

Report for Schwäbisch Hall visit August 2011

Travelling and arrival

I took a flight on the 1st of August from Birmingham Airport to Frankfurt, although it would probably be less trouble to fly to Stuttgart and take the train from Stuttgart to Schwäbisch Hall. I would also recommend looking up the deals available on train tickets, particularly for local saving offers, otherwise rail travel can work out to be quite expensive.

On arrival to Schwäbisch Hall – Hessenthal station, there is a bus service that runs direct to the front of the Goethe Institut. You can drop off your bags in the main entrance of the Institut to pick up after the interview before collecting keys and heading to the Wohnheims. The interview was very relaxed and informal with a small writing assessment as well, nothing much to worry about at all. I spent the afternoon wandering around part of the town with other students on the course, all of whom were from different countries. My first impression of Schwäbisch hall was one of awe, as the main town consists of medieval or classical German architecture, and is quite simply traditionally German, very pretty and awe inspiring. The town also has a lot of open areas to relax or wander, which is very pleasant.

The funding provided by the Scholarship covers accommodation, weekday breakfasts and midday meals, course fees and also €300 spending money, however, I would advise taking up to €400 extra, as this grants you more freedom to make use of what the Goethe Institut has to offer.

On the second afternoon, there is a practical tour round the town, showing the places where shopping for food, groceries, shoes and anything else that is required to enjoy life in the town comfortably, which I would suggest taking advantage of.

Classes, activities, trips and free time

I was placed in class B.1.2., one of the intermediate ability classes. The classes generally have a relaxed atmosphere with them, with a lot of group work, mainly in presentations, with all communication in German. Daunting as it may seem, communicating in German is a great challenge and all students are in the same boat. As well as improving your German ability, speaking in German also enables you to mix with the other students in the class and on the course in general a lot better, as students can help each other with their German just as much as the teacher can.

Homework is received in class on a regular basis, ranging from writing essays to grammar exercises and reading exercises. Although it may seem like a lot of work, it doesn't take long to do and progress is generally clear to see.

The afternoons are kept free to take part in the numerous and various activities, from sporty ones to social ones, organised by the Institut, most of which require signing up for due to limited spaces. I would highly recommend taking a look at the trips on offer and signing up for the most desirable ones as soon as possible, as spaces go very quickly. Also, for some of the trips, payment is required in full up front, so it is important to bear that in mind when

signing up. Most of the trips, however, are completely free to sign up for and can be very interesting and completely worthwhile. The trips are there to help develop understanding of the culture and enhance learning. I made as much use of these opportunities as I could by signing up for a lot of the various weekday sessions, such as the trip to the Schenkensee Bad (the local swimming pool), mini-golf and a historic tour of the town.

Once a week the Institut organises a Stammtisch, which is a group outing open to all students to one of the local bars and is a great opportunity to meet and get to know many of the students, assistants and also teachers at the Goethe Institut, as well as further developing your German speaking and listening abilities. Other evening events are also offered by the Goethe Institut, such as trips to see productions the open air theatre at St Michael's Church. The welcome and leaving parties are also things I would recommend going to, as it is another brilliant chance to socialise with other students and have fun at the same time.

The Institut also offers various day trips at the weekend to cities of interest, with trips to Heidelberg, Würzburg, Stuttgart and also the annual weekend trip to Berlin, all of which are incredibly popular. I myself signed up for the trips to Berlin and Würzburg, and organised my own trip with other students to Heidelberg. These trips are great fun and well worthwhile, and require signing up fast to avoid disappointment. In Berlin is the chance to see the Berlin Wall, Reichstag, Brandenburg Gate amongst other very famous landmarks in the capital. The trips also offer tours and free time to do as you will.

It isn't required to go on any of the trips offered by the Institut, but it is recommended, you are able to make your own plans and arrangements to do what you want and go where you like etc., although this tends to work out quite a bit more costly than events organised by the Institut.

The Biergarten in Schwäbisch hall is another great place to go with other students to socialise, enjoy a drink (if desired) and also listen to live music that is sometimes available. The atmosphere is always lively and friendly, as well as being good value.

Accommodation and food

The accommodation offered by the Institut is very comfortable as well as modern, wireless internet is also available in all accommodation. Small fridges are provided in the Wohnheims, whereas larger fridge-spaces are available in the youth hostel. All kitchens are equipped with ovens, kettles, fridges and microwaves as well as crockery and cutlery. A weekly cleaning service for the bathroom and fresh ben linen is also provided for. Rooms are large, and there is the opportunity beforehand to apply for single or shared rooms. Cooking together with other students is something I did, and with great success, and I would recommend as shopping works out cheaper as well as being more friendly.

Breakfast and lunch are provided for from Monday to Friday, and serves traditional foods. The lunch menu varies from day to day, there is a choice of two each day, and is very high quality as well as being either traditional local or traditional German food. Food portions are also very generous and juice, water, tea and coffee are also provided. Evening meals and food at the weekends is not catered for, but there are plenty of restaurants, shops and the like in the town to do shopping or eat out.

Departure

Keys can be dropped off at reception, but it is important to ensure you leave the room tidy. On my departure, I left on the last day of the course, taking the train from Schwäbisch Hall – Hessenthal station to Frankfurt and flying from Frankfurt to London. However, if you find you want to stay in Germany for a longer time after the course has finished, I would recommend it.

My own summary and thoughts

This Scholarship really is a once in a lifetime opportunity and I would highly recommend it. I got the opportunity to meet so many different people from a lot of different countries, including the USA, Russia, Ukraine, Spain, Uzbekistan, Finland, China, Japan, Nigeria to name but a few. I made a lot of very good friends during my time in Schwäbisch Hall, whom I keep very regular contact with (sometimes in English, sometimes in German). I would highly advise spending most of the free time in the company of other students, as this helps improve your German and keeps you busy and having fun. I thoroughly enjoyed going to Stammtisch, the Biergarten and the Goethe-Parties as it allowed me to have a lot fun and get to know other students very well.

The town of Schwäbisch Hall offers a lot in the way of amazing bars and restaurants, serving high quality food and drink at reasonable prices, all with a very friendly atmosphere. As I've mentioned earlier, the trips offered by the institute are there to be made use of, and the chances are that this will be the only time you get to go to the various places, so don't hesitate much about them and just go for it, it'll be well worth your while! August has got to be, by far, the best month of my year and was brilliant fun, my one regret being that I couldn't stay there long enough! Once again, I'd highly recommend going.