

My German Adventure

by Junior Fellow 2007 Yang Yang

1. Potsdam

Potsdam is the capital city of the State of Brandenburg. It is situated so close to Berlin that it is even considered a Metropolitan area of Berlin. I remember we took a regular train there and it only took us just about 15 minutes. I was wondering how these two very important cities of Germany could be so close to each other, and would the glory of Berlin hinder the path of Potsdam for some opportunities.

But what I saw was that Berlin and Potsdam have such different features that they both are in harmony with each other. For me, Potsdam is like a huge garden, green and historical, free from busy, rushing, or noisy scenes. Potsdam is famous for the Sanssouci Palace, a relatively modest palace of the Prussian royal and German imperial family. The Rococo style palace is glorious and luxurious. Also in Potsdam is the Cecilienhof, where the Potsdam conference was held. Apart from these two sites, there are also some royal summer gardens here in Potsdam. The ambience is so relaxed with green areas everywhere and buildings and streets stretching only to a limited area. Palaces with lavish decorations still speak to the visitors about the glorious history hundreds of years ago alongside the quietness that Potsdam possesses. Nowadays, many rich and famous persons in Germany have their own houses in Potsdam but I am not sure if they live there.



The Sanssouci Palace



The Cecilienhof

In Potsdam another thing that caught my attention was the Chinese Teahouse, which glitters with silver and gold. It is an 18th century pavilion built in Chinese style, which was the fashion of the time. From my point of view, the style is a mixture of Oriental and Western. At that time, few artists knew the life in China, they just built the Teahouse with the limited resources and used their imagination to finish the work. That's similar to how we just guess about other cultures nowadays; we can hardly go beyond our prejudiced interpretations. But I still think the Teahouse is great, not only because it was well-built, but also as it shows a desire of the people in the past to know about a foreign culture.



The Chinese Teahouse
(the whole scene)



The Chinese Teahouse
(the detailed scene)

2. Jena

I don't really dare to write about Jena, because most of us are quite familiar with this city, and are more familiar with it than I am. After all, I was only there for half a day. I won't take the trouble writing about the sight-seeing places in Jena; instead, I will share my impressions.

Jena was my very first stop of my travel plan in Germany. I had a good time meeting some FSU Fellows and they guided me around the city, walking the whole time, I remember clearly. So I was quite surprised when I was told that Jena is actually a big city in Germany, and to be exact, the second largest city in the state of Thuringen. I guess that I had only been to the city centre of Jena where FSU is, probably the most historical part.

In Jena, one can see young people all around; although from the buildings and streets you can see the history of this city (although most buildings were rebuilt after WWII), it is actually a city of energy. Interestingly, I noticed a banner with the words "Jena – the city of science" on it; I guess that must have something to do with the large student population. I think it must be good to study in Jena with such a good environment and of course, with those lovely activities in FSU, such as 'the couch day' which I encountered.



The Couch Day in FSU

That's as much as I could recollect. Later, I began to wonder where the students go after graduation; will they stay in Jena or go to other cities? Maybe some of you can give me the answer.

3. Leipzig

Before I visited Leipzig, if someone mentioned the city to me I would immediately think of 'the small Paris'. A few years ago I read about this city, this title, and its famous trade fair; that had found a place in my mind ever since. Honestly, I didn't know who gave it this title, let alone why it deserves the title. 'Maybe some ordinary traveler who had never been to Paris', I once joked. But I felt really ashamed when, finally this time, I found out it was the great poet Goethe who had called it 'the small Paris'.

When I actually went to Leipzig, I knew the reason why. Walter Benjamin had spoken highly of 'the Fleneur' who was the lyric Poet in the era of high capitalism, and in his article, he said that people can only find Fleneur in Paris. It is in the arcades of Paris that the Fleneur is at home. In his article he quoted from an illustrated guide to Paris of 1852: The arcades, a rather recent invention of industrial luxury are glass-covered, marble-paneled passageways through entire complexes of houses whose proprietors have combined for such speculations. Both sides of these passageways, which are lighted from above are lined with the most elegant shops, so that such an arcade is a city, even a world, in miniature. Luckily, these arcades have also remained in Leipzig in good condition; except for the ancient building and passageways, the shops lined up on both sides are with all kinds of interesting stuff. You can totally enjoy your time: you can choose to be a stroller, a Fleneur or simply an explorer there.



One of the Ancient Arcade in Leipzig

No one can get back from Leipzig without being impressed deeply by its music. I was told that almost everyone in this city knows how to play at least one instrument. Walking in the streets, we had encountered a small wind band with 4 people and 2 men playing violin under the statue of Bach. This is the city where Johan Sebastian Bach, the great composer had worked in the St. Thomas Church for more than 20 years. The St. Thomas Church is not only famous for Bach working as a cantor there but also for the renowned Thomaner Choir. This Choir enjoys the equal fame of the St. Philips Boy's Choir in Vienna. Unfortunately I didn't have the chance to listen to the choir because the boys were having their summer vocation. There is a band call 'Die Prinzen' from Leipzig, whose members are once in the Thomaner Choir. You can find a wonderful harmony in their songs.



A band of four performing on a small square

Another thing I'd like to note about Leipzig is its centre railway station. The station was a historic one, a large terminal station. It was the very first time I saw a railway station like this one; I guessed it must have been an important place in European railway history.

4. Cologne

It was my second time in Cologne, 10 months after the JFOM. I still remembered the bronze sculpture of two gentlemen. It is said if you touch them by the nose you will definitely visit Cologne again in the future. And it was a promise came true for me.



The bronze sculpture of two gentlemen in Cologne -- touch them by the nose and you are sure to come back to Cologne in the future.

I remembered vividly how I was shocked when I saw the giant and solemn Cologne Dom for the first time. I was a little bit nervous when I was walking towards the exit of the Cologne railway station after 5 hours travelling. I was preparing myself for the sight of the Dom right outside the exit: 'that should be one magnificent and awesome first sight of the city.' Yet despite all the preparations, I was shocked from head over heels again! No photos and no words can express the feeling when you yourself standing before the giant Dom rising straight up to the sky.

As I walked with my friends through the city, I recollected some really nice memories during my OM. This city still remained the same though visitors came and went. Some found themselves a comfortable seat with the peaceful view of the river Rhine, tasting the very famous Koelsch beer.



A Wedding Ceremony I encountered in Cologne.

I have long heard about the very famous Carnival in Cologne. It is said on that day people will dress in all kinds of strange clothes and come out on the streets. Parades, singing and dancing will fill the city with joy and laughter and 'craziness'. However, I didn't have a chance to experience that. That makes up a good reason for me to touch the bronze gentlemen's noses once again in order to revisit Cologne.

5. Hamburg

Hamburg is the second largest city of Germany. It is famous for its harbor and it is a major transportation hub in northern Germany. Although it is a large industrial and harbor city, the city itself is garden-like.

A very important element that should not be eliminated when talking about Hamburg is the harbor. If you have a metro day-pass ticket in hand, you can enjoy a free round tour along the harbor to the mouth of the River Elbe. On the riversides you can see not only the container terminals but also some houses of the riches with man-made beach in front of their houses.



On one side of the river is the neighborhood of the upper class and rich people.

I judged Hamburg as 'garden-like' based on my very pleasant experience in one of the parks in Hamburg, the 'Planten und Blomen' ('plants and flowers' in English). The park is in the centre area of Hamburg. It is a park with numerous grasslands, fountains, lakes where many people relax. There are many comfortable wooden armchairs available and its height can be adjusted as you like. Some people just bring a sheet with them and lie there enjoying the wonderful sunshine. Here you can also see young ladies wearing bikinis lying, not on the beach but, on the grass. I talked to a local in Hamburg there in a park, she had been to many cities such as New York City, Berlin for working, but she finally chose to come back to Hamburg. She said there are no other big modern cities like Hamburg, where the life is as convenient as in any big city but the life is so much less stressful. Anyway, what other city can boast a beautiful 160-hectare lake (the Lake Alster) where people can row boats in its center and numerous parks all around the city?



The Lake Alster in downtown Hamburg



Inside the Park "Plants and Flowers"

6. Weimar

Weimar is in the same state as Jena, and it is not a big city; but its role in German history and German Culture has made this city as well-known as any other big German city.

Indeed, it is in this city where so many famous people once lived. The most famous among them would be the two great German Poets, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe and Friedrich Schiller; other luminaries who lived there are Bach, Herder, and Liszt. I guess this city must have some magical

magnetism that attracts so many geniuses to come and to stay there.

Together with the many former residences of the luminaries, the city is now also the location of the Bauhaus University (Bauhaus is a genre that starts a brand new era of the history of architecture) and the Liszt School of Music Weimar. Also in this city is the one of the oldest public libraries in Europe, the Duchess Anna Amalia Library and the very famous statue of Goethe and Schiller.



The famous statue of Goethe and Schiller in Weimar



The cottage Goethe once lived in

In spite of its fame, the city is quite calm and peaceful. There is no big signs pointing to the house some luminary once lived, everything remains just as they was, quietly. That is what I considered as the charm of the city: however famous it is, it still gives people a feeling of ease.

7. Rostock

It is said that Rostock is in the poorest state of Germany. I was there on Sunday, except for the area near the center plaza, few people can be seen. The commercial activities were far less than those in Berlin. Anyhow, the living conditions were not that different between Rostock and Berlin, the houses were all well-built and decorated; shops of many kinds were available and provided people with a convenient life. Back home in China, I would expect to see much more differences between the capital of the poorest province and Beijing.

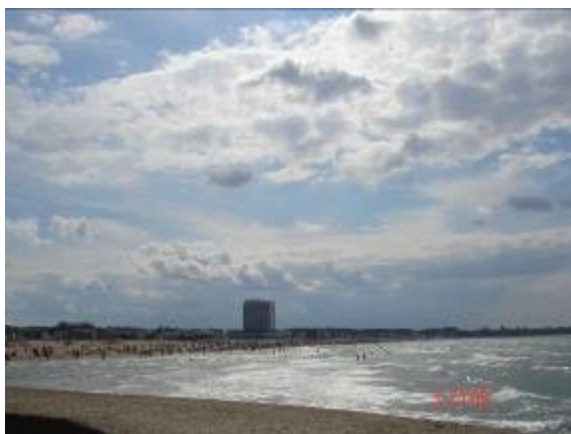


The city centre in Rostock

Near Rostock, there is a very famous holiday resort – Warnemünde situated on the Baltic Sea in the northeast of Germany. The wonderful beach attracts tons of people there, and after visiting Rostock where I saw few people, in Warnemünde I wondered if all people nearby had come to visit the place! Almost every ice-cream shop had a long queue and one had to wait for about 10 minutes just to get an ice-cream. Once you are here, you must taste the local fish-burger. I can't guarantee that you will like it, because the fish in the burger was like a raw piece seasoned by some vinegar to me, but it's really special. Those who know how to appreciate it, really will enjoy it a lot.



The street scene in Warnemünde



The sea view in Warnemünde

The beach scenery is really amazing. The seawater has the same color as the sky – a very clean blue. A city like this will sure be my first choice to relax in the holiday. No wonder I saw such a huge turnout of people in Warnemünde.

8. Dresden

What I see in Dresden is a city of arts. Dresden is called the Florence by the Elbe. In its old city, you might feel as if you are back to the baroque era. After World War II, many important historic buildings were rebuilt including the Semper Opera House, the Zwinger Palace, and many other historic buildings. As a war-time memorial, the Frauen Church was rebuilt using some of the bricks which were collected from the ruins of the original Frauen Church. Those bricks are black and contrast with the bright new bricks, adding significance to the religious resort.



The Zwinger in Dresden which reserves the baroque style perfectly



The rebuilt Frauen Church in Dresden.

In the past, many musicians, painters, and architects from all over Europe went to Dresden. Apart from the music institutes and the famous architecture, there are also some very famous museums in Dresden. One of them is the Alter Meister Gallerie where the very famous painting *The Sistine Madonna* of *Raphael* is exhibited with many other notable paintings not only from Germany but also from Italy, France, and the Netherlands.

9. Berlin

It's not an easy job to write about Berlin because this is such an amazing city where so many things coexist in harmony with one another.

Berlin is a modern city with well-developed transportation system and fabulous malls just as any

other big city. It is also a city where you can sense the weight of history. After window shopping in the bodhi tree under Main Street, you will come to the area of Humboldt University and the Museum Island where the historical architectures are still standing quietly by the river. This is a city that had suffered much in history; the remaining parts of the Berlin Wall, the old photos exhibits on the sidewalks and the destroyed church standing in the middle of modern buildings had much to tell to its new settlers and visitors. Yet this city has so much energy; people come and go in a fast pace, skyscrapers rise straight up in the Potsdamer Platz.



Near the city centre of Berlin is the square where the French Church and the German Church situated.



The night view of Postdamer Platz, the most energetic area in Berlin



The Kaiser Wilherm Memorial Church was located near the former main train station of Berlin. It was damaged during the WWII and well preserved as it is ever since.

Berlin is where you can enjoy nice music shows and operas, where you can see numerous precious artworks and antiques in the museums. Every Thursday Evening, the Museums are open for free which really benefits the local Berliners a lot.

Berlin has this lovely mascot – the Berlin Bear. Walking in the streets of Berlin, you may encounter the Berlin Bear wearing in different costumes standing there to welcome you; you can occasionally be attracted by the pleasant smell of Currywurst (Curry Sausage) and the Döner (a Turkish dish).



Berlin has much to be explored and one can never get bored there.