



BADEN-WÜRTTEMBERG-STIPENDIUM

FOR STUDENTS

PERSONAL REPORT

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MEUS CURSUS IN GERMANIA

Hi, I'm Erick Mendizábal (Ecuadorian, 21 years old) and this is my wonderful story as an international student in Reutlingen University, Germany!

When you're a beginner student in the University San Francisco de Quito, you admire those students who open their wings and fly abroad to experience something phenomenal, an exchange period. Naturally, you hear their stories, anecdotes, and experiences and inside you the desire of also being there appears.

However, I never thought that I would be part of an exchange program, I was technically too old (last semesters of my university) but then the opportunity appeared – in my birthday I must say – to come to Germany.

José, my coordinator, told us that there was a chance to do an exchange period in Reutlingen, I applied, and after a selection process I got selected (when the email came, I was so happy that I almost felt from my chair). Then the international office of my home university, especially Karla, helped me to fill the first application form and with some of the bureaucracy back in Ecuador -my first steps to achieve a lifetime dream-

Here is the moment that two important people helped me, Bridgette McGowen (Life sciences faculty international students coordinator) and Brigitte Bahcaci (representative of Baden-Württemberg Stiftung and RIO). Bridgette helped me to elucidate all the academic requirements (semester fees and documents) and also gave me advice for where to stay and some insurance recommendations. And Brigitte guided me in the process of the scholarship of the Baden-Württemberg Stiftung (without their help I wouldn't have been able to come to Germany). Also, I enrolled myself in the welcoming workshop offered by the university, and I knew some

Also, Maria José, a friend of my career, gave me so many good tips to how to live, to apply for my visa, and the insurance company I should use. With everything set and done, I applied for my visa and with the approval of the German Embassy in Quito, I was ready to flight.

While this was happening, my parents, Renato and Yadira, excited as me, helped me to be prepared. They paid my flight tickets, bought me a brand-new travel bag, clothes and gave me a card for any circumstances. The news of me going to Europe spread everywhere, and my family and friends congratulated me and started making farewelling meetings. My best friends gave me presents, Milena invite a cake and Wendy bought me a book separator.

As the day was approaching, I went to visit my grandma, and with tears in the eyes I said see you soon. My lab partners and my boss, Andrea, organized a farewelling meeting with paella. Renata, my sister, took me to a gastronomic tour the day before my flight was.

And then the day came, my parents and my sister left me in the airport. It was hard, we have been a really close family, and this was the first time we will be separated so long. Also, I was a little bit scared of being completely alone in another country, with another language, and another culture. But then my dad told me: "son, the world is there for you, go and achieve your dream with passion and courage, we will be waiting for you", and he hug me. Then my mom approaches me and says: "son, take this opportunity to live new experiences, be strong, be happy and always keep the values we have taught you", she hugs me and we both cried. And finally, my sister, hug me and gave me a little painting she made for me and says: "a little piece of Ecuador for you", we all hugged again and I said good bye. After leaving my bags on the counter, and embark the plane, my flight to Frankfurt took off with the blessing of God.

After 16 hours, my plane landed in Frankfurt International Airport. The first worrying I had was my checked bags, but thankfully a German couple helped me to find the proper carousel and after quite time they appeared. I slept in a hotel near the airport and the next day I took my first train. The ICE took me to Stuttgart and after that I took a regional train to Reutlingen.

My first impression of the town was nice, everything looked so chill and friendly. I arrived to my housing (near the university) and after a quick tour in the building, I was able to settle down. I unpacked my bags, and then I realized I didn't had cover sheets to sleep, so I went to the nearby supermarket to buy some. I was nervous because I had to speak German to pay, thankfully the staff helped me. Also, I bought my first Döner! – it was delicious.

The first night is always challenging but I had a good feeling and was excited for the next days.

During the first week, I had to adapt firstly to the weather, a little bit colder than I expected of march. I met my fellow Ecuadorian international partners, Leo and Mateo, and I made my first friends here. Reutlingen International Office organized a meeting to fulfill the paperwork to the city, this was awesome because governmental stuff sometimes can be difficult, and they took us into a tour to the city center too, and I knew more international friends from all abroad.

Then I had my first cultural shock: the garbage treatment. Here in Germany is very important to separate the residues properly, Max, a German friend, explained me everything and I understood the mechanism. I thought maybe that besides that, other things must be similar – psd: I was wrong. Suddenly I learned that checking your post box is important (in Ecuador we don't deliver things via post so often), because you receive important information all the time, for example your tax ID. And speaking about it, the creation of a bank account was one of the must difficult things I found because you require the tax ID to open one. Fortunately, I was able to open one just with my passport, that's why

I would totally recommend Volksbank Reutlingen, they helped me a lot and with that and the registration in the city completed I had my first installment of the scholarship.

Now that I'm talking about finances, here are some tips for new students, first you have to do a budget, prioritize the payments of basic things such as rent, food, and insurance, then if you have something left you can think in doing extracurricular activities such as going to the gym. Now returning to the shocks, the transportation is one of the most interesting things here in Germany. Buses are super well organized; the schedules are well made and generally I found the buses in good state. The best thing you can do as a student is to buy a ticket monthly to use all the regional and inner transport inside Germany. I have been warned several times of problems in trains, but personally didn't experienced one so severe – everybody tells me that I'm a guy with luck – but in such case you also should download the DB app to look for alternatives. Regarding planes you can find cheap flights chasing them in the web but departing from regional airports, generally flying from Stuttgart to other parts can be expensive.

Here I learned that I have to wait until the traffic light indicates me to cross because I have the guarantee that cars will stop at the red light. Also, that you should bring your own bag to collect your groceries when you go to the supermarket, and one of the most classic German shocks, the "pfand". Actually, I find it a very efficient and well thought initiative to promote recycling, instead of throwing your bottles to disposal you pay a deposit and then when you return these bottles to a machine you receive your money back, I was amazed by this.

Anyways, as the days passed it was time to register in the subjects. Bridgette, was with me at the whole process and helped me to organize my schedule, searching different alternatives, teachers, and adjusting everything to fulfill both host and home universities. With my schedule set and done, I was ready to start.

The first Monday I was so excited, I woke up early (at 5 a.m.) prepared everything, and left the apartment. In the way, I noticed that some friends were with me at the same class.



Me at my first day of classes

Finding the building was not so difficult thanks to map and the signaling available in the campus. I also have to say it is so interesting to see that here in Germany the universities' campuses are open for public without any fence or wall to delimit the borders, I think also this is a good way to have a direct and deep contact with the nature. The university is surrounded by fields and forest, making an enjoyable experience to lose inside its paths. When we arrived to the class, the professor greets us and we took a sit. I freaked out because the lesson started in German, but then we ask for English and kindly the class was switched to it.

Then after class we went to the stands that showed interesting information about extracurricular activities, in my case I was able to contact to the gym I have been assisting until nowadays. As the week passed by, I met my professors and fellow students of another classes. In surfaces, my first challenge was presented, the class was going to take place only in German, so I asked the professor for additional tutoring in English in other hours and he accepted it. Now that the semester is ending I'm glad this happened because not only I learned the contents, but also learned and improved my German skills.

Regarding language barrier, university also offers courses for foreigners. Naturally I enrolled myself in one of them, and I knew several interesting people there. Also, the teacher made the class dynamic and at the end I think I recovered my knowledges that I thought lost. And in addition to that I would highly recommend that you sign up for the tandem program offered by RIO, basically they pair you with someone who wants to learn your language and viceversa. There I knew Sophie, a charming girl, who helped me to practice my spoken skills, as I helped her knowledges in Spanish, we met almost every Wednesday to talk about the week and our travels around the world.

The days passed by; I acknowledged the rhythm of study here. In Ecuador we usually have a lot of homework to do, but here the education is more autonomous. I have always said that this is something that requires a strong discipline because you're so tempted to waste free time instead of following the course. At the beginning I found out hard, and sometimes I fell into the cycle of not doing nothing, but with time I became more disciplined and I started organizing my home studies better. In the majority of lessons, I was the only foreign student, this was something challenging, because sometimes my other classmates answered questions in German even though some classes were in English.

I felt overwhelmed, but I realized that complaining won't solve anything and anyways we are in Germany so I used translator and practiced hearing to understand what they were saying. Obviously, this didn't happen all time, there were also kind classmates that answered in English to helped me to understand the discussion. I found easy to follow the resources and the university platforms, and in class activities, such as expositions, were fun and interactive. As an example, in my Environmental Analysis course professor Daniela Almeida Streitwieser took us to an excursion to the Reutlingen Natural Museum where we learned about the geology of the region and then we all went to a coffee shop. Also, I was able to put on march my practical knowledge, in the laboratories of Life Sciences, currently in the environmental analysis class, where we used several analytic techniques and definitions to evaluate the quality of water of a nearby lake. I loved being in the lab here, I have learned several relevant things for my career, and hopefully I will learn how to use the ion chromatography equipment soon. Well, maybe you're asking how did I spent my outside university time. Mostly it depended if I was in the town or travelling. In the first case, generally I spent my time doing chores, such as cooking my meals, washing my clothes, cleaning my apartment, doing paperwork, groceries, and walking. I go to the gym also, it also shocked me that I had to brought special shoes for using the gym, generally in other parts we can use the same outdoor shoes to train. During weekend I saw series, helped in my research group in Ecuador, and I went to church on Sundays.

I must say that the catholic community of Heilig Geist church in Reutlingen is very welcoming, during the mass celebration I felt embraced by the music, and also a lady taught me how to sing in German. Some weekends RIO organized events for us exchange students, for example there was the time we went to Bad Urach to see the waterfall and chill in the castle.

Now, I will talk of the other alternative -and my favorite one- travelling. Being in the European Union allows you to travel between Schengen Area countries without any major concerns. That's why I took the opportunity to visit several cities. The first one was Munich; I have friends there who made me a tour around the city and at the night we party hard, I was surprised by the elegance of its streets and the precious town hall. Then I visited Frankfurt am Main with some Vietnamese friends, the skyscrapers and the iron bridge proportioned incredible views. I visited Berlin and fascinated with the beautiful architecture and almost cried in front of the Brandenburg Gate. In every destination I tried several meals including Schweinhaxe, Currywurst, Bratwurst, Maultaschen, etc.



Me at Brandenburg Gate visiting Berlin

When the April's long break came in the university, I adventured into Italy. I took a flight to Rome and got overwhelmed by its wonders and art, I embraced myself in the aura of the Colosseum, the Imperial Forum and the Vatican Museums, I walked almost 30 km but it has worth the pain. Then I visited Venice, and experience the magic of its canals. Using the high-speed train, I arrived to Milan and enjoyed the vibrant atmosphere of the city. Obviously in every city I was delighted with the cuisine, tasting a wide variety of pastas, pizzas and risottos – my favorite and personal recommendation without doubts, the carbonara.

The next month I took my bags and went to Prague. There I experience the mystery of its castles and the traditional Trdelník. After two weeks I went to Paris, the city of light. Feeling the wind in the top of the Eiffel tower was one of the best experiences I had, I went to the Louvre and ate a classical onion soup. Finally at the time I'm writing this I visited Salzburg in Austria and tried Sachertorte, a gate to the food paradise I have to say. I'm planning several other trips, such as Spain, Portugal, Switzerland and if have enough time to the Netherlands and Belgium. Here is another tip, if you have the chance to travel take it. Knowing places from all abroad makes you comprehend how beautiful is our world, how awesome is to have diversity of cultures, people, and experiences. And you return different with a warm feeling in your heart that would never disappear.

Now that the semester is ending, I can say that if someone ever ask me for a place to come, I will definitely say Reutlingen University. I can't describe how happy I am now for taking the chance to become an international student and I can't be more grateful than I am with God, my family, both home and host universities and specially with the Baden-Württemberg Stiftung for being supporters to make this dream come true.

These months abroad have passed so fast, but that's a good sign, because usually good times seem to be quicker – I don't know why, but it is how life works. My time in Germany is coming to an end soon, but it will be tattooed on my heart forever, every single second has worth the pain.

Now I will return to Ecuador, not only happier but more mature, responsible, academically prepared, and open minded. As a future chemical engineer, I feel stronger and ready to face the challenges of the upcoming world, can't wait to apply all I have learned here and make my contribution to these precious family, the mankind.

Sic itur ad astra



Me at Main Tower in Frankfurt am Main

DETERMINING CO₂ emissions via the CO₂ calculator on BWS-World

- ☒ I hereby agree to record the air travel undertaken in connection with *the Baden-Württemberg-STIPENDIUM* in the CO₂ calculator on BWS-World. I also agree that the Baden-Württemberg Stiftung may use this data for compensation purposes and carry out anonymous evaluations.

Which CO₂ emissions caused by your air travel within the Baden-Württemberg-STIPENDIUM did you calculate using the CO₂ calculator on BWS World? (Note: only outward and return flights as well as max. 1 flight home for stays of more than 6 months are to be taken into account)

Incoming Flight: UIO-FRA via MAD (1.41 tons)

Outcoming Flight: FRA-UIO via IST, BOG (4,13 tons)

Total Emissions: 5,53 tons of CO₂