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In summer 2017 my life was forever changed. That was the summer I said goodbye to my home in the US for an internship in Germany. When I arrived, I had never been to Europe and never traveled alone before so, needless to say, the butterflies in my stomach were having a field day. Little did I know that the next three months would gift me with memories that I will forever cherish.

The first great German experience I had were with the people. The Germans are very hospitable and many of my encounters with them left me with a smile on my face. Furthermore, one can always count on the Germans to help in a pinch. Having trouble reading the road signs? The Germans are happy to translate for you. However, they were not the only people I met. Due to the ease of travel in Europe – one can literally leave the country and come back for the weekend – I came across a diverse array of people many of whom I’m still friends with after leaving Europe. Among other things I attended an anime convention with a guy from Berlin, explored the Louvre museum with a student from Sicily, traversed the Cologne parks with a couple from Brazil, and chugged Oktoberfest beer in Munich with a group of Bavarians.

While the people I met were great, how was the working environment at my internship? My research at BASF was not all that different from my experiences in the US. Common tasks included preparing reagents, learning new lab techniques, gathering data, the usual. What really surprised me was the German working culture. On day 1 I was literally told that I could show up and leave at whatever time I wanted. To top it off, it was common for my lab mates to have multiple coffee breaks per day. This established a laid-back atmosphere at the company and was likely a reason why everyone always came to work with a smile on their face.

Although it may seem like my German experience was happy all the time, it wasn’t all fun and games. As one might expect, adjusting to a new life in a different county proved was difficult. From the outset, I was frontloaded with lots of paperwork: setting up my bank account, obtaining my residence permit, applying for housing and the like. Germans love their paperwork, emphasis on the “paper”. Luckily, I obtained plenty of help from coworkers and my roommates in my adjustment who helped to translate anything I didn’t understand and showed me around the company. BASF even provided me with a local guide who helped me with my transition into this new country. Never underestimate German hospitality.

The three months I spent were life-changing and gave me a newfound cultural understanding. Though I was in a different country, I learned that one can always find people with shared interests. The fact that I went to a German anime convention is a testament to that. One should take one’s hobbies with them as meeting people from other countries with similar interests is unforgettable. Furthermore, I gained a better understanding of my core values which are meeting people and building relationships. While traveling to see the sites was great, it was the people I met and the memories we made together are ultimately what I will cherish the most. Also, German beer is amazing. Believe the hype.

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