



(Week 1- Exchange Students – Miniatur Wunderland)

Hamburg University of Applied Sciences

Study Abroad – Lyric Kesteloot

February 28th, 2009, five months ago I came to Hamburg. In that time I've done things I never imagined I would in life. Some of my most memorable experiences include feeding an elephant, attending a male strip show, attending a concert in an ex-slaughterhouse, celebrating a Swedish Midsummer Festival, learning to cook authentic German food, experiencing being blind for a day, traveling throughout Europe, and finally, meeting people from all over the globe, each with their own story, whom many of which would become a part of mine.

Before I came to HAW Hamburg, I was a student at California State University Long Beach. My major there is International Studies. With such a major, I knew that it was essential to study abroad to get a better understanding of the world; I just didn't think that I would actually go through with it. When I began applying for schools, I knew that I wanted to study in Germany. My mother was born in Germany, I had traveled there a few times before, and I was studying the language. Although I had been to Germany before, I had never before been to Northern Germany, nor had I ever stayed for longer than a month. I chose HAW Hamburg because my school had a direct exchange with the university and the counselor at HAW was accommodating and informative. HAW Hamburg is one of the largest universities of applied sciences in Germany, so I figured that they would have the widest variety of classes and programs. I was worried though, because the classes in English were limited. The university however, allowed me to take classes at two separate campuses. This allowed me to obtain a full schedule with classes equivalent to the classes I should have been taking back home. My classes at HAW included International Business,

Working in Multicultural Groups, German Food and Culture, and Intercultural Communication and Competence.

My first day in Germany I was terrified. I arrived at the airport late in the evening, tired, hungry, jet-lagged, and completely unaware of my surroundings. There was another HAW student tutor there to pick me up and she brought me to my student apartment in Allermöhe. When you arrive you will also have a HAW student tutor to meet you at the airport and help you get situated. Your student tutor will help you settle in, set up a bank account, register with the city, obtain a visa, get a cell phone, and answer any questions that you might have. I arrived a few days early, so there was only one other student in the apartment at the time. After I had slept for about 26 hours, I decided to go find food and see where exactly I was. I found a little bakery, and I quickly discovered how terrible my German really was. Being in a class with other American students speaking German is entirely different than speaking with a native German speaker; everything sounded so different and so much faster. Within a few weeks though, I felt comfortable enough to order food and perform simple errands using the German language.

When I began classes at HAW Hamburg I was nervous, I thought that the classes would be particularly difficult. I had heard that the European system was much more challenging than the American system, and this was true in some ways. HAW is a university of applied sciences. Universities of applied sciences focus more on practical knowledge and field work. HAW was more hands-on and interactive than I had experienced at CSULB. The main way that HAW differed from my American university was that instead of constant tests, we focused on group work and presentations.

At my home university we typically work alone unless we are working on a skit for a language class. Working in any group can be worrisome because you depend on the other people to complete their own work, you will need to standardize the work that has been completed, and you need to coordinate schedules to accomplish this. Although the tasks for the groups were simple, I found it extremely difficult to work in these groups, especially on the multicultural level I experienced at HAW. English was not the mother tongue of over 98% of the students. Because of this, I found straightforward communications could easily be misunderstood and lead to conflict. My classes at HAW consisted of other study abroad students from virtually all over the world. Some students will speak English better than others; some students will have a different work ethic than others. During the course of the semester there were times when I was frustrated and felt helpless. It can be challenging relying on other students and this was something that I was not used to handling. But the fact is, in the working world you will be communicating with other people on a daily basis. The concept of working alone and only for one's self is unrealistic. The skills I learned from these hands-on group experiences are both critical, as well as something that I simply could not have learned by sitting in lectures at my home university.



(German Food and Culture Class – Cooking Lesson)

My classes at HAW Hamburg included International Business, Working in Multicultural Groups, German Food and Culture, and Intercultural Communication and Competence. I took International Business and Intercultural Communication and Competence at the Berliner Tor campus, while I took Working in Multicultural Groups and German Food and Culture at the Bergedorf campus. Each one of my classes was entirely unique and it is difficult to compare them. The Berliner Tor campus is more business orientated and the classes I attended there reflected that.

»Intercultural Communication and Competence« though was unique because the class only met briefly to form groups. With these groups we were given a topic about communication studies in which we had to write an extensive research paper and conduct an hour and a half presentation with a case study.

My »International Business« class was exactly as the classes I have attended in the United States. The lectures consisted of students sitting in a classroom taking notes, with a professor up front lecturing to PowerPoint slides. At the end of the semester we took a final examination in which we had received a study guide a few weeks before.

»Working in Multicultural Groups« was similar to this course, however half of the class was lecturing and for the second half of the class we worked in groups doing various teambuilding and communication exercises. Our final for this course was a case study presentation of a communication conflict resolution situation based on the materials we had learned in class. I was able to use the information I had learned in this course to solve conflicts I had encountered working in groups for my other courses at HAW.

My favorite of the courses I took was my »German Food and Culture Class«. In this course we learned how to make schnitzel, sauerkraut, spätzle, and other traditional German dishes from various regions throughout the country. We learned why and how the German dishes vary from region to region, how Germany's history has impacted and changed these traditional German dishes, and what current

trends are affecting German cuisine. At the conclusion of this course, we threw a party for the international students, where we served the dishes we had learned to prepare. I couldn't have thought of a better way to conclude the semester.

There will be times when you will get homesick, but remember that your friends and family will still be there when you get back. I was fortunate enough to have both my friends and family come and visit me, you never know, people might surprise you. As part of the exchange program though, you will hardly have time to be homesick. During my first week in Hamburg, there were coordinated events to make the international students feel welcome, introduce us to Hamburg, and to help us meet other students. These events included a scavenger hunt throughout Hamburg, a walking tour of the city, a trip to Miniatur Wunderland, a welcome brunch, and an afternoon of bowling. Miniatur Wunderland is the world's biggest model railway exhibition. I am not very interested in model trains, but I found Miniatur Wunderland fascinating. Miniatur Wunderland has scaled down replicas of Scandinavia, Hamburg, Mount Rushmore, the Grand Canyon, the Florida Keys and Sea World, the Austrian Alps, the Matterhorn in Switzerland, Las Vegas, and even Area 51, complete with UFOs and aliens! The international student group went through the exhibit very quickly, but my housemate Kim and I stayed after to admire all the hard work and detail.

After the majority of the international students arrived, a welcome brunch was held. I was impressed by the organization of the brunch. The food was excellent, there were many varieties as well as vegetarian options, and the food was paid for by the university. During the brunch we played games to get to know one another better and after the brunch the group went bowling. On the way home from the bowling alley I learned a very valuable lesson: DO NOT FORGET YOUR TRAIN PASS, EVER! Train control can come on the train at any time and they do not wear uniforms. Forgetting your train ticket is stressful, time consuming, and embarrassing. And if for some reason you DO forget your train pass, DO NOT FORGET YOUR PASSPORT AS WELL! After bowling I found myself in this situation, no train pass and no passport. I was actually removed from the train by the train control and brought to the train station security office, all the time I was being yelled at in German. Luckily I was in a large group and the other students who were on the train with me followed us. In that group there was a German student, he talked to the train security and they agreed to take his passport information because I did not have a passport on me. The following week I was required to go to the court house with my train pass and pay a fine of €2.50. This was quite an ordeal for such an easily avoidable mistake. I learned the hard way that you must carry your train ticket on you at all times, you never know when train control is going to check you. If I had been alone or without a native German speaker, the situation could have become much more complicated. I hope you do not ever find yourself in my situation.

Outside of HAW, Hamburg has many fantastic things to offer. During one of my first nights in Hamburg, a few of us went down to the Reeperbahn. The Reeperbahn is a term you will become quite familiar with if you are studying in Hamburg. The Reeperbahn is the party place of Hamburg and was also my first culturally shocking experience. The Reeperbahn is the "Red Light" district of Hamburg, but also where you go if you are looking for dancing, music, drinking, or having a good time out with friends.

Coming from the United States, I was not used to seeing prostitutes out on the street, openly soliciting themselves. I was in awe by all the neon lights, clubs, sex theatres, sex shows and sex shops. For all the ladies, the Reeperbahn offers a male strip show the first Thursday of every month. I never thought I would go to a male strip show, but it is actually a very fun thing to do in a large group of friends. I recommend trying it once.

Although you will probably spend quite a bit of time down on the Reeperbahn, Hamburg is not just about sex. Some of my favorite places in Hamburg are the Japanese Garden, which is absolutely beautiful in Spring, the zoo (*Hagenbecks Tierpark*) and the city park (*Stadtpark*.) If you bring some carrots or apples to *Hagenbecks Tierpark*, you can feed the elephants. They will eat right out of your hand! If you get a chance to see a musical while you are in Hamburg, I would highly recommend it. When my mother came to visit we went and saw *The Lion King*. I do not even have words to describe how amazing *The Lion King* was. Although the plays are expensive, they are well worth it. Keep in mind that the plays will be in German. Another place to check out is *Knust*. *Knust* is an old slaughterhouse that has since been turned into a club. The venue sounds excellent, holds a decent amount of people, and has a great atmosphere. *Knust* is also within walking distance of the Sternschanze train station, where you can find lots of pubs, restaurants, and bars.

My favorite experience in Hamburg was *Dialog in the Dark (Dialog im Dunkeln)*. *Dialog in the Dark* allows visitors to experience being blind for a day. Actual blind tour guides lead you through different settings in complete darkness, such as a city, park, and train station. You will need to use your senses of smell, sound, and feeling to find your way through the different scenarios. At the end of the tour you have the opportunity to order, eat, and pay in a pitch black bar. The tour guides are friendly, humorous, and willing to answer any questions that you have. They offer tours in English, but you must book at least two weeks in advance. This tour really opened my eyes, no pun intended.

Living in an international student house was one of the best experiences of Hamburg for me. I lived with four Finnish people, one other American, and a girl from the Netherlands. Each of us had our own bedroom, with shared living quarters, kitchen, and three bathrooms. Because of my Finnish housemates, I decided to move to Finland after my study abroad in Hamburg was completed. Five months ago I knew nothing about Finland, and could probably not have located it on a map. Now I am living in Finland and will begin school in a few weeks. My housemates were there for me when I was sick, lonely, missing home, or just bored. The floor above us had four Swedish girls, one Polish girl, and a Spanish girl whom we spent a fair amount of time with. One of my favorite memories from living in the student housing was when I got to experience a Swedish Midsummer with the girls upstairs. The Midsummer party included games such as a three-legged race, a baton rally, and a quiz about Sweden. There was Swedish food, Swedish music, and Swedish songs; the girls even made a *Midsommarstång* for us to sing and dance around.



(Baton Rally - Swedish Midsummer Party)

By studying in Hamburg, I had the opportunity to travel to many other countries, including England, France, Ireland, Sweden, Austria, the Netherlands, and Finland. Traveling within Europe is relatively inexpensive and easy once you get a European Union visa. On my flight over to Hamburg, I had an eight hour layover in London. During this time I hopped on the underground and went to the city central for the day. During my first week in Hamburg I took the train down to Bavaria to see a friend of mine named Verena. She studied abroad at my high school in 2003, and her and I have been traveling back and forth between Europe and the United States visiting one another ever since. To get down to Bavaria I used the Schönes-Wochenende-Ticket, this is one of the cheapest ways to travel throughout Germany. The ticket costs €37, is valid for up to five people, and can be used for either Saturday or Sunday to travel anywhere within Germany. I used this type of ticket many times throughout the semester to see various parts of Germany. When I got down to Bavaria, I was able to travel with Verena's school group to Paris, France for a week. I was fortunate because I was included with her university group and able to get the group rates and discounts for the trip. Additionally, the entire itinerary was planned out for us and I am confident we saw everything that we could in Paris given the amount of time that we had. There are many airlines that fly for extremely low prices from Germany. During the first week of May I traveled to Dublin, Ireland with another student named Steph, who I met in the international exchange program. We found plane tickets online for €25 each, round trip and decided to go for it. In Ireland we stayed in a youth hostel and took advantage of the free tours that the city offered. When I returned from Ireland, I traveled with my housemate Valtteri to Sweden. Our flight to Sweden cost around the same price as the Ireland tickets,

however we were able to stay for free with Valtteri's aunt. Toward the end of the semester my friend Janine, from the United States came to visit me. Valtteri, Janine and I went down to Bavaria to see Verena. Verena lives close to Austria and drove us to Salzburg for the day. We stayed in Bavaria for a few days and traveled around using the Bayern Bundesland ticket. Bundesland tickets are similar to the Schönes-Wochenende-Ticket. Bundesland tickets however are good for up to five people to travel anywhere within a Bundesland (state) of Germany within one day. They cost a bit less than the Schönes-Wochenende-Ticket and they can be used during any day of the week. If you have more than three people and split the ticket cost, there is really no cheaper way to travel in Germany that I found. When the semester was over, another friend from the United States, Amanda, came to visit. For my 21st birthday, Amanda, Valtteri and I flew to Amsterdam where we split a hotel room. Finally, here I am in Finland writing this.

Keep a diary, your time in Hamburg will go by faster than you can imagine. My study abroad experience is completely surreal to me. Studying abroad has allowed me to gain a stronger understanding of the world by seeing it from the perspective of another culture. My time in Hamburg provided me with educational opportunities that I could not have obtained by simply attending college in the United States. I am in disbelief about all the people I met, the places I traveled, and the amazing events I experienced. I've been looking through my diary as I've been writing this and I still can't believe how fast everything went by. Before I left I was worried about being away from home for so long, now I can hardly grasp that my time in Germany is over. In my diary you can find various mementos from the semester such as train passes, city maps, museum tickets, concert wristbands, postcards from the places I visited and even flowers. When you get home you'll have something to look back on and remind yourself that although it may seem like it, your study abroad was not just a dream.