



DBi Germany - Automotive & Mobility

University of Cologne

12-23 May 2019

Peter Hair and Curtis Chang

PMBA 2020

II. Introduction

In 2019 two students from UBC participated in the Doing Business in Germany (DBi Germany) - Automotive program. There is also a DBi Germany - Energy program, however we were not eligible to apply due to the application deadline preceding that of UBC's summer study abroad application process.

Curtis Chang

My name is Curtis Chang from the PMBA 2020 cohort. I'm working full-time at Coast Mountain Bus Company, a subsidiary of TransLink, as the Fleet Project Manager responsible for the procurement and delivery of new bus fleets. I have a mechanical engineering background with interests in automotive and high-speed trains. As Germany is well known for its engineering capability and extensive development in the automotive and transportation industry, I was excited about this opportunity. In addition, this study tour helps with my current job since there are many bus components developed and manufactured in Germany.

Peter Hair

My name is Peter Hair, also from the PMBA 2020 cohort. I work full-time for the Metro Vancouver Regional District as a Project Engineer. Although this program was not directly relevant to my current role, I have always had a passion for cars and I wanted to see first hand how the German automotive industry is adapting to changing technological and market trends that also affect other industries such as my own.

III. Orientation

We were instructed to make our own way to our first hotel in Cologne, which was not far from the city centre. The directions to the hotel sent out by the program manager, Natasha Turner, and were clear and easy to follow. The hotel is not far from the central train station (the 'Hauptbahnhof'). It's about 3 tram rides followed by a 10 minute walk (Curtis' method) or 25 minute walk (Peter's method).

The program officially started with a welcome dinner in Cologne. The dinner was at a local brewery with traditional German food and authentic Kolsch beer (originated in Cologne, served in iconic 0.2 L 'stange' glasses). It was a great opportunity to meet other participants as well as the program manager and support staff.

After we had checked into the first hotel in Cologne, we traveled around as a group for the most part (with some flexibility on the middle weekend, if desired), with all accommodation and transport included in our course payment. This made it easy to plan, there was very little we needed to arrange prior to arrival.

IV. Courses & Registration

As the program was a fixed 'study tour' focused on the German automotive industry, there was no course registration necessary. The initial tentative schedule included in the program brochure was based on the previous year's program, our schedule was finalized and distributed about one month before the program started. The final program was very similar to the previous year's program, with minor differences in terms of company and organization visits. The program manager was very helpful and was able to confirm some travel and accommodation details in advance, upon request.

The program offering is very different from typical courses at UBC. It provided a good mix of lectures, company visits, factory tours, and social events. Although some activities were of more interest than others for different participants, we enjoyed the overall program composition.

The workload is not heavy. The only course deliverable was a group presentation for an allocated automotive cluster in Europe. Some background information was available from the course material, and guidance was provided during the program. Most groups also conducted online research during the program to provide content for the presentation. Preparation and research took around 5 to 10 hours during the program, depending on the depth of the research each group wanted to do.

V. Teaching

Being a study tour, the style of teaching is very different from the typical UBC Sauder courses. The style of teaching most often used were presentations given by management and representatives from the companies and organizations we visited. One great point was that most of the presenters made time for Q+A, which typically resulted in very interesting discussions. The presenters were great in providing the overall view of both the specific organization they represented and the current opportunities and challenges of the industry. Many of the memorable learning experiences came out of the Q+A and discussion.

VI. Language Courses

No language courses were offered and were not required at all. All presentations and tours were in English. The most German language we were exposed to was in restaurants and hotels. Most Germans we interacted with spoke excellent English.

VII. Campus Facilities

We only spent 2 days at the University of Cologne campus. The rooms and facilities are very similar to the ones at UBC. WiFi was also available. Most participants brought personal laptops, which were very helpful for completing the group presentation projects. There is a student cafeteria available for lunch with decent selections (most meals were included in the course fee, but some were not). Since we spent such limited time on campus, the program manager didn't really cover the available student services. We were provided with a student card, which also included free public transportation in the local region. The campus and the city felt quite safe, we had no safety concerns throughout the entire study tour.

VIII. Housing Facilities

Accommodations throughout the tour were all pre-arranged. They are single rooms in descent hotels usually very close to the central train stations. All accommodation included breakfast. Because the accommodations were typically in city centre areas, there were many options available for dinner including food courts, breweries and higher-end restaurants. There were also grocery stores readily available, including in major train stations.

The study tour also included a two-day weekend over at Cologne, with accommodation already included in the cost. However, many of us decided to make our own arrangements and spend the weekend in other cities such as Berlin, Amsterdam, and other nearby cities.

Many of the participants often ended up eating and drinking together in German beer halls and gardens, eating large portions of meat and drinking 1.0 L 'steins' of beer.

IX. Costs / Expenses

The cost of the program was 2,450 Euros. This includes accommodation, transportation, breakfasts, and some lunches. Participants were generally responsible for dinners and incidental snacks and groceries. As mentioned above, there were many dining options available. A reasonable dinner with a beer was around 20 to 30 Euros although if you venture beyond touristy areas there are usually cheaper options available.

X. Study Tours / Field Trips

The entire program was a study tour including 5 cities. The tour began in Cologne and ended in Munich. Activities in each location included:

Cologne (3 days)

- Lecture from German automotive journalist on the latest industry trends in Germany, Europe and globally
- Ford factory tour and lecture/discussion with a senior manager at Ford Europe
- Lecture from a university professor on the role of the automotive industry within the EU

Nurburgring (1 day)

- Backstage tour of Nurburgring race track facilities
- Lecture from former Nurburgring COO on the economic impact of the Nurburgring in the region
- Evening activity: indoor karting at the Nurburgring karting track. Peter comprehensively beat Curtis.

Frankfurt (1 day)

- Visit to sigo, a local cargo bike-sharing startup to share the journey as a start-up
- Group presentations

Berlin (2 days)

- Lecture from VDA (German Auto Association) on EU policies relating to auto industry
- Lecture from dena (German Energy Agency) on new energy sources and impact on auto/mobility industry
- Tour of Reichstag (German Parliament building)

- Visit to 'The Drivery' - a shared workspace and innovation hub for mobility-related startups

Munich (2 days)

- Lecture from AT Kearney consultants on automotive connectivity and technology trends
- BMW brand experience at BMW Museum
- Visit to EVUM Motors, a startup developing light electric utility trucks for emerging markets
- Lecture on Inzell Initiative - cooperation between BMW and the City of Munich on modern urban mobility solutions

XI. What to Bring

We would recommend traveling light as there is a lot of travel involved. A backpack and a small suitcase/carry-on would be ideal. As there is quite a bit of walking involved, a pair of comfortable walking/running shoes would be a good idea.

XII. General Impressions

An excellent experience, much more than just lectures in a classroom. The relatively small group of participants (around 20) allowed for great discussions and we learned a lot from each other as well as from the planned activities and lectures as all participants are from MBA schools all over the world. In addition, the tour provided a good overview of the major German cities.

Highly recommended for anybody with an interest in the automotive industry, mobility and/or Germany!