

Report on My Volunteering Experience in Germany (4 Months In)

Dear Reader

I am writing to share my experiences and reflections on my time so far in Germany as part of my one-year volunteering program. Having completed four months in this wonderful country, I have witnessed personal growth, encountered challenges, and learned valuable lessons. I believe it is important to document these experiences, as they have helped shape my journey and broadened my perspective.

My first month in Germany was a rollercoaster of emotions. Leaving home for the first time, traveling alone, and being away from my family was undeniably difficult. I had never traveled so far, let alone lived independently in a foreign country, and this initial period was filled with homesickness and uncertainty. However, with the support of the welcoming staff at my volunteer placement and my determination to adapt, I gradually found my footing.

I am currently volunteering at St. Peter und Paul Kindergarten, and I cannot express enough how much I enjoy working there. The staff have been incredibly supportive and have made me feel like a part of their team from day one. The children, too, have been a great source of joy and inspiration. When I arrived at the kindergarten for the first time the staff was very welcoming and made me feel like I was part of the kindergarten and not just a “volunteer” or an outsider. The kids were so excited to meet me and vice versa. I loved how the staff learned a little bit of English here and there so that we could communicate better. Despite the language barrier—my German skills being limited at the beginning—the kids have been patient and understanding. They often try to communicate with me through gestures, expressions, and even teach me some German words while we play games together. This genuine effort to connect has been heartwarming, and I have developed a strong bond with the children over these months.

It's a little hard to adapt to how things are done here, so the first few weeks were about learning and unlearning some things we do back home that are not accepted or done here. Playing with the kids is my favorite part of the day, because not only do I get to have fun, I learn the language as well, especially when we match the letter with the picture.

My daily duties at the kindergarten involve a variety of tasks. I ensure that the breakfast and lunch tables are properly set, and once the children finish their meals, I assist with cleaning up and ensuring the dishes are in their proper places. When I'm not in the kitchen, I engage with the children by playing games, such as building puzzles, playing memory games, doing arts and crafts, and spending time outdoors. One of the highlights of my week is the Friday tradition, where the children go for a walk either to a nearby park or around the city. It is a wonderful opportunity for me to bond with the children while exploring the local area.

In addition to my work at the kindergarten, adapting to life in Germany has been a gradual process. The first month, particularly, was a challenge when it came to navigating the city and getting to the kindergarten. However, after plenty of practice and repetition, I am now confident in my ability to travel without confusion, and the journey has become routine. This sense of independence and confidence has been one of the most rewarding aspects of my experience.

My experience outside the kindergarten (my daily life) - I came across a bicycle with a box attached to it in the city and I learnt that it was meant for people to drop food inside and for people who don't have to come and get . It is called foodsharing. I felt that this was such a

heartwarming feeling to see such a good gesture and people being generous. I love how many people that I've come across grow so much of their own fruit and vegetables. Many of them have beautiful gardens as well.

One of the things I have grown to admire about Germany is its deep respect for nature. As I live in what is considered the "greenest city," I am constantly amazed by the care taken to maintain and protect the environment. From the beautiful parks and green spaces to the thoughtful and efficient recycling system, Germany's commitment to sustainability is evident everywhere. I have also adapted to the recycling system, and it has been an educational experience in itself, learning how to properly sort waste and contribute to preserving the environment.

But not all is sunshine and rainbows, as a person of color I've experienced a bit of funny looks and even some kind of behavior towards me while traveling. It has made me feel a bit uncomfortable and a little bit sad but I've overcome that part of being here. We were told in the beginning of our seminar that "we belong" and we shouldn't let anyone make us feel any other way.

The funny thing that the public transport has taught me is "BE PATIENT" . It's not always that you'll catch that train or that bus. That could cause so much frustration because missing a train means your day is set back 45 min - 1 hour. But I've learnt to bring a book along while I wait, so not just am I waiting on the train but I am gaining knowledge.

I have written this brief letter of my point of view and experience here in Germany while volunteering, some experiences might differ from others or might even be the same.

This is not the whole of Germany nor is it the 'reality' but it's about my time and my experiences that I've encountered and would like to share!

Shandre

In conclusion, my experience in Germany has been transformative. While my initial months were filled with challenges, I have now found a sense of belonging and have gained valuable personal and professional insights. Volunteering at St. Peter und Paul Kindergarten has been incredibly fulfilling, and I look forward to the remaining months of my program. I am excited to continue learning, growing, and contributing to the community here in Germany.

Thank you for taking the time to read about my experience. I will continue to keep you updated as I progress in my volunteer journey.

Warm regards,

Shandre' Jessman