

2011-2012 OBW Alumni Report

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Heidelberg Is The Way To Go!

My name is Katie and I spent my 3rd year of postsecondary school at the University of Heidelberg, Germany! I definitely had an interesting time finding a way to study abroad. I am a Trent University student in the Teacher Streaming Program and I am majoring in Sociology and German. One of my deciding factors in coming to Trent was the previously offered Freiburg exchange program. This program was then cut in my second year; the day after I handed in my application (January/February 2011). This came as a shock to all students in the German program at Trent because we did not have another option to study abroad in Germany in order to enhance our speaking and writing skills. After a few letters and meetings with the International Study Abroad Program and the Dean, we were given a new option through the OBW Program. This program was honestly a lifesaver for me because I dreamed of studying abroad for years and I wanted to learn the language in order to speak with German members of my family. At that time, it was past the deadline for applications into the program, but OBW made an exception for the Trent students. We had three choices of schools to apply to and, depending on your majors, we were accepted at a university. It is hard to admit, but Heidelberg was my 3rd choice because I didn't really have time to look up anything about the schools that I had randomly chosen. I could not be happier with OBW's decision in matching me with Heidelberg University.

Heidelberg city is gorgeous and the atmosphere is energetic. It is broken up into two sections; an old town filled with history and a newer area with some of the greatest medical facilities in the world. If you are an active person, the athletic facilities and sports are fantastic. Socially, there are a huge number of activities such as excursions/weekend trips, pub-crawls, courses, and groups that are geared towards the many exchange students. Transportation in Germany was easier than I have ever experienced in Canada. Buses and streetcars travel all over the city every 10 minutes during the day and there are night buses Friday through Sunday to ensure an easy way home after a night out. Heidelberg is also in the perfect location to travel to any point in Europe. I now regret not getting the Bahn card, this is a discount card that can be purchased at any train station giving travelers cheaper means of transportation. I ended up using the train much more than I expected and could have saved money by buying one. Heidelberg is located within an hour to an international airport and two hours to the Ryan air airport. Ryan air was the most inexpensive way to get around Europe and, although there are baggage restrictions, they were the perfect company for a poor university student.

There are large numbers of tourists because of the city's castle, the Neckar River and the mountains surrounding it. The fact that there are so many tourists can make your stay in Heidelberg much easier as an English-speaking student with many of the restaurants and businesses know English. The downside to English spoken in shops and other areas made it harder to learn and speak German. You need to practice the language, it was difficult when the servers and shop employees automatically switched to English once they heard an accent. I would recommend sticking to German in order to get some practice and making as many German friends as possible! As much as Germans want to learn English, they also want to help you learn their language.

Photo: From the top of Königstuhl

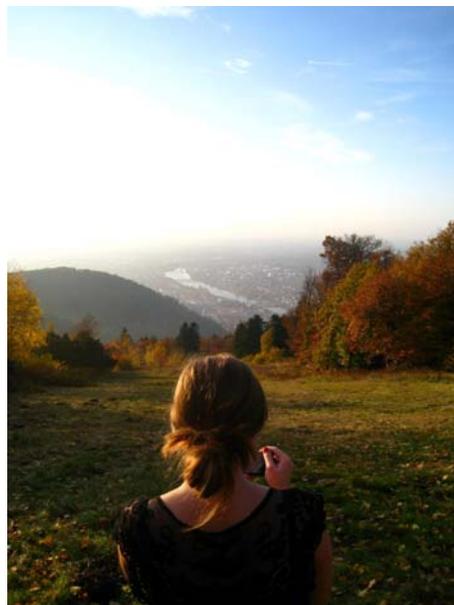




Photo: A night view of the 'Old Bridge' and Castle

The administration in Heidelberg is more complicated than I expected. There is a form for everything and each form needs to be taken to a different location or office. These administrative things are not such a big deal as long as you get them done on time and fill out each form correctly. The same thing applies to class registration. There is a short language proficiency test in the first few days of arriving to Heidelberg in order to place you in a section for the pre-university language course.

This lasts a month and is very helpful after a summer filled with zero to little German learning. When registration for the actual university courses comes along... be ready to have a few different ways of registering. Some courses are done through e-mail to the professor, some are first come first serve on a sign up sheet, and some are just showing up to the first lecture. Make sure you know what you need to do for each class specifically because it can result in a mix up of courses/schedules.

All together, I had the experience of a lifetime and would not trade my time in Heidelberg for anything. I plan on moving back to Europe as soon as I finish my Teaching Degree. Without the OBW experience I would have never met friends from all over the world, or been immersed in a culture that does not have English as its official language. I would never of had the opportunity to travel to over 20 cities outside of North America during my school year. Finally, I know I had an amazing year abroad because I have only been back in Canada for a month, and I already miss everything about my time away. I'm excited for you to make your own memories and have your own adventures that you can then share next year! Good luck!



Photos: Trip to Cinque Terre, Italy with friends I met in Heidelberg

