

## Erasmus Report - Bonn Universität

I was first introduced to the idea of studying abroad by my father in term one of my first year at Warwick with him citing the typical benefits of how it will build self-confidence, independence and broaden the mind. And so, after some deliberating I eventually settled on Bonn as the destination due to its reputation as an excellent university for maths, which I am sure is one of your reasons for considering it as well. However, as I would come to find, this quaint city would prove to be much more than initially perceived.

### Before arrival

Before coming to Bonn, I decided to teach myself German from scratch and could only make it to the start of A2 level but given that I had only done self-study I would say that my reading was a lot better than my speaking and listening; a fact that would become much clearer when I reached Bonn. Overall in terms of language I would say that you can get by on limited German as a lot of people in Bonn are friendly and will speak English to you if you ask them to, however you will need to work a bit harder if you decide to do a German module (which I will come onto later) and being inarticulate in the language will make you feel ostracised in social situations where everyone else is using it.

One component which I highly recommend participating in is the study buddy scheme which Bonn university offers. You are going into a new environment where you do not know anyone or anything about the city and so any advantage you can get to make the transition easier will be invaluable. My study buddy was a Law student called Lucie who was extremely helpful: meeting me at the airport, answering any questions that I had about the university or the city and even going as far as to set up days out or pub and restaurant visits. Obviously your results will be dependent on who you are paired up with but even the slightest of help is better than nothing and you can always request another partner if your original is not very helpful.

### Administration

Every resident in Bonn needs to sign up at the Stadthaus when they move into their accommodation. All it requires is setting up an appointment online and then going to the place with passport and documents. You will also need to de-register when you leave Bonn which only takes an email with the necessary documents. However all of this should be told to you by Bonn university so it should be trivial. In terms of Brexit, you will probably need a visa of some sort but I'm guessing that you will be told about this by Warwick. If you are still lost then just google "Bonn buergeramt" and send them an email explaining your situation and they should give you an appointment to get one when you are there.

In terms of the university, there is a semester fee which is needed to be paid (around €340) each semester and for this you get a semester ticket which allows you to travel on all available public transport in Nordrhein-Westfalen except all ICE and IC trains. For me the public transport was more than sufficient for my needs so I don't think a bike is necessary to travel and for any journey that public transport was not usable for (either too late or my destination was in a certain area) the public scooters were more than enough. For university admin work, you can talk to the maths coordinator Dr. Thoralf Räsch who is extremely friendly and supportive and can answer any questions you may have.

### Accommodation

The accommodation process should be straightforward if done correctly. In the January/February (or even earlier) period before you go abroad you must apply to the Studierendenwerk (student

accommodation) to have a good chance of getting a place for when you arrive. Even if you haven't heard confirmation from the university of your place, it is imperative in order to secure a flat (you can always just reject the offer if you do not end up going to Bonn). Additionally, if you haven't heard anything from the Studierendenwerk by the start of August then you can either contact them via email or look for other means of residence on a website called wg-gesucht. This means reaching out to listings of people looking for a flatmate or listings of single apartments. I would recommend avoiding any listing of fraternities and depending on whether or not you are religious also avoid the Catholic-only places.

Of course, knowing all of this now, I elected to do none of it and had to scramble around looking for a place to stay in my first month. In my first month in Bonn, I stayed in an Airbnb belonging to a nice couple called Marce and Dan who I eventually rented a shared flat from in the following month. The flat was pretty expensive at €670 per month but it was located directly in the middle of the city next to plenty of shops and near to the main station, and everything was provided including washing machine, dryer and a fully kitted out kitchen which I shared with three others.

Due to me not applying to the Studierendenwerk until early July, it was not until February of the next year that I managed to secure a place. My new home would be on Endenicher Allee, a spot I had chosen because it was next to the maths department of the university which at the time was completely redundant since the building was closed for the entire year. But the room was much cheaper at €248 per month and much more social since it was completely full of other students. My particular accommodation meant I was sharing a kitchen and bathroom with one other person but I met plenty of other students in other flats adjacent to mine. One interesting thing to note is that I did not find many German students living in the student accommodation or in many others that I visited throughout the year. So perhaps this can be put down to luck or the German students might have known something that international students did not.

#### Things to do

When I first arrived in Bonn in October the situation was actually not bad given that we were in a pandemic. While there were no clubs open, pubs and restaurants were and so that was where I would meet other Erasmus students as well as a couple flat parties that took place. Furthermore, I took up badminton, joining a club in Beuel that I attended twice a week where everyone was really friendly and welcoming.

Then the lockdown arrived in November and many of the meetings were relegated to small gatherings in flats in which we would cook meals and play games throughout the night. This would remain the case until things started to open up in February and the weather got better. From then on I would be going on hikes or going to various places around Bonn such as the Hofgarten or the Botanical Garden to imbibe and enjoy the weather. Another place that I recommend when the weather is good is taking a walk along the Rhine on the Beuel side and relaxing in one of many of its green spaces. In fact, green spaces, was mainly the theme of my outings during the year since everything else was closed: I'd visited many parks and gardens in places such as Köln and Düsseldorf which were really beautiful during the summer. In the springtime if you go to the Altstadt in Bonn you can see the serene cherry blossoms which are just amazing.

In March I went with some friends to a town in the mountains called Winterberg for a couple of days to go skiing and would highly recommend it to anyone interested. Even if you are a complete beginner at the sport or a bit better there are teachers who can be very good and can teach you to get down those intense red and black slopes.

Finally in around August the situation with the pandemic became much more tame and so clubs were opening up again and so I was able to attend a few clubs and raves just as my life abroad was coming to an end. If you are able to go up to Düsseldorf to party then you are sure to have a great time.

#### Food

In the beginning of my time in Bonn I was mainly eating primarily German food, drinking German beer and also a lot of this one drink called "Berlinerluft" which I recommend trying at least once. I particularly enjoyed eating German kebabs and there were plenty of places in Bonn to get one whenever I felt like it.

Then after eating more kebab than one should ever eat in a lifetime, I decided to branch out and try out other types of food and Bonn was very happy to oblige. Another one of the great aspects of Bonn is just how diverse the range of food available is. In my year I tried sushi, Mexican, Vietnamese, Spanish, Italian, Indian and many other types of cuisine all of which was top quality. At the time I couldn't go and eat inside any restaurants and so resorted to doing way too many deliveries for one year but if you decide to go to Bonn I wholeheartedly recommend exploring the many types of cuisine that you can find in Bonn and surrounding areas.

I cannot mention the food in Bonn without mentioning the wide array of ice cream that you can try. Especially in the summer it pairs perfectly with the weather going to one of the many gardens or parks such as Rheinaue. A couple places which are great are EisLabor which can get quite busy in the summer so you can always try the Eiscafé am Kaiserplatz or Gelateria Italiana. As for flavours, any of the fruit flavours are a great hit but my personal favourite is the salted caramel.

#### Academia

Before I get into talking about the maths curriculum in Bonn I first want to mention the German course that the university put on during the year. For the year that I went abroad there were two types of German language course: the main language course which teaches grammar, vocabulary etc. and a smaller themed course for all levels. In my case I took the A2.1 course and "Kommunikative Grammatik" for the theme in my first semester and then moved onto A2.2 and a pronunciation themed course for my second. All of the courses were incredibly helpful for me learning German as I was able to practise my speaking and listening a lot more with other people than when I was just learning by myself as well as practising writing weekly essays for homework.

Now onto the maths, the main difference between maths at Bonn and at Warwick is the fact that there is more content at Bonn due to the longer terms (around 50% longer than at Warwick) which means you will have to put more effort into keeping up and learning all of it. All lectures and support classes took place on Zoom where lectures are two 2 hour sessions per week with a 10 minute break halfway through and support classes just one session per week. The way that it works at Bonn in terms of language is all of the bachelor's modules are in German and the master's modules are in English. Furthermore, there are weekly assignment sheets which only count towards the module grade in the fact that you need above a 50% average in order to qualify for the end of semester exam. These I definitely recommend you find a pair to do them with as they are quite long if you want to enjoy other aspects of Bonn, especially if you are doing 3 modules per semester. The exams in my year were all oral online exams which if you failed the first try, you could try again

later on in the holiday but it may be different for the year that you attend. As well as the modules you can take seminars but I didn't have any experience with those.

In the end for the first semester, I chose Analysis III, Einführung in die Algebra and Partielle Differentialgleichungen und Funktionalanalysis where the first two were German modules and the last an English one. Analysis III is different to the analysis III at Warwick in that the one at Bonn focuses primarily on measure theory. The Algebra module focuses on rings and also gives an introduction to Galois Theory but I lost interest in it throughout the term and eventually gave up. Finally, the Functional Analysis module is similar in content to both the Functional Analysis I and Functional Analysis II modules at Warwick. For the second semester, I took Einführung in die Komplexe Analysis and decided to branch out to try the statistics modules: Einführung in die Statistik and Stochastische Prozesse, however I found them to be too difficult to follow along with and so lost interest. Personally, I found that out of the three choices of focusing on academia, enjoying Bonn, and getting enough sleep you do have to pick two in order to do them really well. Unless you save the enjoying Bonn aspect for the holidays.

#### Final thoughts

As stated at the beginning of this report while I originally chose Bonn due to its academic prowess I now know that Bonn is much more than just this; it is rich with culture and diversity, extremely beautiful with all of its scenery and filled with many friendly and welcoming people. In addition to the many benefits my father told me about with studying abroad I have come to learn of a couple more. First is that when you go into a whole new place not knowing anyone then there is an opportunity to try out new things that you may have never tried before without the pressure of thinking what will people back at home think of you. You get to re-invent yourself somewhat. And finally, a thought to leave you with if you are still deciding whether or not to do a year abroad: if you are looking for that big change or something to happen in your life it is not going to happen if you attend the same university, seeing the same people and doing the same things. If you want to see change in yourself then a massive change in surroundings, such as a year abroad, is the perfect catalyst.

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