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Introduction

My name is Rachael Dyck and I am currently in the Master of Management program at UBC Sauder School of Business. I chose the option of doing a study abroad at the end of my program because since I started the MM right after my undergraduate degree, I was hoping for a break and an adventure before heading back to Vancouver to look for full time work. I selected Cologne University because I wanted to travel in Europe after the program and Germany was a great place to start! This program also ran at the start of August (August 3-16th 2019) so I was able to work for a few months in the summer before leaving to save up some money, and also leave time for some rest before starting another course.

Orientation

I arrived in Cologne 2 days before the course started so I was able to get to know the city a little bit and settle in to my accommodation. The first orientation that was provided was on the first day. We had a main point of contact throughout the process leading up to the course, so we were given instructions on where to meet on the first day. The morning that classes started we were given university ID cards and the coordinator, Anna, gave us some useful information about Cologne and the university in a 2-hour orientation. Following this short session, classes started. Anna attended each session throughout the course, so she was always easily accessible if anyone had questions.

Courses and Registration

At the University of Cologne, there was only one course that was available for study abroad and we were all automatically enrolled in it, so there was no confusion at all regarding this. There were 20 students in the class from many countries including China, Argentina, Australia, and Japan. The course that was chosen for us this year was on Diversity in Business and the course only consisted of exchange students. For UBC students looking to select which university to attend for study abroad, I think it is important to look closely at the course that will be offered each year. From my experience, the people attending the course were very passionate about this topic specifically, so it would be a more rewarding experience to have a passion or interest for the course they select each year. You can view this on the CISU-MBA website for the University of Cologne and they will also post the detailed syllabus on the website that you can view before selecting the school. The course was 2 weeks long and classes were held Monday to Friday from 9am-1230pm. The grading scheme consisted of 20% participation, 30% on your contribution in a team debate, and 50% on a final team presentation. I think the quality of the course was definitely on par with UBC. The workload was comparable, although I do think since most people are attending the course to also experience the city, most students were in the mindset that balance between school and social life was important, so I don't think that the workload overall was too heavy.

Teaching

The style of teaching was similar to UBC. The instructor spoke perfect English and had worked at universities in many countries including Israel, Germany, and the US. He used published studies and experiments to illustrate points and did many in-class activities to further reinforce these points. Most classes were in traditional lecture style, but participation was encouraged. For one of the classes, a head recruiter from Beiersdorf came in to do a case study about diversity and the challenges that their company faced launching their product in a new market. Overall the course was engaging, and time went by quickly.

Campus Facilities

The campus was a lot more spread out than UBC and it is more integrated into the city, so it was harder to see where it started and ended. The buildings are numbered, but everything is in German, so it is essential to look up on the university website where the building is before heading to class! Thankfully, we had every class in the same seminar room, so after finding it the first day I was able to get there easily each morning. I felt very safe on campus and all throughout the city for that matter. The best part of the facility that I took advantage of was the University Mensa. This is a cafeteria that you are able to pay for food and drinks by loading money onto your university ID card. The meals are delicious and fresh, and I would definitely recommend eating here every day after class if you can! It is subsidized, so a huge salad and protein would only cost about 2-3 euros. I did not see any of the other facilities like the gym or library, but since most of the homework was group work, we would usually just meet at a nice café or stay in the classroom to work together in the afternoon. A laptop is necessary for this course and they do not provide computers. Make sure you bring a converter... I learned this the hard way!

Housing Facilities

The school did suggest a hotel for us that they had reserved some rooms in, but no one used this option. The hotel was a little run down and expensive for what it was. Most students opted for the Airbnb option, and some chose other hotels in the city. Everywhere in Cologne is very well connected by the tram system, so I wouldn't worry too much about exactly where you choose to find accommodation, just focus on the amenities. My apartment had a kitchen and washer/dryer, which was key. Eating in Cologne is fairly expensive, but the groceries are very cheap, so it was amazing to be able to cook meals at home to save money. My particular Airbnb was about \$70/night which was less than the hotel the school suggested, and I think a much better alternative. I stayed in the Belgian Quarter, which is a very cute area with lots of shops, cafes, and grocery stores, so I would recommend staying in this area. It takes about 30 minutes walking or 15 minutes on transit to get to the school. If you are looking to stay closer to the university, the Latin Quarter is the closest area.

Expenses

I honestly did not spend a lot of money during my time in Cologne, which was an unexpected surprise. The first night of the course we went for dinner as a group, which was paid for by the university. There were also farewell drinks after class on the last day, which were also covered by the university. As I mentioned before my group ate lunch every day at the Mensa, so I was only spending about 2-3 euros per day on lunch, and for dinner I usually made food at home with the exception of a few meals out.

- A) Transit – with your university ID you can take all the trams and regional trains within the province for free! This is an amazing resource since the system is really well connected and you can get basically everywhere within 10-15 minutes on the tram. There is also a direct train from central station to the airport which is included in this, and it only takes 15 minutes as well.
- B) Accommodation – I paid \$70/night for my Airbnb, but there are definitely cheaper options. I had an entire apartment to myself with kitchen, laundry, TV, coffee and tea included, and a large seating area, so this was a more expensive option. I am not sure what the hotel prices were like, but many of my classmates did this so I can imagine it wasn't much more.
- C) Textbooks – There were no required textbooks for the course and all of the reading materials were posted online in the portal.
- D) Groceries - There are many small grocery stores all over Cologne, so you won't have any trouble finding groceries no matter which area you choose to stay in. I think the prices are cheaper than Vancouver. For example, I paid 1.50 Euros for a tub of yogurt, 2 Euros for a flat of raspberries, and all of the pre-packaged salads are around 2 Euros. If you are looking to eat cheaply it is definitely achievable. There are not really to-go restaurants because that isn't the culture, so sit down meals are quite a bit more expensive. All of the traditional German restaurant's main dishes will be around 18-20 Euros.

Social Activities

There was a mandatory social fee of around 350 Euros. This covered a few social events including a rooftop tour of the famous cathedral, an escape room, and a tour of the German History of Migration in Bonn (a town about 20 minutes outside of Cologne). The rooftop tour was amazing and lasted 1.5 hours. We were taken all through the cathedral by a guide and told about the history. We climbed up to the top which was 60 metres! The escape room was also a lot of fun; we did this with our groups that were assigned for the projects, so we could get to know each other better on the first day. The museum was also interesting; we had an English guide and were taken through on a 1.5-hour tour. It was a little long, however, since all the descriptions of items were in German so none of us could really understand but just had to listen to the guide. Everyone in the program ended up going for lots of informal dinners and drinks after class in the evenings as well. Something to note for student choosing to go to this course is that it is an MBA course, which I did not consider prior to registering. Everyone in the course was much older than me, so it was not the young social atmosphere I was expecting.

Everyone was still very nice, but for someone from UBC looking to join a young group of friends to explore the city with during the course, this will not be the case in Cologne.

What to Bring

When I was in Cologne it rained a lot, so I would definitely recommend bringing an umbrella! They were coming off of a heat wave when I arrived, so I am not sure if this is typical for August, but most afternoons around 3pm it would rain for the rest of the evening. The dress code for the course was technically business casual, but after the first day I quickly realised that casual dress was fine. I would recommend packing casual clothes like jeans, khakis, some dress shirts or blouses, sweaters, or skirts and dresses for girls. There are some days that require walking to the social events so make sure you have some sneakers. In class, any shoes are fine, but I mostly wore flats or sneakers, no heels or dress shoes are required. I would also pack a water bottle, since plastic bottles are usually no less than 2 euros, and this adds up!

General Impressions

I chose my study abroad based on timing and length of the course, which worked out for me personally, but I would definitely recommend choosing a school based on the content of the course you will be taking and the city itself (i.e. will there be enough things for you to do during your time, other than school, that you will be entertained). Cologne is a city that you can explore in a day or two, so after that I was kind of bored and ended up just hanging out at home a lot or going for runs. I think it would be more rewarding to choose a vibrant city that you are excited to explore, that has nightlife or other schools in the area, or is close to other cities for day trips. After all, you are living there for a while! Generally, my study abroad experience was what I expected. If you are looking for a relaxed class schedule, short timeline (2 weeks), and proximity to other places for travelling in Europe, I would recommend Cologne.