

On 17 February 2014 I got the most exciting news: "I am pleased to inform you that your application for the research grant was approved, congratulations!" After three months of searching for a supervisor and host institution, I had finally completed my application for the DAAD short term research stay scholarship and mailed it by late January. I was shocked at how fast the application was processed. So upon receiving the news in less than 3 weeks, my first reaction was a mixture of surprise and excitement.

After a few minutes reality set in again and my brain went into overdrive. Having never travelled on my own before, I began running through all the arrangements that still had to be made. However, after the initial shock wore off during the first week, I was able to make all necessary arrangements fairly calm and collected.

A week before my flight in April the nerves were playing up again. All in all, when considering my very limited knowledge of German, the public transportation system and being "alone and lost" in this "new" world, the journey actually went quite well. Catching the different trains from Nuremberg to Bayreuth and lugging 40+ kg of luggage around made my first day on German soil quite a taxing one.

I must say that being a foreigner in Germany with little to no German is not as big a problem as one might think. In general it seems that most Germans have, at the very least, an elementary grasp of the English language. So with a little effort (and in many cases a few mispronounced German words on my side) I was able to at least ask for directions, buy food and in a few instances had quite interesting conversations with new people in restaurants. Being Afrikaans also helped a bit, although not as much as I would have liked.

My first week in Bayreuth I spent familiarising myself with the city, learning the location of supermarkets, restaurants and pubs, opened my bank account, completed my residents registration and got a German sim card. I spent a further three months at the "Lehrstuhl für Chemische Verfahrenstechnik" (Chair of Chemical Engineering) under Prof. Dr.-Ing. Andreas Jess. I was conducting some of my experimental work in Fischer-Tropsch Synthesis at the chair as part of my Masters thesis. In hindsight, my research stay should have spanned 4 - 5 months. One sometimes hits a few bumps in the road with equipment malfunctioning, and unfortunately this was my fate. Even though not all went to plan, I still gained valuable insights and experience from an academic standpoint. During my time at the chair I was exposed to a top quality academic atmosphere, highly capable academics, students and staff, pristine laboratories and a variety of laboratory- and analysis equipment.

Although a lot of my time was spent either in the office, my laboratory (the "Keller" as it was called, since it was in the cellar) or in my flat in Bayreuth, I also made a few weekend trips and spent a few nights barbecuing with my new friends from the chair. It may sound like I was "confined", but rest assured, there is more than enough to keep you busy in Bayreuth. The university offers quite a number of "extracurricular activities" and the city itself hosts a few festivals. Also, being there during the Football World Championship it was almost impossible to not watch football.

During my first month a friend and I went on a day excursion to Bamberg, which turned into a bit of a longer excursion than initially anticipated. On our way to Bamberg we noticed that it was, incidentally, also the day of the Erlangen volksfest. The masses of people we saw in traditional wear

then made a lot more sense. So seeing as neither of us had been there before we decided to stop off at Erlangen on our way back since it was on the way anyway. It was a very enjoyable trip and those memories will not be soon forgotten.

I also managed a weekend in Munich with a friend from the chair. A bit of nightlife and a bit of sightseeing on Friday and Saturday and the best was left for last: A day in the Deutsches Museum. (At least, for me it as an awesome day.) I would recommend more than a day to visit the museum if you want to see everything as the building houses much more than it would seem.

Unfortunately I was only able to manage on more weekend trip, this time to Leipzig. Leipzig is a beautiful city with a rich history and a healthy nightlife. I experienced a bit of the city, a bit of the history and a bit of the nightlife and to crown the weekend I was lucky enough that the tramway museum was open (as it is only open once a month). One can take a trip around the city on one of the historic trams and see parts of the city one would not necessarily see otherwise.

All in all I had a very pleasant stay in Germany and would jump at the chance to visit again. I met great people, made new friends, gained valuable experience and learned a lot, not only academically and culturally, but about myself as well. My thanks goes to the DAAD for affording me the opportunity to do a portion of my research in Germany and also to my supervising Professor for his willingness to supervise and advise me during my stay.

I would recommend anyone whose interest is peaked by an international study/research opportunity in Germany to go for it. It will definitely be something you would be hard pressed to forget or regret.



Mr. Andi Wolf and I enjoying a beer in Leipzig