

## Final Report – Munich 2020/2021

When I was applying for universities in sixth form, I knew that I wanted to study a year abroad in Germany. My year abroad experience ended up being rather different to how I could have expected, with the double challenges of lockdowns due to the coronavirus pandemic and all the complications surrounding Brexit. Despite all of that, it was still such an incredible year and I'm extremely grateful that I got to be part of the last year of Erasmus for UK students.

I arrived in Munich on 2<sup>nd</sup> October, after taking the ferry to Rotterdam and driving straight through the Netherlands to Germany. It was a long journey, but worth it as I had too much stuff to take on a plane! Due to covid-19 pandemic, the start of the semester was delayed from 12<sup>th</sup> October until 2<sup>nd</sup> November, so during October I took part in a daily German language preparation course on Zoom, run in connection to LMU. The course was helpful in getting my German up to scratch, however the most important thing was the group of students I met, who became my main friendship group for the year. At this point we were still allowed to meet in person, but when the lockdown came and it was impossible to meet new people, this group really became my lifeline and support system - surviving a pandemic together is definitely a bonding experience!

Another great thing was my accommodation – I lived in a room in Studentenstadt halls provided by the student union (Studentenwerk), which I would recommend to everyone who has the option. There is a lot more freedom and autonomy than in UK halls – students chip in together to paint/decorate their house and common rooms, leading to a nice sense of house pride and community. The rent was extremely cheap for Munich, and the shared kitchen/bathroom situation ended up being a bonus during the lockdown, since we counted as one household and were still allowed to meet, whereas the common rooms were closed in other blocks who had their own kitchen/bathrooms.

The worst thing about the year was that everything for my course was online, which meant that I never met another maths student. It was really difficult not having any friends on the course to discuss the material and work on exercises together with, it definitely made me appreciate the community of maths students at Warwick! I also found it much harder having lectures in German. The level of content was similar to at Warwick, however it took me so much longer to get through everything – the lectures were usually 1.5 hours twice a week instead of 1 hour lectures three times a week like at Warwick. This does allow you to get deeper into the material, but I found it harder to keep focused for that length of time.

One thing that was very different from Warwick was way the year is scheduled – there are two very long semesters instead of three terms. The advantages were that exams are held at the end of both semesters (so you're not revising for 10 exams at once), and that most modules offer a second exam (Nachklausur) if you don't as well as you wanted in the first. The disadvantage is that there is no revision period and exams often take place late into the supposed semester break, leaving little time to actually have a break (I had just one week between my last exam and the start of the second semester). Additionally, you have to register for each exam individually on a variety of different systems depending on the module (Moodle, Uni2Work, LSF etc) and with different exam procedures.

My favourite module of the year was "Introduction to Modern Cryptography" as this is a topic I have long been interested in and done my own research on, for example my 2<sup>nd</sup> year essay. I also really enjoyed Numerik, but I found Algebra quite challenging to understand in German. I liked the freedom to take some computer science related modules as well as maths, such as Machine Learning and an introduction to C++ (Programmierung für Mathematiker I).

I still tried my best to experience Bavarian culture, despite the sad cancellation of Oktoberfest and the Christmas Markets. I ate Bavarian food in beer gardens, developed a taste for (non-alcoholic) German beer

and visited other beautiful cities nearby when the rules allowed – Ingolstadt, Regensburg, Augsburg and Ulm. I would fully recommend the events organised by the Erasmus Student Network and Studentenwerk Servicepaket, a brilliant way to meet other international students and discover more of the surrounding area. Unfortunately travel further afield around Europe was not allowed for most of my stay, but I managed a fab trip to Slovenia with my Erasmus friends at the end of the year!

Munich as a city is a wonderful place to live. I had never lived in a big city before, but Munich felt safe and homely, with lots to see and do but not too overwhelming. You don't have to venture far into the Englischer Garten until the city fades away and you feel immersed in nature – it a great place to walk/run/cycle, meet friends for picnics and cool down in the rivers on a hot day. As the summer arrived and restrictions started to ease, I was finally able to visit art galleries and go to the theatre to watch the ballet, experiencing more of the rich culture that the city has to offer.

A surprising highlight was the postponed 2020 Euros. I'm not a big football fan, but many of the football matches were held in the nearby Munich Allianz Arena, which really brought out the spirit and exciting atmosphere of the city! Whether watching in a beer garden or Irish Pub it was easy to get caught up in the excitement. Another sporting highlight was joining the quidditch team in Munich, the Münchener Wolpertingers (Wolpis). I had started playing at Warwick the year before and it was great to continue playing (when restrictions allowed) with such a friendly team.

My main reason for doing a year abroad was to improve my German, especially my speaking and conversation skills. When I first arrived, I struggled with having the confidence to speak German to native speakers, but over the year my confidence really increased, along with my ability. Since I had met my Erasmus friends through a language course, we all wanted to improve our German and always spoke in German when we were together. This had a great positive impact on me, as it was all of our second language so there was less pressure – we all made mistakes and that was fine – plus I still had people to talk to in German to practice during the lockdown when I couldn't speak to anyone else. Looking back now, it is amazing how speaking and understanding German went from requiring lots of effort to almost second nature. I am very happy with the progress I made.

Overall, despite challenges, it was an absolutely fantastic year, full of new experiences and making new friends. I grew as a person and developed skills I'm sure will be a great benefit later in life. If you are thinking about doing a year abroad, please go for it!

My tips for studying in Munich:

- Supermarkets close at 8pm on weekdays and are closed on Sundays and holidays (apart from in the central train station/Hauptbahnhof), so make sure you plan in advance!
- You get charged an extra 25 cents for most plastic/glass bottles and cans, but if you bring them back to a supermarket you get the money back in a voucher off your shopping.
- Do the pre-semester language course! One of the best places to make friends.
- You can travel in Munich for free with your student card on weekends and 6pm-6am weekdays. You can buy a semester ticket to cover the other times, but I would suggest buying a second-hand bike and cycling instead if you want to save money.
- Use the Bayern Ticket to travel anywhere in Bavaria for €25 a day, or cheaper with friends.
- Apply for a room through the university/student union Studentenwerk.
- Look out for events from Servicepaket and Erasmus Student Network.
- For cheap food in the city, try the Mensa (student cafeteria) or the app TooGoodToGo.
- Try to keep on top of your paperwork and forms!
- Explore as much of the city and surrounding area as you can, especially the lakes and mountains!