

## FROM STELLENBOSCH TO HEIDELBERG

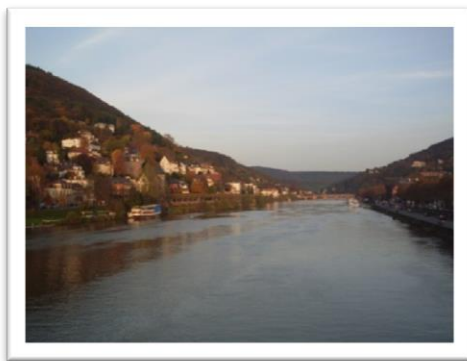
On the 14<sup>th</sup> of June 2013 I got one of the most exciting emails of my life. My application for a short term research visit to Germany was approved and I would soon be in Heidelberg. I had never been overseas before and didn't know what to expect, but I was excited to go and ready for the experience. Heidelberg is home to the oldest university in Germany and is a popular tourist destination due to sights such as the beautiful Old Town, Castle and the River Neckar.

I am currently doing my Masters in Genetics at Stellenbosch University and was fortunate enough to be awarded a 4 month DAAD research visit to the Theoretical Bioinformatics division of the German Cancer Research Centre (DKFZ) in Heidelberg. The centre is the largest biomedical research institute in Germany and I was extremely privileged to receive bioinformatics help and training which was not available in South Africa. I have learned valuable techniques that were not only useful for my current work, but will hopefully be of use for future projects as well. Furthermore, I was also exposed to a new working environment and was in the position to ask various people for help whenever I faced a problem. I definitely learned a lot during the 4 months!

On a personal note, this experience means the world to me. It might not sound like much, but for someone who has never been outside of South Africa, even the smallest things like supermarkets, working with a different currency and figuring out the bus routes were a thrilling experience for me. Every day was definitely an adventure! I have seen many beautiful places, from Leipzig, Nürnberg, Füssen, Munich and Freudenstadt in Germany to bordering countries Austria and the Czech Republic. I have also met people from all walks of life and learned that you don't need to speak the same language as someone just to get along. Having seen many new places and meeting people from various backgrounds, I feel I have matured more over the past few months than over the past few years. It has also given me a sense of confidence and I now tend to think I can do anything (even if it isn't always the case!).

I can truly say that I now understand the DAAD motto "change by exchange". Thank you DAAD for this incredible experience!

- Michelle Coffee



Views of beautiful Heidelberg!