

## My Hohenheim Year

My name is Nik and I studied business management at Universität Hohenheim from September 2011 to July 2012. Simply expressed, it was the best year of my life. I had never been to Europe, in fact not even to the United States, but I had always dreamed of living in Germany. I was pretty nervous considering my first trip abroad was actually moving to an entirely new country. After a fairly long flight I arrived in Frankfurt on a sunny afternoon and accidentally boarded a train headed north to Hamburg. I did realize my mistake when the Deutsche Bahn employee informed me I was to get off at the next stop. However, I arrived safely in Stuttgart only a couple hours late. I think one of the most important things upon arrival is to have a friend of some sort to help you find your new home! I was lucky to have been assigned a “buddy” from Uni Hohenheim and she was a massive help for my first week in Germany. She explained the transit more clearly, took me to the banks, and made appointments for the many places that required them. I am not sure my experience would have been so nice without a “buddy”.

Within the first couple of days I began taking part in the “Sprachkurs” that was made available to me and I think this was the second most important part of my arrival in Germany. This was where I met a large collection of other students in the same position as me. The students ranged quite widely in age, nationality and program of study. It was a fantastic way to meet new people and to begin practicing (for those who are not already familiar with German) the new language. It was crucial for getting comfortable in my new country and to be dealing with the same things as everyone else. Then we went on excursions together around Stuttgart which was very fun and we got to know everyone better. I can honestly say that I made some incredible friends in Germany that I will keep for the rest of my life. The other advantage to meeting other exchange students is that they often have the same desires for travel and for all things German, which makes the experience that much richer. Since Uni Hohenheim is also a campus-style university everything and everyone was very close to my residence. I found this to be an excellent advantage of Hohenheim because I could get to class quickly and if I had some sort of bureaucratic problem I did not have to go out of my way to find the people with answers. The exchange coordinators at Hohenheim were also excellent in providing help to me when I had many questions. I rented a bike from the University which was fantastic because I could use it all year round and it made trips to the grocery store or class that much faster. I highly recommend getting one! My room was modest in size but the building itself was very nice and always clean, which was important for me. An advantage of staying in residence is that you have the opportunity to meet REAL Germans studying at the University as well. At first it is intimidating because they all speak “Swäbisch” seemingly as quickly as possible before they learn you are not from Germany. However all the Germans I met were nice and helpful, none of this “cold and angry” nonsense! I was able to make friends with my neighbours relatively quickly and I got to have a much more “German” experience as I met their friends and learned about where they came from within Germany. It is important to make an effort to “be German” so that you can adapt quickly and feel comfortable in your new home. I personally loved Germany and nearly everything about it. Naturally, as any place, there are things that upset a Canadian such as EVERYTHING being closed on Sundays but overall I had no problem adjusting and really enjoyed it. I love that Germany is (at least in Baden-Württemberg) extremely clean and horribly well-organized. I will never forget my friend saying that “...according to the schedule the bus should be here...” as it pulled up

beside us. Transportation is simply amazing in Germany with the high-speed trains and I am impressed how well connected Stuttgart is with S- and U-Bahns as well as buses. Although Hohenheim is not that close to the city-centre of Stuttgart it took a mere 26 minutes to get from my front door to the very centre. Downtown is just like any city as well, with lots of good places to hang out and enjoy food and drink from Germany but also the whole world. Stuttgart also has many neat things to see and is quite a modern and exciting city. In all parts of Germany nearly everyone speaks excellent English which can be helpful for newly arrived students who may not know all the vocabulary yet.

The education system is quite different to that of Ontario's and regular university classes really start around the second week of October, so there was plenty of time to get accustomed to my "new" life before worrying about syllabi and exams. There was an excellent selection of German classes but for my academic standing I opted for English-language courses which were also widely available. All the professors I had were from Germany and had extensive worldwide working and teaching knowledge. For instance, one of my professors was showing us pictures of him at conferences with Angela Merkel... Professors were also accommodating for international students if there were any early departure dates or other exam conflicts to help exchange students. There are also many breaks during the year which give students excellent opportunities to explore Germany but also the entire continent and Uni Hohenheim is literally minutes from Stuttgart's main airport with connections worldwide.

All in all it was a fantastic year abroad and I cannot wait to return to Germany. I think it was an amazing experience for me to not only see Germany but to have the opportunity to actually live there. There are so many great people and experiences I will never forget and I feel that I really grew personally because it was also my first year living away from home. I also think a one year exchange gives you a lot of time to really experience Germany and its culture and I have truly learned so many things about actually living in Europe after this year. I also honestly felt like I was going home to my residence after a very short time which was a nice feeling. I highly, HIGHLY recommend Uni Hohenheim and personally I think doing an exchange in Germany is the best. I wish everyone heading to Germany the best of luck- you will have so much fun!