day. Our most favourite place to stay was a little bed and breakfast kind of thing on the way to Kentucky. It was perfect for a bunch of teenagers! We had a games room, lake, pool, hot tub, and great food! We all didn't want to leave the next morning! The tours we had throughout our trip were all very well organized and everyone was always having fun.

Competition at the Kentucky Horse Park, Kentucky

The part of the competition that impressed me the most, was the ponies we were lucky enough to use. Our team of ponies for the competition were unreal! They did an excellent job of putting together the teams of ponies as each team was equal with a small, tall, fast, and steady pony. The competition was fairly well organized, with little mishaps. The only thing that I found shouldn't have happened, was how each team got assigned a set of ponies for the whole competition. There was a discussion about letting the riders ride in white polo's, as the weather was extremely hot and humid, however only the COACHES were asked to vote on this, and they wanted to stay with tradition. Yet they failed to stay with tradition by assigning each team to one team of ponies. For competitions in the future, I think this should be overlooked more thoroughly as this was all a last minute discussion. Other than that, the competition ran smoothly and we all had an amazing time competing with our new friends.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it was the experience of a lifetime. We all have memories that will stay with us forever and friendships all around the world. I would most defiantly recommend anyone who has the chance to participate in the IMGE to go for it, as all the hard work pays off!