

# **Report about my experiences at the Anmchara International School**

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## First contact

I study “Teaching” at the Technical University of Munich and just finished the second year of my studies, when I decided to take a semester off to go abroad. After some internet research, I found the website of the *Anmchara International School* and was very impressed about its history. I emailed Godwin in May and asked about coming to Anmchara in the end of September. Besides texting Godwin, I also got in contact with some previous volunteers, which are pictured on the website. That was a great help, because I got answers to all the questions I was worried about. In the following weeks, Godwin sent me all the important documents I needed for my university and the visa – uncomplicated via WhatsApp.

## Teaching

Since I am not a finished teacher yet, I was a bit worried about what I am going to teach and even if I am able to do it. What are the expectations of the teachers? Are there materials I can use for preparing lessons? If you are reading this and having the same thoughts: Don’t worry. In the first week, I was just observing and got to know the teachers, children and the different subjects (e.g. English, Writing, Phonetics, Maths, Natural science, Sports, Creative arts, etc.). I personally decided to stay in class three and just asked the teacher if he could need some support in any subject. Since then, I am teaching natural science and sometimes phonetics, using the school book, curriculum and lots of colours to draw pictures because the children don’t have books themselves.

The rest of the school day, I am helping the teacher during class by correcting homework or helping the students. Sometimes, the teacher and I are separating the class to have smaller learning groups. That is great to make repetitions for children who are struggling and to challenge the ones who are a bit further.

All in all, volunteers can bring in as many ideas as they have. Even if it is not working, there will always be fun and laughter in class. Most of the time you are teaching, the class teacher will be sitting in class anyway to do some bureaucracy stuff and if everything is running out of control, he/she will help you.

## What to bring?

I contacted the sport brands Molten, Mikasa and Emira, wrote a few lines about the school and asked if they could provide some balls for the school. All of them were so generous and donated a couple of volleyballs. I think that many more companies are willing to sponsor some of their goods. If you have something in mind, just contact them. It is worth a try.

If you would like to bring some school materials for the students, I think it is better to shop them in Kasseh, the little town close to Sega. Doing so, you don’t have to carry heavy notebooks in your suitcase, you save a lot of money because it is cheaper here and you can support the local salesmen and saleswomen.

## Going alone?

When I arrived in Segua, there were two other volunteers, but they had already spent one month here and were about to leave in the following days.

Of course it is lots of fun to go with friends and at some points during my time here, I wished to have some company from the same culture to share experiences and thoughts. Also, it is easier to travel around on weekends. But if I had been here with my friends the whole time, I might have missed a few opportunities to get in touch with the locals here. Godwin has a great friend, Philip, who spends a lot of time in the house. Philip can take you to Kasseh by his motorbike and is the perfect guide for this area. He seems to know the whole town with its entire people and it is always fun to spend time with him. A couple of times a week, I also go to Naomi's, a girl who is almost my age and living next to the house. We are always having a great time together: She is trying to teach me Dangme, I am trying to teach her German, we are sharing music we are both listening to and have really great conversations. Naomi also tried teaching me some Ghanaian dance moves – I completely failed.

You will have fun either ways – going alone or with friends. There is no right or wrong way to do it. Everybody here is as curious to get to know your culture as you are.

## Excursion

One of the most exciting trips was the school excursion to the Volta region. We visited the highest mountain in Ghana, a monkey sanctuary and the Wli Waterfalls. What made this trip so different compared to the school excursions in Germany? - Almost everything. I am very happy to get the chance to experience Ghana's culture for two whole days.

The bus was supposed to leave school at 6:30 in the morning. Arriving at the school, it was only me being ready to go. Clocks are running more slowly in Ghana. At 7:30 am, we started packing the bus. Another surprise: Everybody brought its own mattress, buckets for showering and a plate for eating. Besides me – who did not think about one of those. Luckily, the school could provide the utensils for me. What I also didn't know in the first place, is that there was no booked accommodation for the night. The teachers wanted to look after it when we were going to arrive at our final destination.

The bus was very old and I am sure that nobody would even think about driving it at home. But the driver ensured that wheels and brakes are totally fine and that it just needs some new colour. He was also driving very carefully and the conditions of the roads we were driving on don't let you break any speed limit anyways. The bus ride was a party itself. Some student brought drums and bells to set up the beats, and as soon as we left the school, the children were singing and clapping for the following hours (with definitely no break).

After a couple of hours, we arrived at the monkey sanctuary and a guide showed us the way into the forest, where we watched and fed the monkeys. Before we were heading to the mountain, we had lunch at the park next to the sanctuary. The school has prepared every meal for the following two days. Our first lunch was Kenkey, fish and a special sauce. It was very good and that was also the first time for me, eating only with my hands. I must have looked very funny, because some children didn't mind to laugh at me, while I was eating. Later, I learned that some food here does not need to be chewed and that the kids were just amused by that. Back on the road, back to music.

In the early afternoon, we arrived in the small village that is located right next to the mountain we were going to climb on the next day. It is a very nice place, surrounded by huge mountains. While the students and I were walking around, the teacher organized the accommodation for the night: two classrooms from the local school. Within minutes, some locals were taking care of light in the rooms (they needed to be installed first). In general, the sense of community seemed to be very strong in that village and everybody was willing to help and unpack the bus. Because of my higher risk of getting malaria, a guy organized a little tent with an included mosquito net for me, which they put in the classroom. I must admit, that I felt pretty dumb, being the only one sleeping in a tent in the classroom. But as soon as it got darker, the mosquitos were really aggressive and I was just relieved to know that I was going to sleep in a protecting tent.

After dinner (Banku with stew), we all had a nice bucket shower and went to bed quite early. Good choice, because teacher Jacob woke us up at 3:30 am. For breakfast we had sweet bread and a warm drink, made out of corn flour, sugar and water. I was quite confused (and tired) why he was so early, but it took everybody so long to get ready, that we didn't leave before 7 am.

Climbing the mountain: I am writing this report seven days later and my legs still hurt haha.

It was quite a tough hike for me, but the view up on the mountain was just impressive. After that, we were directly driving to the waterfalls, which is about half an hour bus ride away. Luckily, the walk to the waterfalls does not include climbing any peaks higher than five meters. The Wli waterfall should definitely be on your list, when you're traveling Ghana. The nature is very untouched, we were allowed to pick some fresh fruits from the trees (My first Cocoa was delicious) and the waterfall is just impressive.

The bus ride back home to Segha was quite long and took us more than five hours. The roads were bad and due to heavy rainfall under bad conditions. Also, the bus had to get some wheels fixed. Instead of children playing with their phone or listening to music on their own, like I use to know it from home, the students of Anmchara were playing another concert, song by song, for five hours. I would lie, if I say I enjoyed it the whole time. Arriving in Segha, my ears were very thankful for some quite minutes.

Summing up, I can just recommend the excursion to any volunteer. Of course, you get to know the culture also by teaching and talking to the people here, but it is something totally different to spend two whole days together and just do and eat all the things the children here are used to.