

**MERSEBURG UNIVERSITY OF APPLIED SCIENCES  
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**GERMANY IN INTERCULTURAL CONTEXT**

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My experience in Germany started more than six months before I came here. I always had a dream of studying abroad, since I was a child, but my mom always told me that she thought, that the best idea was to wait for a good opportunity, once she didn't agree with going for a foreign country just in order to learn a new language. So, during long years I saw friends of mine going abroad and I was still in Brazil doing the same things. When I entered into the university in 2013 my parents finally agreed that could be the time for me to make my dreams come true. Consequently, I started researching about all the potential countries that I could go and in my head, all I wanted for a long time was the United States or another country where English was the main language. However, over the years I started focusing on my career and stopped thinking about going abroad, also because when I finally realized that I could go I started being afraid of going alone. When I was in the 6th semester of my studies in 2016 I had almost forgotten about the exchange program, but then a friend of mine came to talk to me, inviting me to go study somewhere else for six months with her and at the moment all my desire for the experience appeared again.

From that moment I started talking to my parents again, telling them that I really wanted to go and I started, once again, researching all the places I could go. At that time I realized that it wouldn't be possible to go to the United States because my university didn't have so many agreements with them. Thus, I decided with my friend that we would go to Europe, but to France. I had already decided everything and researched a lot about the place we would go when a professor of mine came with a new opportunity: studying in Germany for six months and working as an intern in a German company for other six months.

This new opportunity came for me as all I always wanted and all my parents always wished for me, because at once I would be able to: practising my English, learning a new language, studying abroad and improving my career with the amazing experience of working in Germany. The problem was: my friend didn't want to go with me, because she wanted to stay only for a few months and also Merseburg was a small city in East Germany, unfortunately not so attractive for most people. She finally decided to go to Berlin and told me that I could go with her, but even though the experience of going with a friend would be amazing I decided to follow my instincts and dreams and go to this small town called Merseburg.

The process to arrive here was not easy, and for moments I thought about giving up, as it required many paperwork and many problems with the visa authorities.

Anyway, I kept with the idea that all the difficulties would bring me a good reward at the end. So after six months of planning and learning German, I finally travelled to Germany in March 2017.

When I arrived here I realized that my German skills were not good at all and that people couldn't speak English as I thought they could, so it would be a challenge to me, at the same time I became aware that people were not so patient and not speaking the language would be very hard. In another hand, I was not expecting so much from the city, but I fell in love with Merseburg from the first day I walked through the main street and passed by the castle, at that moment I felt that I was in the right place.

After three months here I can already say that Germany and Brazil are very different countries, even though there are plenty of similarities between both countries, once that some cities, like the one, where I was born, have a lot of influence of German culture. The weather here is very different, first because the winter is really cold and the summer isn't really hot, at least not yet, if comparing to Brazil. Yet, for me, the main difference is that it is light until 22 pm and is a day at 4 am. However there were two main moments that I really enjoyed here, one was when I saw snow falling and minutes later the sun shining very hard and the second when I first saw grains of pollen falling from the trees, something very beautiful and typical from places where they have all the four seasons like in Germany, which is not the case of Brazil.

Another different thing for me was the first time I went to a supermarket. To start, I needed to put a coin to have access to the supermarket trolley, something that I had never done in Brazil before. Then the disposition and the foods were very different from where I am used to, I could barely find things to buy at the beginning and then when paying I realized that I needed to have my own supermarket bag and put my own things inside of it. In Brazil, we normally use plenty of plastic bags (which is not good) and there is always someone helping to put the things in the plastic bags and then in the cart, which means it is their obligation to do it and not ours. Consequently, I was lost at the beginning and sometimes I still realize that I am not so efficient as the Germans because they can do it very fast. However, I definitely think that this is a better attitude, more sustainable and also more profitable, once that you need fewer people working at the supermarket. Nowadays I already have my own bags, I already know the name of the products that I need to buy, I always have a coin with me when I go and I try to be as fast as I can on the cashier.

Besides that, I saw many other differences between Brazil and Germany and even with other countries, once I could compare it with the other international students, and it was so interesting to me that I wrote down during these past three months some of them like: there are no ice cubes here to sell as we often find in Brazil, you need to do your own ice in the freezer; nobody here does popcorn in the pan, they prefer to cook it in the microwave; they vote for the politics with paper not in an electronic ballot box as we do it; the tickets inside of the busses are sold by the driver, in Brazil we have another person inside just to sell it and to help with any problem that might appear; among other differences that I found on the way.

Whereas I also realized that some of the prejudices I had about Germans were not so true, like for example: I always had this idea that Germans were very on time for everything, but in fact it is not true, I already waited for buses for more than 30 minutes, some of my professors arrived late for class many times and also some German friends were not there always on the correct time. Another idea that I had was that Germans were more close and not so friendly but I was completely wrong about it, I found myself making many friends out of nowhere and I realized that the Germans can be very helpful for what you need, they just need a certain time to open themselves and get your trust.

During these three months here I also had the opportunity to travel a lot, inside and outside Germany, and that way I had even more experiences. I started travelling to Halle and Leipzig with my international friends and it was amazing, I loved both cities, especially because was the first two places that I travelled to. One interesting thing about Leipzig was that we wanted to visit one famous monument of the city, but when we arrived there, it was about 3:50 pm, they didn't allowed us to enter because it would close at 4 pm, at the moment I understood that I was in a different country, with another culture, because if it was in Brazil certainly it would be open at least until 6 pm, in order to make more profit out of it.

My third trip was to Munich, where I was able to see the differences between a small and a big city in Germany because there were things to do all day long, even some places open on Sunday, something that is rare in Germany and completely normal in Brazil. Munich was amazing, I loved to visit the BMW museum and the English Garden. From there I went to Fussen to visit Neuschwanstein Castle, one of the most beautiful places I ever been. As I am a big fan of Disney fairy tales I felt myself inside of one of the princess movies. The castle was unbelievably beautiful and the landscape with the Alps mountains was even better, a vision that I will never forget. The best part

about this attraction was that I always wanted to visit this castle in Germany, but as my friend organized the trip and not me, I didn't know that we were going to this specific castle until we arrived there, so it was an amazing surprise for me.

The next place I visited was Hamburg, another amazing and big city in Germany. Hamburg remind me a lot of New York because of the intense life night, the harbour and the buildings, so I just liked it even more. Something that caught my attention there was that I could enter into the parties without paying for it, another thing very different from my country, because in Brazil all the places you need to pay at least a little bit and normally it is a big amount of money.

I also visited Berlin, the most famous city in Germany, a city that I never had so many curiosities to visit, but that now really makes me want to come back. Berlin is alive, full of things to do, sightsees, famous monuments and of course full of history. One of the reasons that never made me really want to visit Berlin was because I thought that with all that the city already suffered during the war, it would be a negative atmosphere there, but to my surprise, it was an amazing atmosphere, I really loved it.

The last place I have been in Germany was Dresden and Bastei with many international students. First, we went to Bastei, the amazing rock formation with a beautiful bridge in the middle. This place was also unbelievably beautiful and it remind me of my childhood when I used to visit a famous museum in Brazil inspired in Germany cities that shows many miniatures of the cities, because from the top of the mountain when I looked down to the city with the trains passing by it was exactly like in that museum in the past, was an amazing experience. Dresden was also very nice, a city full of beautiful old buildings and crowded because of the good weather.

Besides Germany, I also visited other three countries: Denmark, Belgium and Spain. In Denmark I fell in love for the history of the city and the people, they are known as the happiest people in the world and I totally agree that they are, from someone in the gas station, until people in the best restaurant everybody is completely polite and kind, helping with anything. Another positive thing was that everyone speaks English there, and you don't even need to ask them to speak English, they automatically change the language when they realize that you are a foreigner. In Belgium, I enjoyed a lot the food: French fries, chocolate, ice cream, waffles and beers, all from the best. I've visited Bruges and Brussels two close cities but completely different and I loved both. There I had the first experience of travelling just with a girl friend and at this moment I felt vulnerable for the first time, I realized how different is to travel with a

woman or a man, especially because Belgium had suffered a recent attack and there were police everywhere taking care. But in the end it made me want to go more often alone or with girls friends in order to realize that I am able to do it, it just requires more careful. Spain was from far the best country I've been here, first because I travelled there with my parents, after two months without seeing them, so I was really happy there and second because I could felt the Latin culture there, which reminds me a lot of Brazil. The cities there were incredibly beautiful and different from each other, so in the same country, I was able to see many different places and landscapes.

During these three months here I also had the chance to get to know myself better, once that for the first time I was all by myself. Many times I had problems and I had to figure it out alone how do deal with it. The experience of being abroad has been amazing and I expect even more from the next months that I will be working for Bosch. Definitely, I am leaving this small town called Merseburg with another view of the world and open for more.