

Could you introduce yourself please?

My name is Sandra Narten. I am studying to be a primary school teacher specializing in music and German at the University of Hildesheim. Currently in my sixth master's semester, I am almost through with my studies.

Why did you choose to spend a semester abroad in Sweden?

I am spending half a year at Uppsala University in Sweden. I opted for a semester abroad because I did not want to visit another country as a tourist, but wanted to live there for a longer period. I want to experience a new culture, meet new people, and practice my foreign languages. Studying abroad was a good opportunity to be here for a longer period before starting my professional life.

Ever since I was a child, and Astrid Lindgren books were read to me, I have wanted to go to Sweden. I have heard from friends who have been there, and I always liked the pictures very much. In fact, I was there on vacation last year. However, now is my first time spending such a long time here, and it has been very nice.

How were your first days abroad?

I arrived in January, and it was 15 degrees below zero. The cold was a bit of a shock for me at the beginning. I had to cover myself with winter clothes that I probably will never use again in Germany.

In addition, everything was very relaxed because I arrived on the day of arrival suggested by Uppsala University. I was able to take advantage the Key Service offered by the university at which point they give us our key and drive us home by bus. I recommend that everyone come on the suggested day of arrival. It is not only practical, but also gives you the opportunity to meet other exchange students.

How do you like studying online at our partner university and the mentoring at our partner university?

I think the online program at Uppsala University is very successful because the university is well organized. The technical implementation works extremely well. Sometimes I even have the feeling that the online implementation is smoother in Sweden than in Germany. Usually, you get a response to e-mails from the university within two hours. If you need an office hour appointment, you can often arrange it from one day to the next.

As an exchange student, you are assigned a coordinator. I find it very helpful having a contact person, especially when studying online. For example, I was worried that I would not be able to manage the work load, so I discussed my concerns with my coordinator online. She was

very helpful and told me not to worry and that they already had gotten organized. She also knew exactly which courses I was on and knew all my lecturers. I felt very much in good hands here.

Is there a difference between the German and the Swedish study system?

The study system is different than in Germany. First, courses in the university vary in length and start on different dates. For example, I took four courses at Uppsala University. My Swedish language course lasts the whole semester. Two of my courses last two months each, and the last course only lasts one month. The shorter the course, the more intensive the work is in a week.

What is very different, is the fact that homework is not submitted during the lecture-free period, but directly at the end of the course. This means you have to organize yourself differently.

The university is the engine of lifelong learning in Sweden. I think it is encouraged to learn until the age of 60, to pursue further education, or take a different direction in life. It is nice to not only study with people of the same age but also have contact with older people and learn from one another. The German system differs in this aspect as well.

Additionally, I find that the interaction between students and lecturers is more personal. When it comes to communicating with lecturers, students speak on equal terms and at eye-level. In one instance, our lecturer invited us to get to know each other personally and even shared her mobile phone number. If we are worried, we can always call her. This is very different from Germany.

Did you improve your language skills?

My English has definitely improved. Because I have never studied English before, I had never really read texts in English or had a lecture in English. I had to start learning a lot of vocabulary in order to find my way around here. You slowly get used to understanding English texts and communicating with subject-specific language in the seminars.

Before my semester abroad, I began teaching myself Swedish. Then I attended three Swedish language courses at the adult education center. In Sweden, I was allowed to join the B1 course straight away. It was a good thing not having to repeat everything.

Although, I would like to practice my Swedish, I do not get the chance very often. You do not get to talk much yourself, and there is no time before or after the seminar to talk to others. It is a bit of a shame. However, I do think that in the end I will definitely be able to speak a lot more than before.

You can meet with locals at your leisure, because Sweden allows more contact compared to other countries during the pandemic. It is a question of personal conscience whether you want to do it or not. Currently, I tend to avoid large groups because there is no mask requirement here. Although you are free to do a lot, it is a question of conscience.

Is there something that you have adopted (for yourself) from the foreign culture?

Going for a coffee in Sweden is a great tradition. They call this *Fika*. *Fika* is an active break from work or studies. You meet up with friends or colleagues for coffee every day, go out and sit at a café or on a meadow. You can even see people in suits simply sitting on meadows in Sweden. The top priority is not to talk about work or studies, which I find nice. I will definitely stop for coffee. People in Sweden are also a bit more mindful. You rest more, leave others alone, and are satisfied focusing on your own business. That is very relaxing. Sometimes, I wish it were the same in Germany. Maybe I can take this attitude and mentality with me.