

## Goethe Institut Schwäbisch Hall Scholarship 2019

On the 26th of August 2019, I boarded a British Airways flight from London Heathrow to begin one of the most memorable experiences of my life. From Stuttgart airport I made my way to Schwäbisch Hall-Hessental station, where I was picked up by Karin, who worked for the twinning association in Schwäbisch Hall, and taken to my home for the next four weeks.

At the Goethe Institut I was put in an intensive German course. Learning German in a full-immersion environment in a small class gave us plenty of opportunities to practise speaking German and to ask any questions we might have about the language and culture. Because of this, my German improved vastly in a short amount of time. We were also encouraged to do presentations on a topic of our choice. I chose to do mine on the Māori culture, as being of Māori descent. It is a culture important and precious to me but one about which little is known outside of New Zealand. Other people presented on their careers, hobbies, home countries and towns and mother tongues. My class itself included one other person from the UK and participants from Russia, Turkey, Canada, South Korea, Israel, the US and Spain. It was great to get to know each other and about each other's cultures as we learned together. At the end of the four weeks, we completed a mini test to determine our progress and I got 100%! This was very encouraging and proof that my language skills had improved greatly.

The scholarship covered course fees, accommodation and meals. This meant that I had the option to have breakfast and lunch in the cafeteria, or receive an allowance for all my meals. The cafeteria didn't cover my dietary requirements (vegan) so I received an allowance and catered for myself. The staff in the Institut were very helpful and went above and beyond their duties in printing out a map for me with all the restaurants and cafes in which I could find vegan options in Schwäbisch Hall. There were also plenty of options for me in the local supermarket, so being vegan was never a problem.

The Goethe Institut has an extensive free-time programme which the staff in the culture and free-time office dedicate much time and effort to, for students to have the best experience possible. This programme included cultural, sport, social and educational activities. During my stay, I spent afternoons making pretzels at a local bakery and picking plums to make jam with. I enjoyed historical tours of the town and the region of Hohenlohe, and attended pub nights, language exchange cafes, parties and an international buffet. Other activities available included yoga, watching a football game, word games, debate club and cooking traditional Swabian dishes. There were trips to the local museums and galleries – the Hällisch-Fränkisches museum, which tells of the history of the town, the Kunsthalle Würth which was the modern art

museum, and the Johanniterkirche which displayed medieval art. On weekends there were day trips to local cities. I visited the historic city of Rothenburg-ob-der-Tauber and the beautiful Bavarian city of Nuremberg. In both cities we had guided tours, free time and opportunities to visit local museums together if we wished to do so. As well as these planned activities, I spent a day in Heilbronn, the nearest city to Schwäbisch Hall, where there was plenty of opportunity for shopping, eating and relaxing by the river Neckar. I also met a local called Ruth for coffee where we chatted about Schwäbisch Hall, Loughborough and my experience so far, and spent one evening having dinner with Karin from the twinning association and Liisa from Lappeenranta, their partner town in Finland.

On the 19th of September my time in Schwäbisch Hall came to an end. Karin dropped me at the train station, and I made the return journey back to Stuttgart station. I returned to Heathrow with a suitcase full of souvenirs and many memories of people and experiences that I know I will keep with me for the rest of my life.

I would like to thank the twinning association in Loughborough for gifting me with the opportunity to have this once-in-a-lifetime experience, the Goethe Institut for their amazing lessons and programmes and Karin from the twinning association in Schwäbisch Hall for making me feel so welcome. Finally, I would also like to thank the many people from all over the world that I met and befriended during my time in Schwäbisch Hall for learning and practising the language with me, enjoying the experience with me and making my time there so much richer.