

## German Scholarship Experience

This summer was unlike any other for me. Having been selected as one of only eight in the UK to enrol in the PAD (Pädagogischer Austauschdienst) Scholarship programme in Germany, I was initially very nervous, but I can safely say it was one of the greatest experiences of my life.

With the aim of the programme being to bring individuals from across the globe together via our love of German, it was important that we conversed in the language for as much of the time as possible. I shared a room with a boy from Costa Rica for the first week and whenever we spoke in the room, it was always in German. I learned so much about his nation and its culture, from the fact they don't have an army to their obsession with eating rice and beans for breakfast every morning!

Food was another amazing aspect of this trip; we received money for lunch and dinner and ate in a variety of interesting restaurants, trialling typical German cuisine like 'Bratwurst' and 'Schnitzel', as well as anything from Ethiopian to Japanese food.

The trip involved an introductory week in Bonn and Cologne where we got to know our group – each of the three were made up of 10-15 students – followed by a two-week stay with a host family in Ravensburg, five days in Munich and another five days in Berlin. My group was full of incredibly interesting and talented people from such diverse countries as Finland, Belgium, Costa Rica and Colombia!

My German progressed tremendously over the course of the trip, not least during my stay with the host family, who were always really friendly and helpful. I had my own room at the house but did have to wake up at 5.30 every morning for an early school start! We sat in on some lessons with our exchange partners and it was intriguing how different their approach to learning is; this school in particular had blackboards instead of whiteboards.

In terms of highlights, there are far too many to list, but I especially enjoyed our trip to the Allianz Arena, home to Bayern Munich football club, the day out at Konstanz during our host-family stay and a musical, which we watched in Berlin called 'Hinterm Horizont'. We also visited the famous Cologne Cathedral, the first ever Haribo shop and Beethoven's birthplace during the first week, while my host family took me on days out to Austria and Bodensee.

All in all it was the trip of a lifetime. I made some friends, who I am still regularly in contact with and hope to be for a very long time, saw great improvements in my German and, most importantly of all, now have the desire to visit Germany as much as possible over the coming years and to travel the world.

Liam Flin