



**British Chamber of Commerce Foundation**

**Report from:**

**Alison Steele - Scholarship 2009**



## **BCCG Report – Living and Studying in Bamberg**

It has been quite a journey from learning that I was one of the winners of the BCCG Scholarship in early September to writing this report, four months later. The kind support of the BCCG Foundation has made my experiences in Bamberg, Germany possible – and this is a fantastic time of my life that I will never forget.

### **Life in Bamberg**

Bamberg has definitely made a great impression on me – I consider myself lucky to have been able to live in such an interesting town. It is an architecturally stunning place, which extends across seven hills. Standing from a high vantage point on Michelsberg, you can see the numerous medieval spires and towers rising up from this town. Fascinating buildings, such as the ancient imperial Cathedral of Bamberg, are everywhere; needless to say, this town is a top German tourist destination. Nine breweries in the town centre and many, many more within the surrounding area mean that Bamberg is a German beer capital, and my fellow students and I have enjoyed tasting the many varieties that are on offer. A particular speciality here is Rauchbier – “smoked beer”, which has a distinct taste of bacon. This makes it the Marmite of the beer world with international students, but a small glass once in a while is a real treat! Bamberg is not just for beer connoisseurs; if you are interested in art, history or religion, you should definitely visit this town.

I arrived here in the middle of September, when the summer was beginning to fade. But I was still able to enjoy a sunny walk around the rose garden at the Neue Residenz and sit on the banks of the river Regnitz, admiring “little Venice” – an old fishing village, where the houses and their gardens seem to float on the river. As the autumn and then winter rolled in, Bamberg lost none of its charm. I have experienced the colourful beauty of a Bavarian autumn, and the chill of an icy, snow-covered Bamberg.

### **Studying in Bamberg**

Otto-Friedrich-Universität in Bamberg is a friendly place, where approximately 9,000 students study. There is an international community, and I have made friends with many different nationalities, notably French and Hungarian students; we have had fun teaching each other unpronounceable phrases in our native languages!

Attending lectures and small seminars in German was a shock to my system at first, and there have been times when my self-belief in learning this language wavered. But through perseverance, I am slowly improving. Otto-Friedrich-Universität has afforded me the opportunity of studying subjects that are not available at my home university; as a result, I have a new-found interest in international politics. A particular triumph for me was writing an essay in German on the problem of climate change and how a regime such as the Kyoto Protocol has influenced it; not only was my essay understandable, but I achieved a surprisingly good grade. Learning about politics has been incredibly interesting, and I now see a greater relevance in political newspaper articles and television programmes.

I have been able to take other classes in the field of marketing, deepening my knowledge in the area of “Customer Management” and studying “International Marketing” for the first time. I have worked on group presentations in both subject areas, which I found challenging yet actually enjoyable. Considering the role that Web 2.0 has played in Customer Relationship Management was especially interesting; you realise how much the internet has revolutionised our lives in terms of purchasing, selling and reviewing goods and services, and how companies respond to their customers through this media. I have always found marketing a stimulating subject, but studying in Germany has awakened an interest in politics that I hope to explore after I leave Bamberg.

### **Life in Germany**

Living in Germany has opened my eyes somewhat; I am particularly impressed with the recycling initiative here, where household waste is recycled almost religiously by German citizens. There is a community spirit about it; everyone recycles as everyone seems to care. People are actively encouraged to bring back their plastic bottles to supermarkets, where they can receive 25c per clean bottle. Recycling banks are very accessible and are present in small villages, not just towns

and cities. I believe that initiatives such as these would be beneficial in Britain, where we are slowly catching up with Germany in terms of recycling. I think that British people are becoming more and more aware of how wasteful they can be.

German public transportation is another plus; the high-speed Inter City Express (ICE) train means travelling to Munich and Berlin is more convenient, and you can spend more time at your destination than travelling. I know that Britain wants to follow in the footsteps of Germany, France and other European countries with high-speed train travel, and it would mean a shift from domestic flights and cars to trains – a more environmentally friendly alternative. Faster trains would benefit Britain, but apparently we will have to wait until 2025 before the first high-speed route will open.

Spending Christmas in Britain and then flying back to Germany in early January meant that I saw the contrast between how heavy snowfall is dealt with in both countries. Back home, stories circulated about town councils refusing to clear some roads due to “health and safety” issues, and about how some small rural villages were completely cut off due to uncleared roads. Salt and grit were in short supply for some councils across Britain; many people used dishwasher salt to clear paths. Evidently the sub-zero conditions took the British by surprise. In Bamberg, all main roads have been gritted and pathways cleared. The schools here have not been closed, and generally Germany seems to cope well with the deep snow.

Despite the advantages of living in Germany, there are aspects of British life that I miss. The cost of living in Bamberg is more expensive than at home; petrol is more costly here, as well as many basic food items. Product choice is greater in Britain, I believe. The British high street is superior to Germany’s shops and stores, and I miss the eccentric British style. Germans, at least in Bamberg, dress quite conservatively. In Britain, there is an emphasis on individualism and I admire that more now. However, the differences between our cultures just reinforce how beneficial a strong German-Anglo relationship is; we learn from one another, celebrating our strengths and hopefully improving our weaknesses. The sheer number of British and German companies from all industries in the BCCG network means that the importance of this relationship is recognised, and can only grow stronger.

Indeed, it is gratifying to see the German enthusiasm towards the English language; the importance of learning English is ingrained in the young German psyche and many of the German students I have met speak English to a very high standard. I aspire to match their standard when speaking German!

During the four months that I have already spent in Germany, I have begun to explore Bavaria, visiting Munich twice and experiencing the magic of the huge Nuremberg Christmas market! As Bamberg is relatively close to the Czech Republic border, I spent a long, unforgettable weekend sight-seeing in the capital, Prague. The Old Town in Prague is one of the most stunning places I have had the good fortune to visit. One of my future plans is to visit Berlin while I am still here. 2009 was a very important year for Germany, and watching the celebrations of the 20th anniversary of the Mauerfall – “fall of the Berlin wall”, on TV really showed how far Germany has come since reunification and how much hope the German nation has for the future.

Thanks to the BCCG Scholarship, I have seen places that I had never even thought of visiting – and I have plans to visit many more. My horizons have expanded through living in Germany, and I believe everyone should live abroad at some point, to try another way of life. I would like to thank the BCCG Foundation for making this German experience possible due to the generous scholarship. Thanks are also in order for British Airways – the free return flights were greatly appreciated! Thank you again.

Alison Steele