

## **Goethe Institut Scholarship- Schwäbisch Hall**

**30<sup>th</sup> July- 23<sup>rd</sup> August 2012**

I would like to begin this report by saying that my time spent in Schwäbisch Hall was one of the best months and most fantastic experiences of my life so far. I feel so privileged and very grateful to have received such a fantastic opportunity and would like to thank both the Goethe Foundation and Loughborough Twinning Association for making it possible. I would highly encourage anyone thinking of applying for the scholarship to do so.

On 30<sup>th</sup> July, I took a direct flight from Birmingham International Airport to Stuttgart Airport (Flughafen Stuttgart). Below the airport is the underground train station and here I took the S3 S-Bahn rail line from the airport to Backnang, and changed to the connecting train to Schwäbisch Hall-Hessental. On the information provided by the Institut, I was advised to go to Bad Cannstatt rather than Backnang, but the ticket machine chose this route for me after I had selected Schwäbisch Hall-Hessental. I had been a bit worried about travelling alone but the train journey was very straightforward. The entire train journey lasted around an hour and a half, and I took a taxi from the train station to the Goethe Institut.

On arrival, I dropped off my luggage in the main entrance and headed upstairs for my interview and tests. Everything was explained in German and the interview was very informal, just a relaxed chat about myself, my hobbies and my German studies. The written test consisted of a series of grammar and reading comprehension exercises, followed by a small essay based on one of the two provided titles.

I was then transported to the accommodation, which was very large. I had a single room and shared my bathroom with the girl next door. This was no problem at all- there was a small light on the light switch which lit up when the bathroom light was on, so we knew that the other person was in there. The rooms are furnished with a bed, desk, chair, wardrobe (with lots of coathangers), a small cabinet and a fridge. The bed sheets and towels were changed regularly and the bathroom was cleaned weekly. I was very pleased with my room except there was no wifi connection in Wohnheim 14 (my wohnheim) or 12. If I wanted to use the internet I would have to either go to Wohnheim 2 or the Mediotek in the Institut. This was not a problem as I had friends in Wohnheim 2 so I would often do my homework in their kitchen and use the wifi connection.

Breakfast and lunch are provided on weekdays, but evening meals and weekend meals are not catered for. I would either go out in the evening or cook with the other students- often I was not very hungry after the large hot meal and dessert provided at lunch time, so would just have a sandwich or something small in the evening. Kitchens are equipped with ovens, kettles, microwaves, crockery and cutlery although there is an option to 'hire' your own pots and pans.

Breakfast in the Mensa was cold and continental- cereals, bread rolls, yoghurts etc, and the lunch menu changed every day. Portions were generous and tasty and a vegetarian option was always provided. Due to the variety of nationalities and therefore religions at the Institut, the meat was usually chicken. Coffee, tea, orange juice and water are provided at breakfast, lunch and both of the breaks between lessons.

Lucy Schofield

There are two supermarkets in Schwäbisch Hall for students to purchase food and drink for weekends and evening meals but I would remind future applicants that German shops are not open on Sundays! I made the rookie mistake of not having anything in my fridge on the first Sunday, walking to the supermarket and realising that it was closed. Luckily a few bakeries and restaurants were open!

I received €250 spending money as part of the scholarship, but I would advise taking up to €450 more, so as not to struggle for money.

Based on my interview and written tests, I was placed in level C1- the highest class on the course. However, I felt out of my depth in the class- the other students were all a lot older, had been learning German for much longer than I had and were much more confident speakers. After two days of struggling to understand and becoming rather unhappy in class, I spoke to my teacher and asked if I could move down a level. She didn't want me to move at first but agreed that my happiness and feeling comfortable in class was more important, so I was moved to B2.3- the top class of intermediates. I felt much better in this class- we covered much more grammar and the pace of the class wasn't so intense. In C1 I was reluctant to ask questions as I felt that the other students understood and I would be holding everyone back. In B2.3 I felt that I was on the same level as my peers and enjoyed the class a lot more. I also feel I benefited greatly from the move- in C1 I wasn't understanding a lot, and therefore wasn't learning.

Class work consisted of a lot of group work, presentations, discussion and also individual work, and everything was in German. I became good friends with an American girl in the class and sometimes we would quietly confirm comprehension in English, just to be sure that we had understood the teacher's explanation, but on the most part, we spoke German all the time. At first this was a very scary prospect but within a short amount of time, I noticed my understanding and speaking improve greatly.

Homework is received every day, sometimes exercises from the text book, or small writing tasks and we had weekly tests. These were nothing to be worried about, just a way of measuring progress. There was no competition between the students- we all worked together to help each other improve. Classes last from 8.15 until 12.45, with one half-hour break and one 15 minute break in between. We therefore had free time in the afternoons. Students would spend time in the Mediothek completing homework or independently studying, or taking part in activities put on by Goethe, or simply doing their own thing. There were tours of the town, both practical and historical, conversation classes, or visits to various towns/ sights nearby. There were also sport activities, such as swimming, mini-golf and bowling, but I recommend signing up early- I sometimes missed out on the opportunity to take part in these activities as they were already full.

Some activities had to be paid for, particularly ones that required transport, but these excursions would cost less through Goethe than if you were to visit these places of your own accord. For example, the trip to Berlin was just €99, which a lot of the students who had visited Berlin before, said was very good for 3 days. I took advantage of these opportunities as much as possible, and took part in many of the activities, for example the weekend trip to Berlin, the daytrip to Stuttgart and the Mercedes Benz Museum, various museum trips, bowling, the 'Freilichtspiele' Summer of Love (a play which took place on the steps outside the St Michael church) and many more activities.

Lucy Schofield

Berlin was definitely one of the highlights of my time in Germany. We visited many tourist sites including the Berlin Wall, the Reichstag, and the Brandenburg Gate, and on the last day we visited Potsdam, the capital city of the German federal state of Brandenburg. Here we visited the beautiful palace of Sanssouci in Sanssouci Park, the largest World Heritage Site in Germany.

You don't have to take part in any of the trips but I would recommend that you do- it is an opportunity to meet people and experience new things. Sometimes if the Goethe activity didn't appeal to us, we would get a group together and organise our own plans- for example I took the bus with some of the other students to the Freibad one Sunday.

Every week, 'Stammtisch' took place, organised by the Institut. We would visit a different bar each time and it was a great way to talk to the other students! The first Stammtisch was on the second day of the course so it was a great icebreaker for everybody. Stammtisch was also an opportunity to get to know the bars and see which ones you liked the most, for evenings when you wanted to go out for drinks with friends. For example, I hadn't known about the Biergarten before the Stammtisch, and we returned there many times afterwards and had some lovely evenings there. On Mondays there was a live performer and it was an almost idyllic setting to enjoy an evening with friends.

Goethe Parties were also great fun and something I would highly recommend going to. They took place every Friday night- I was very disappointed to have missed one whilst we were in Berlin! The last Goethe Party had the theme of 'Bad Taste' so we all had to dress up in silly, mismatched clothes and it was a great laugh! These parties took place within the Institut, in the 'Goethe-Pub', which had a dancefloor, bar and a Foosball table. Nearly all students attended the Goethe Parties so you don't want to miss out!

I also went to the 'Hoolgaschfest der Haller Sieder', an annual Schwäbisch Hall tradition. The 'Sieder' of Schwäbisch Hall are a group who historically would have produced salt in the town (salt is how Schwäbisch Hall made its money throughout history), but now they are a group who dress up in traditional dress and perform music and dance. It was a lovely evening and I even got to try on a fantastic feather plumed hat!

On arrival, you paid a deposit ('Kaution') of €50 for your accommodation. On the last day, you get this deposit back, as long as everything is in order in your room. On the day of departure, rooms were checked between 9am-10am and you had to leave your room by 11am. My key was taken when I received my deposit and then I was free to leave. I travelled to Stuttgart Airport and flew home, despite wanting to stay longer! A lot of students did not book their return flight before arriving, and a lot of them chose to stay in Germany for a few days after the course had finished. However, this depends on money and I had already booked my return flight.

This scholarship was an unforgettable experience and I feel so lucky to have been able to go to Schwäbisch Hall. I had so much fun, my German has improved tenfold and I met people from all over the world, for example students from the USA, Bolivia, Italy, Serbia, France, Switzerland, Australia, Spain, Ukraine, Saudi Arabia and many more, who I will keep in contact with and hopefully visit in the future. (Believe it or not, I was the only Brit!) The trip was perfect, I just wish I could have stayed longer! It was so upsetting having to leave but I came away with fantastic memories and I can look forward to the future with the friendships I made there.