

AALIYAH'S REPORT



Reflections beyond borders



Warmest greetings. My name is Aaliyah, and I'm from Cape Town, South Africa. I'm currently volunteering at *Kinder und Jugendzentrum Weingarten* in Freiburg im Breisgau, Germany. *Ripples of Exchange* is a short series where I reflect on my journey as a volunteer, focusing on cultural exchange and what I've learned along the way. I found the program through an NPO called *Life Choices* based in Lansdowne, Cape Town. The program is partnered with *FIF* (Fachstelle Internationale Freiwilligendienste) and *VAMOS*. These organizations help make the volunteering experience possible. Two other Capetonians and I are part of a pilot group, as we are the first South Africans to volunteer in Germany.

Settling in

During my first few weeks, I attended a 10-day welcoming seminar where I met with the coordinators and Peruvian volunteers for discussions and relevant training. I travelled to the seminar house (as I call it) by tram, which was quite convenient as most places are well connected here. In the mornings, we'd start with icebreakers, stretches, or just chilling together before beginning the day's activities. There was always tea, coffee, fruit, biscuits, Fritz-Kola, and Apfelsaft on the table for everyone, and I brought some Rooibos tea for everyone to try.

There's also a helpful app called DB (Deutsche Bahn) Navigator, which assists in finding the best routes using different modes of transport and times of arrival. It's very accurate, and the best part is the option of purchasing a Deutschland ticket that lets you travel across all of Germany. We'd often explore the city, do interesting activities, and get familiar with how things work. Our group also met with former volunteers and connected with them. So far, I've learned a lot about the culture in Freiburg and even more about the language.



Learning German

After the seminars, we began an intensive two-week *Sprachkurs (language course)*. Since we shared the course with the Peruvian volunteers, our teachers used both English and Spanish, so we ended up navigating three languages throughout the day. This setup not only helped us learn German but also brought us closer to the Peruvian volunteers, allowing us to bond and build a strong support system despite the language barrier. It was beautiful seeing the connection between us by sharing experiences and enjoying our time together.



Back in Cape Town, I took a short AI course at the Goethe-Zentrum, which was really helpful. Since Afrikaans is derived from Dutch, and Dutch from German, I found it a bit easier to pick up the language. However, there came a point where I realized I couldn't rely on one language to learn another—it's best to approach it independently. I didn't pressure myself to learn (as perfectionism can creep in), but I made sure to put in the effort and practice consistently. I think working at your own pace makes a big difference, as I can clearly see the improvement from when I started to now. *Genau!* Since I hear German about 90% of the time, the pronunciations and phrases start to stick subconsciously.

Culture

Each day feels surreal, being on the other side of the world. Freiburg is quite different from Cape Town, with key differences in services, safety, and tranquility. Everyday management and workflows are well-structured. For instance, transportation systems, municipal registration processes, and network services are organized and efficient. I've noticed that people tend to respect each other's boundaries more, and cycling is a common mode of transport throughout the city. However, while the city can be busy, it doesn't feel as warm or welcoming as Cape Town; most people keep to themselves, which makes socializing a bit more challenging.

Despite these differences, there are also some similarities. Both cities are stunning, particularly in their greenery, architecture, and monuments. They are also diverse, with a mix of nationalities and cultures, which is always wonderful to see. On Sundays, all stores are closed, creating an extra quiet atmosphere. One thing I couldn't escape, though, are the mosquitoes—they still find you! (Haha.) Adjusting to these changes took some time, and I'm still learning as I go.



Locking in



I look forward to each day at work with the children. It's full of surprises, raw energy, and fun. At Jugi (my workplace), I normally assist with catering at 11:00 and deliver it to the elders in the Weingarten neighbourhood. From 12:30, the other assistants and I prepare for lunch, and then we fetch the children from school (the 6-year-old group). We walk in pairs, hand in hand, making sure everyone stays together. As we get ready for lunchtime, everyone washes their hands and chooses a place to sit. They then share a bit about their day and say a small rhyme before eating and drinking water. Afterwards, everyone tidies up their own little space and chooses where they'd like to play.

There are a variety of places to go: the homework room, playroom, disco room, music room, carpentry room, clay room, chill room, or outside to play. Sometimes we take a walk to the nearby park or animal farm. Recently, I got myself a skateboard again, so I have a crew that enjoys skating with me outside. I like how it teaches them to be brave and patient with themselves, no matter how many mistakes we make. As much as we learn, there's also a lot that I'm unlearning. As I'm in a different environment, with a different culture, people and mentalities. At 15:30, we take some children to their taxis, while :))the rest are picked up by their parents or siblings. My afternoons vary

between joining the baking group, young boys' group, young girls' group, mother and children's group, or the sports hall group. Twice a week, there's the *Wägele*, a wagon full of toys and activities that we drive around to different neighbourhoods. I normally end my day at either 18:00 or 18:30. If they need assistance on the weekends, I come through as well. Whether it's children's day, assistance with registration or market day. Most of my days are really busy, so when I get the free time, I really try to make the most of it and also take care of myself.

Life

To be honest, I put in a lot of effort for myself—showing up, being disciplined about what I want to do, being kind, choosing what's right for me, staying real and true. It's beautiful how everything mirrors; at work, the children bring out the child in me, and these past two months have also been about unbecoming.

I live 25 minutes away from Switzerland and France, so I go out more in my free time. It's a different story missing home and everyone, but Alhamdulillah. There's immense growth every day; I strongly believe in that extra 1%. I brought lekker biltong with me that I enjoy, and sometimes I have koesister Sundays <3

With the ripples in the water, I remember, along with every person I encounter from the south to the north, that we are all interconnected and leave an impact on each other. No matter how small the drop, the ocean stays boundless.

Until my next report letter, I hope you enjoyed reading about my experience so far & thanks to everyone for your immense love and support.

Aaliyah ❤️

The experiences I've shared in this letter represent my personal perspective on my time here. They are unique to my journey and should not be viewed as a reflection of everyone's reality in Germany. :)



