

A tale of two UNAM students in Freiburg, Germany

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The excitement was palpable the moment Martha Shilongo and Lihongeni Trasisu learned about the possibility of going to Germany in April 2024. After all, how are they to become future German Language teachers if they had never set foot in the country?

With visa arrangements quickly sorted, their dream of experiencing Germany first-hand was finally becoming a reality.



First impressions: Frankfurt's charm

"The moment we landed in Frankfurt, we were awestruck," Martha recounted. "The sprawling airport, sleek electric trains, and the sheer efficiency of it all felt like stepping into a new world. However, the weather was a surprise.



Expecting the warmth of summer, we had packed lightly, only to be greeted by a chilly breeze. Fortunately, we had our throws (small carry-on blankets) to keep us warm. From there, we boarded a train to our final destination,” she stated.

A first-class mistake en route Freiburg – a city that welcomes the world

“Our train journey to our next home for 2 months got off to an unexpected start. Without realizing it, we settled into the first-class section of the train, despite having second-class tickets. It wasn’t long before the friendly train officer pointed this out. Luckily, understanding German saved us from any confusion, and we politely moved to the correct section, laughing at the mishap,” Martha recalled.

According to Lihongeni, upon arriving in Freiburg, they instantly felt at home. The city had a vibrant, international vibe, making it easy for them to blend in. Nestled at the foot of the Black Forest, this Green City buzzed with the energy of travellers, and students from all over the world. Here, no one was out of place.

“On the very first day, we received a generous €150 each to help us settle in. With a pocketful of euros, we eagerly explored the shopping centres, amazed by how affordable everything seemed until we started converting prices into Namibian dollars. Lesson learned: never convert prices when abroad unless you want to feel like you’re spending a fortune,” she remarked



One of our funniest moments was walking back to Pädagogische Hochschule Freiburg with armfuls of new purchases. Unfamiliar with the local trains, they decided to walk – a decision that made them feel like they were truly experiencing life in Germany.

“In just two months, Freiburg became our second home. We quickly learned what food and drinks suited our tastes, navigated the city with ease, and even managed to squeeze in trips to other German cities. A highlight was our visit to the picturesque town of Colmar, France, just across the border,” remarked Lihongeni.

Cultural differences, of course, were inevitable. Germans have a reputation for seriousness and small talk wasn’t common, which was a shock for us. “Despite these differences, we quickly adapted to life in Freiburg. The international nature of the program meant we were surrounded by students from all over the world, making every experience shared and every moment memorable,” Martha expressed.

Missing home and comfort food

Martha shared that at the end of their second month, homesickness began to creep in. “We missed Namibian staples; pap, vleis, and especially the taste of Kapana. Despite this, we stayed focused on our studies, determined not to let the cravings distract us. The courses, both in English and German, were a joy to take and we excelled academically.

One particularly funny memory from our time there was paying the TV tax, despite not owning a TV. It was one of those moments that made us feel like true locals, living just like the Germans.”



Lessons learned and returning home

Martha and Lihongeni reflected that their time in Germany taught them invaluable life lessons. “We learned to respect and appreciate people from diverse backgrounds and cultures, understanding the importance of coexistence. Living in Freiburg made us more adaptable, open-minded, and self-reliant. It was an experience that left a lasting mark on us, one we would love to repeat.

When we finally returned home, the first thing we did was rush to Hungry Lion, only to find it closed. Luckily, Garlito’s was open, and their chicken was just as satisfying—if not better. Germany was an unforgettable adventure, but as they say, there truly is no place like home.

So, as UNAM celebrates internationalisation from 16 – 19 September 2024, we are proud to share our story. Freiburg was just the beginning of an adventure that shaped us, challenged us, and reminded us that no matter where we go, we are part of a global community,” shared Lihongeni.