

My name is Thayná Camargo da Silva and I was granted a DAAD Scholarship from October 2020 until February 2021, and through this report, I would like to share my experiences as an exchange student at Offenburg University of Applied Sciences.

It all started when I got selected from the international office of my home university, the Federal University of ABC in Brazil, and they nominated me to be an exchange student. In the next few days, Johanna Wolber, from the International Office in HS Offenburg, got in touch with me by email and explained to me the details of the next steps of my application. I also applied for the Baden Württemberg and DAAD scholarships, at the end I was selected to receive the DAAD scholarship and it was essential for me to participate in this exchange semester.

A few weeks before my land in Germany I was assigned a buddy. He was very friendly, helped me with all the bureaucracy, and also to adapt to Offenburg. We first met in the train station when he was waiting to take me to the student residence. Also, in my first week, he took me on tours in the main spots of Offenburg, the buildings and facilities in the university, as well as arrange appointments in the city's office, and open a bank account. We became great friends and during my stay in Germany, he shared a lot about the German culture and showed me some nice places in the region.

During the application I had the option to choose private accommodation or the student residence, I chose the student residence and it was the best choice for me. There are three student residences in Offenburg: St. Martin Straße, Zähringer Straße, and Goldgasse and I lived in the first one. There, the flats can accommodate up to 5 students and each one of us has our room, with all the furniture we need and we share the common areas: kitchen and bathroom. The best part of it is the cultural exchange, there are so many students from different countries to get to know in the building, besides that it is 5 minutes from the university.

Before the start of the semester, we had an orientation week, in which the International Office gave us important information about enrolling in courses, changing the learning agreement, and they answered all our questions. This week we had fun training about intercultural competencies and by the end of the week, I had my first hiking trip in Germany to Hohes Horn. Hiking here became one of my hobbies, there are so many beautiful landscapes and castles to see. After the orientation week, we had a wine tour too, and it was great to meet new students and we could taste wine made in the region.

All of my courses were carried online, but it was not a problem because Offenburg University has all the infrastructure to support online classes. There was the possibility to rent books in the library, access all the software we needed, and even connect to the computers in the university using VPN. Along with that, all the professors were adapting their classes to this new online version and it was inspiring to learn from them.

By December, the festivities were about to start but we had restrictions due to the coronavirus, but even so, the International Office organized an online Nikolaus event. We received a package with candies and Christmas poems. It was nice to learn about Nikolaus' tradition, which we don't have in Brazil. Also, during the event, we could share the different traditions that we have in our home country. For Christmas, I and some other international students organized a big dinner, we had a Christmas tree and decoration and each one of us cooked delicious food.

By the end of the semester, we had a fun treasure hunt game organized by the International Office. Each week we had to find a different place in Offenburg and take a selfie, the first person to send it to them got a hoodie from the university. It was awesome to meet new spots in the city and to win the prize.

My first snow experience was here and it was magical! Generally, it does not snow much in Offenburg, but this winter there was surprisingly a lot of snow, we even built a snowman and sled near the Kinzig river. One of my friends took me to the mountains in Mummelsee. It is a beautiful place to visit, where you can go snowboarding and skiing.

During the semester, I also had the opportunity to visit beautiful places. In the Ortenau area I visited Europa Park, Gengenbach, Altenheim, Hausach, Oppenau, Lahr, Mummelsee and Durbach, always surrounded by the stunning Black Forest. Besides, I visited Heidelberg, Konstanz, Karlsruhe, Stuttgart and Freiburg. Visiting that many places I learned even more about Germany and its culture.

When I was granted the DAAD scholarship I was hesitant if this was the right moment to go abroad, considering the coronavirus pandemic. However, I believe that the best experiences happen just on the other side of our comfort zone. So, I committed myself to enjoy this cultural experience as much as I could, and today I am convinced that I made the right choice and I am grateful for all the experiences this scholarship offered me. Even with the social distance, I had the chance to learn from great professors and study a new challenging language. Besides, I met brilliant people from such diverse backgrounds, who enlightened me every day about their countries, languages, culinary, and traditions.

I hope my report encourages more students to challenge themselves and study abroad. On the next page, you can find a few pictures of my experience.

Wine tour:



Christmas market in Offenburg:



Baking Christmas cookies:



Christmas dinner:



Treasure hunt with my friends:



View of St. Martin residence from my window:



Castle in Ortenberg:



Offenburg:



Mummelsee:



Karlsruhe:



Stuttgart:





Heidelberg:



Konstanz:



Freiburg:



Durbach:

