



Tübingen, Winter Semester 2016/17

I headed over to Germany with a handful of German and possibly foolhardy amount of optimism. I had decided to use my exchange semester, among other things, to test the “she’ll be right” attitude, and I was rewarded with some amazing trips, great mates, and a renewed sense of faith in the Kiwi attitude.

Arriving in Tübingen on a public holiday could have been disastrous, but thanks to tips from other Otago kids who had been before me, I managed to find my way to a youth hostel and sort out moving in to my apartment. I was living in Prinz Karl, apparently a previous home of Alzheimer himself, and definitely a prime location in the middle of Tübingen’s old town. The building was filled with other exchange kids, and so to my relief the friend-making could be done in English, instead of German. Most of the university accommodation has one exchange student per flat, which would be much better for getting your language up to speed, but I was stoked to be able to make friends in my own language. I did have to drop a bit of the Kiwi drawl to make myself understood, but compared to my friends from Russia and Denmark, I felt like I had the easy end of the deal.

The significant memories from those first few weeks are mostly of lines. German bureaucracy is really a thing of wonder. We lined up to sign forms so that we could line up to fill in spreadsheets to get into yet another line. There’s no escaping this, and so we decided to make the most of it. It’s amazing the friends you can make from standing in a line together for hours on end.

The student organisation StudIT was amazing at organising activities to get us all mingling. The Meet and Greet in the first couple of days was crazy- it involved cramming as many international and local students as possible in an enclosed space in the hopes that physical closeness might lend itself to the bonds of friendship. It was surprisingly successful- I think that the shared awkwardness of breaking the ice whilst being crushed on all sides really was a catalyst for some great friendships, and deciding to go out for drinks afterwards was the start of one of many great nights out in Tübingen.

I felt pretty rude living in Germany but not knowing any German, and so I tried to sign up for a German language class through the Uni. In classic German fashion, this involved signing up for an appointment in order to sign up for the class, but by the time my appointment came around, the lowest level German class was full. I had to sit an exam to try and get into the next level up, and so after 4 hours of intense German grammar lessons from my flatmates, I sat the exam and somehow



passed. The class itself was amazing- we weren't allowed to speak a word of English (or any other language), and so at the start it was pretty hilarious trying to communicate with such a limited vocabulary. However, our teacher was great and explained all the words very slowly and clearly, and soon we were all chatting away in what was probably hilariously inaccurate, but understandable German.

I hadn't planned any trips before arriving, but as soon as I got set up in Tübingen I started organising myself to make the most of my time in Europe. Compared to in New Zealand, travelling is super easy and pretty cheap if you use the busses, not the trains. Some highlights included visiting some mates on exchange in Lyon, going to Paris to see a gig, and hiking around the mountains in Bavaria, in south-east Germany. I think some of friends thought I was a bit nuts for going away every weekend, because people who live in Europe don't have that urgency to see everything all at once, but I'm so glad I did because I feel like I really made the most of my time away.

The classes in Tübingen were structured pretty differently to those in Otago. At home I study a BSc in Microbiology, but in Germany I was just doing a range of 300-level biology papers, along with my German course. They have an option to take block courses, which involves doing a whole paper in about a month. These were a bit intense, because usually we had about 4 lectures and 2 or 3 labs per week, along with presentations and assignments, and finishing in an exam. It was great getting them out of the way though- I did once in November, and then once from December- January, so it meant that the start and end of my exchange was more chill academically. The whole semester papers were also good- the involved a lot more presentation and discussion than the courses at home, which I liked. It was also cool studying subjects which I would never have even heard of in Otago. A highlight was a course in visual ecology, where we learned all about how animals see and why they are different colours.



One of the best things about my time in Germany was learning about different attitudes to pretty much every topic. My mates came from a pretty diverse range of countries, and some of the stories they had blew the mind of a little New Zealander. For me, the whole point of exchange was to connect with people from other countries, and try to understand why people have such world views.

Although I'm sure I would have enjoyed an exchange anywhere, I'm very happy I chose to go to Tübingen. The people, the travel and the German culture all made it an unforgettable experience, and I'd highly recommend it to anyone considering an exchange.

