

JONNY MANKTELOW - SANTANDER TRAVEL REPORT 2016-2017

STUDYING GERMAN LANGUAGE AND CULTURE IN THE INTERNATIONAL SUMMER SCHOOL AT THE UNIVERSITY OF TÜBINGEN

Located in south-west Germany, the state of Baden-Württemberg holds the university town of Tübingen. Sitting close to both the Swabian Alb mountains and the city of Stuttgart, this historic and beautiful town was the setting for my month-long experience of getting to grips with the German language and culture. Established in 1477, the University of Tübingen is one of the oldest in Europe and has over 28,000 students, which is almost a third of the population of the whole town. The River Neckar runs through the town and the *Neckarbrücke* stands in front of the iconic multi-coloured houses on the bank of the river.

As a participant of the International Summer Course at the Eberhard Karls Universität Tübingen, I was able to participate in a variety of classes, excursions, seminars, lectures, cultural activities and group projects. This ranged from workshops about Martin Luther and the Reformation, to punting on the River Neckar, to visiting the beautiful city of Würzburg. The course was very international and it was fantastic to be able to meet



people from all over the world. There were participants from over 40 different countries: Brazil, Iceland, Taiwan, Romania, Burkina Faso, Tajikistan, just to name a few! The course allowed for an excellent space to make great friendships and the general atmosphere amongst everyone on the course was just great all the way through.

Each morning was dedicated to German language lessons to help improve our skills in writing, reading and speaking German. The course was split into 12 different classes, meaning that I could have lessons with people on the same language level as me (for me CEFR B2.2). Our teacher, Karsten, was always enthusiastic and helpful and managed to make even the trickiest grammar topics interesting and memorable. With the help of our textbook *Mittelpunkt*, we covered a range of topics, such as cultural integration, religion in Germany and studying abroad. My knowledge of certain grammar points definitely improved, such as complex sentence structures, use of more complex prepositions and conjunctive adverbs and much more. However, I would have to say that what improved the most for me was my spoken German. By being completely immersed in the German language throughout the whole course and through the help of plenty of interactive speaking lessons, I could tell that I had improved in that area by being more spontaneous and more accurate with my vocabulary and grammar choices.

We also got to choose particular seminars on German culture and I chose 'German History after WWII'. This was particularly interesting for me, as it complimented some of the work I had been doing at Royal Holloway on this topic. However, this module did extend my knowledge of West Germany history in particular and though discussing numerous photos and short videos in the class, I found the sessions to be extremely interesting and useful in understanding the main political and social events in Germany after World War 2.

During my time in Baden-Wuttemberg, I experienced traditional Swabian food, such as Maultaschen, Spätzle, Schupfnudeln and Leberkäse. I also learnt more about Swabia and the fascinating dialect, work ethic and culture of this region. This included learning about the oldest pieces of artwork in the world that were found in the caves of the Swabian Alps. It was also interesting seeing how there is a culture of working very hard, being very careful with money and being very efficient and clean! But in this environment, businesses are able to grow well and hence there is actually a high proportion of world-leading companies in Baden-Württemberg, including Bosch, Mercedes-Benz and SAP.

Another main part of the course was participating in a group project, which was assessed with a 20-minute presentation. Our chosen topic was about cleanliness on the streets of Tübingen and other environmental projects within the town. My focus during the project was reasearching about the popular environmental scheme in the town, called *Tübingen macht blau*. The scheme means citizens can only choose electricity for their homes from renewable energy sources, they have access to discounts for cycle schemes and energy efficient heating pumps, etc. The whole group project experience was very beneficial, as it allowed me to speak to the people of Tübingen face-to-face, through asking a variety of people during interviews on the streets of Tübingen –this also helped extend my vocabulary to do with this particular topic of the environment.

The summer course also allowed me to explore some musical opportunities, such as the Summer Choir and the International Singing Evening. The Summer Choir was a good chance to sing with people of all nationalities and to sing traditional German canons, chorales and small pieces, such as Beethoven's *Freundschaft*. The director of the choir also showed me around their unique vintage instrument collection, college organ and scores collection at the university, including a number of interesting and rare woodwind instruments which is certainly relevant to my course at Royal Holloway. The International Singing Evening also allowed me to experience traditional and modern music from over 30 different countries, as each country had to bring a typical song from their homeland and perform it in front of the rest of the course participants!



The month-long stay in Germany meant I could visit some other towns and cities in Germany, including Heidelberg, Würzburg, Rottenberg and Rottweil. Heidelberg was a very beautiful city, with the renowned castle being the main attraction. The guided tour around Würzburg Residence palace was fascinating and the Baroque architecture of the building was stunning. Rottenberg also has an intriguing history, with many Roman ruins and remains still to this day laying beneath the ground and Rottweil was also interesting, as it is the oldest town in Baden-Württemberg.

So to conclude, the trip was fantastic, was very beneficial and was very helpful in improving my German skills. I am also very grateful to the Santander Travel Award for helping to make this experience possible.