

## EXPERIENCE REPORT

I spent a semester as an international exchange student at the University of Hildesheim, which was actually 5 months in which I learned a lot of things, met very interesting people and visited incredible places. The exchange was possible in part through a scholarship granted by the TRANSLANG project, which covered half the minimum monthly amount required by the German government for student stays, that amount was a great help, but even so I had to save and get the rest of the money. The scholarship also included transportation support, which was enough to buy a round-trip flight to make the transfer.

Before leaving I was very nervous, especially since I don't speak German. Although I knew that the classes I would be attending would be conducted in English, I knew that day-to-day activities would require at least a basic knowledge of the local language. This was my second time living in Europe, the first time being in France, so I used the knowledge gained from my first experience of how trains work, for example, and some aspects of the lifestyle that I got to know when I visited a couple of German cities as a tourist.

It may seem not so difficult for some people, but for me, the most difficult thing before leaving was packing my bags. Being autumn-winter season, I knew that I would face low temperatures, so I had to bring appropriate clothing and essential items for me, some things that would make me feel at home despite being in a different country and continent. But at the same time, I was happy to be able to spend that season in Europe, since I prefer the cold and I would have the opportunity to see the autumn colors and enjoy the snow and the Christmas markets. And so, I did, I visited various markets both in Hildesheim and Hanover and other cities, experiencing moments that seemed like they were out of a movie.

I did not have high expectations before arriving in Germany, because I have always preferred to let myself be surprised and discover the particularities of the experience while I am living it. However, I can say that the TRANSLANG team members were extremely kind to me, always watching over me, and that my buddy assigned by the university was also an excellent person, and helped me with many things, making my installation and adaptation much easier.

The university turned out to be much bigger and more beautiful than I had imagined, the same thing happened with the apartment in which I lived (Hansering). Access to various parts of the city was very easy using the buses, so my stay was very comfortable and pleasant. During my stay I took an intensive week-long German course and, although I found the classes to be very traditional, I learned very useful aspects that helped me in everyday activities.

I also took two seminars (Teaching English with Stories and Challenges of Inclusive Teaching), the sessions were very long but very spaced, which I liked a lot, since it allowed me free time to travel and do other cultural activities. I found that the classes were not that different from those in Mexico, and I felt comfortable seeing that I could perform well, using previous knowledge, participating, reading the materials provided, and preparing presentations.

Although I did not do any extracurricular activities during my stay, I did travel a lot. I visited several cities in Germany: Hanover, Goslar, Braunschweig, Heidelberg, Hamburg, Frankfurt, Stuttgart... etc., so I was able to discover the museums, the architecture, the history and the local food. I also traveled to other countries in Europe, taking advantage of the proximity and how relatively easy it is to travel within the European Union. The truth is, being much older than my fellow students, I wasn't very interested in student life since it's a stage I've already lived through, but I still established good relationships with my classmates and did several team projects.

As I already mentioned, I really enjoyed my stay in the university residence. The size was comfortable, and it had all the facilities, equipped kitchen and heating, for example. Also, I could get to the main campus on foot or by bus (the bus stop was very close) and there was a supermarket right in front of it. At all times I felt calm and safe. As I mentioned before, I took an intensive course in German and having the opportunity to listen to people speak German every day I was able to improve my listening comprehension and general understanding of the language, now I feel more motivated to learn it than ever before. It had been in my plans.

As this was my second experience living abroad and knowing a little about German culture, I did not experience culture shock upon arrival. However, I recognize several aspects that caught my attention and I really liked living there. For example, the culture of recycling (specifically the PET recycling machines in supermarkets), the efficiency of public transport (buses with specific schedules and that I could use for free with my UNiCard), how they respect rest time (many establishments they are closed on Sundays), the security (I could be alone in the street at any time without being in danger) and the friendliness of the people (many look very serious but when you approach them they are very friendly).

In summary, I lived an extraordinary experience that made me grow personally and professionally. I recommend to future students that they make the decision to go on an exchange, although it can be scary, it is an experience that helps you expand your limits and learn or develop abilities that you did not think you had and do things that you considered impossible. In my opinion, the most important thing is to go with an open but respectful mentality, knowing that you have to adapt to the country and not the other way around, but that there is always room to share your customs and worldview, thus achieving mutual feedback.

At first, I was scared and nervous, but they say that when you want to do something and it scares you, do it with fear. And I did it. I think it was one of the best decisions I could have made. I am happy and grateful to have been able to be part of this project, which was also completely aligned with the research topic of my master's thesis, and to have lived in a country where I never imagined living. All the time I was there I tried to make the most of it and do my best, and I managed to live great experiences and build extraordinary memories.