

The DAAD Deutsche Experience

From the Literature Students Association-University of Nairobi



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Editor

The DAAD Deutsche Experiences is a publication by the 11 students from the University of Nairobi, Department of Literature who toured Germany between November 1st and November 9th, 2011.

The publication seeks to capture the experiences of the students about Germany from the guided tour through three cities and two universities, thanks to DAAD

(Germany Academic Exchange Service). DAAD funded the Visa fees, travel and accommodation while in Germany and generally ensured that the trip was a success.

This long overdue trip came courtesy of a MOU signed by the University of Nairobi and the University of Hamburg back in 2007. This group of students was the first beneficiary of the MOU and the DAAD sponsorship under the arrangement.

In this publication, I have compiled the experiences of the students on their social and academic experiences throughout the ten days. It was an exciting, memorable encounter that will be permanently etched in our minds. And it could not have come at a more opportune time, given that most of the students just started their final year, another in her Masters and I in the final stage of my undergraduate.

I have supplemented the publication with appropriate opinion with regards to what we studied during the trip. The publication is meant to thank DAAD for their assistance and other students who might in future find such an opportunity.

I would wish to extend my personal and collective gratitude on behalf of the group to the individuals and institutions that made this trip possible. Professor Wasamba for initiating the MoU back in 2007 and ensuring that it was actualized. Dr. Masumi Odari for painstakingly guiding us throughout from the time we applied, accompanying us to Germany and delivering us back to Kenya. We thank Dr. Tilo Weber, formerly of the University of Nairobi, for acting as a liaison between the respective institutions hosting us for a dinner at his Dresden home. Dr Weber was also instrumental resourceful in outlining the kind of opportunities and challenges in Germany.

We are also thankful to the Student Union of Nairobi University (SONU) for their financial support and the office of the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Student Affairs) for the moral and financial support.

We also wish to thank DAAD for giving us the best glimpse into Germany and giving us a platform to learn and interact with our German counterparts in University. We cannot thank you enough for the opportunity and indeed we all looking forward to tour, study, work or live in Germany in future. We further thank the Universities of Hamburg and Dresden for hosting us while in Germany.

Finally, our tour guide, Mr Oliver Kurta was exceptionally resourceful and ensured that our stay in German was comfortable and eventful and we express our appreciation and wish him the best in his future endeavors.

Silas Nyanchani

The University of Nairobi's mission is to be a 'World Class University' committed not only to scholarly excellence but to produce students that will serve the community better.

The university has various initiatives that are geared towards achieving this goal. One such way is by establishing constructive and sustainable links with other institutions of higher learning. This has spurred exchange programs for both the teaching staff and students in various departments. These links are strategic to both parties as both the teaching staff and students gain an experience that steers them to be 'World class citizens.'



Dr Odari Left, with Dr Weber and Mrs Weber at their Dresden Residence.

Various departments within the university are doing their part in making this vision a reality by collaborating with other learning institutions as well as the private and public sector. The knowledge that the students gain through these exchanges is invaluable in enabling the student to not only transform their lives but that of the society in large.

The Department of Literature has been working hard towards establishing international links and have already sent students and staff to Soka University in Japan and Hankook University of Foreign Languages in Korea and are hoping to establish links with the US and France among other countries.

In November 2011, through the German Academic Exchange Programme (DAAD), 11 students from the Department of Literature were able to embark on a 10-day study trip to Germany. They visited Hamburg University, the city of Berlin as well as the Dresden University of Technology. In the two universities, the students were able to meet and interact with the staff and students through arranged classes, seminars and cultural exchange programs. The University of Nairobi students were able to learn more about the culture, student life as well as explore the different methods of teaching and research in the two German universities. The trip was a successful one and there is talk of another one in the near future. We are grateful to DAAD for giving us the opportunity and both universities who helped us to make this study trip a successful one.

Such exchange programs offer many opportunities for the students. Perhaps a student will be inspired and want to go back as a Masters or PhD student. It is our desire that many students will take up such opportunities. While such trips are indeed costly, the overall experience is more beneficial in the long run. The trips offer unique and exciting academic opportunities as well as some challenges outside Kenya that help in moulding one for personal as well as professional growth.

For the university, such programmes that allow foreign students to take their exchange programs with us as we send some from our university have ensured that we really are a world class institution given the strength and credibility of our programs. Our students studying in foreign universities have been known to perform well. I hope that the university continues creating more links with universities abroad; the students also take up the opportunities to participate in study trips and exchange programmes to broaden their horizons and perspectives on life. I also wish that students challenge themselves to make more and more friends from other countries to create mutual understandings and friendship. This is a sure and steady way to create peace in this world.

Dr Masumi Hashimoto Odari

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Why international study trips are important to Varsity students

Travelling out of the country gives you that 'starter mentality' and guarantees you many opportunities academically, professionally and entrepreneurially. Never skip such an opportunity if you ever stumble upon one, urges George Maangi

We landed in Hamburg to a wintry afternoon, consumed by the jetlag and overwhelmed by the excitement of being in a foreign land, far away from home. It was the first time in Europe for most of us and we were full of anticipation for the nine days we were to spend touring two universities and three cities in Germany.

As we left the airport and stepped into an electric train that was comfortable, spacious and fast, I was still searching for something exceptional about a first world country. Some spectacular skyscraper. A super-highway. Some magnificent bridge. Anything. As the train snaked through the neighborhood, it was like a typical car ride in any of Nairobi's middle class estate such as Adams. I was a little disappointed, totally oblivious of the stark differences that I was to learn soon.

The roads though cleaner were not necessarily wider or any better than a well spruced Uhuru Highway in Nairobi. There traffic was moving rather orderly. The weak autumn sun sneaked through the yellow-leafed trees making the scene really awesome for all of us experiencing autumn for the first time as we clicked our cameras to record the phenomenon. The graffiti throughout the walls (a widespread convention throughout Germany) was a reminder of the situation at home in the ghetto. The unfamiliar biting cold was gnawing into our nerves becoming increasingly insufferable

As we took a tour around the city, there were no glassy skyscrapers as I had anticipated. The buildings typically represented the 19th and early 20th distinct architecture. I was amazed by the sheer grasp of the history that our guide possessed and from the outset, I knew that the Germans and indeed many Europeans I have interacted with value details, and for good reasons. We were taken on an exhaustive guided tour in Hamburg and it suddenly dawned on me that, skyscrapers are not necessarily the mark of civilization.

This trip had come courtesy of the MOU signed between the University of Nairobi's Department of Literature and the University of Hamburg. While the MOU had been signed back in 2007, it had never been actualized until November 2011 and this was the first ever group to go for a study visit in Germany from the Literature Department and indeed the university.



University students savouring a moment in Berlin

We were eleven of us drawn from both the Main Campus and Kikuyu. The trip had been arranged and sponsored by DAAD (German Academic Exchange Service) and by the University of Nairobi. As students we had to pay for our air ticket, and DAAD took care of our accommodation, food and travel expenses for the ten days. As part of DAAD's policy we were to visit two universities in order to be exposed to the German culture as well as access the learning and working opportunities in Germany. Thus we toured Hamburg and Dresden Universities as well as the respective cities including Berlin

"We had signed the MoU three years ago, the suitable opportunity had not been arrived to this date," said Prof. Peter Wasamba, the Associate Dean in the Faculty of Arts who was the brainchild of the study visit.

"This is the first large group being sent out of the university entirely for academic purposes. Mostly individuals travel for other extra-curricular activities such as sports and music. So this was the suitable opportunity to foster these academic linkages between the universities," further explained Professor Wasamba on departure day.

Study trips and exchange programs are part of the initiatives that many universities across the world are utilizing towards exposing their staff and students to other academic and career opportunities in other destinations. The University of Nairobi is equally partaking in a number of such programs and this trip to Germany was a good example.

The benefits of traveling out of the country cannot be gainsaid. Nothing expands our imagination and ideas than traveling.

"Traveling out of the country definitely gives one the starter mentality," says Peter Oduor

researcher with a Nairobi based firm, Strategic.

"You will notice individuals who come from abroad to work or start business locally are twice likely to be succeed than those who have not travelled out. It is not even about the capital," Insists Oduor.

"Rather it has to do with the starter mentality you get from out here. The same reasons that foreigners with opportunities always tend to excel than locals anywhere in the world."

Indeed, there is some kernel of truth in what he says. The eleven of us were touched differently by the trip. It was comprehensive in its grasp, objective in detail and suitably tailored to give us the requisite experience of a first world country. The knowledge we gained while in the trip is supposed to help us in our lives and making our country better. And one just had to admire the absolute pragmatism of the German people. It is something deeply ingrained in their DNA. We for instance from the outset are taught the benefits of frugality from our tour guide who always referred us to cheaper shopping malls and places we could get affordable meals, toiletries and other utilities. Germans prefer shopping and buying cheaper. It possibly explains their reasonable stability amidst the credit crisis. We attended classes and shared the lecture room experience with the students and their passion for African languages at best baffled us.

There are no major differences on the way studies are conducted but the level of research evident is commendable. Especially, when we visited the Institute of Africa and Ethiopian Studies at the University of Hamburg, we were dumbfounded at the energy and resources being spent. There is absolute zeal by young academicians in compiling journals and encyclopedia on Ethiopian studies. This was quite a far cry from the universities locally.(Contd next page)



Wellington Nyokabi & Yoshiki Sugano of UoN at the Humboldt Museum, Berlin

There are no major differences on the way studies are conducted but the level of research evident is commendable. Especially, when we visited the Institute of Africa and Ethiopian Studies at the University of Hamburg, we were dumbfounded at the energy and resources being spent. There is absolute zeal by young academicians in compiling journals and encyclopedia on Ethiopian studies. This was quite a far cry from the universities locally.

Our tour took us through three cities; Hamburg, Berlin and Dresden, each city giving us a different perspective of what Germany as country is made of. At Hamburg, our tour guide explains that it is Western or capitalistic in terms of ideology, and that explains its relative costliness. Berlin is the cheapest city in Europe, or so we are told. And Dresden on the far Eastern part is an emotional city, given it was bombed during the Second World War and has been rebuilt and restored to its present beauty and glory (Read travel piece on Dresden elsewhere in this publication).

We are taken through an exhaustive physical and the historical journeys of the cities in Germany and in the end, we all had a fair grasp of the country as well the many opportunities available. It was gratifying also running randomly into Kenyans in the street and sharing their experiences in Germany and their opinion about local politics.

At Dresden University, we are treated to a spectacular library and a well furnished technological university and great city.

What was more exciting is the hospitality of the students and lectures in the two institutions. While education is almost free at university level, we learn that the cost of living is prohibitive without sponsorship.

“You need about € 7000-10,000 (about Ksh 700,000 to 1,000,000) annually in order to pull it off, which is hard, especially if one is not sponsored,” says Dr Tilo Weber, formerly a DAAD scholar at the University of Nairobi and currently residing and teaching in Dresden.

“But there are numerous opportunities, especially on water projects, peace and conflict management but mostly at PhD level. But you must have a very good proposal in order to get funding and a reliable supervisor to work with in Germany.” Says Dr Weber, emphasizing on the need to seize some of these opportunities.

Currently, many universities locally have exchange arrangements and scholarships to many institutions not necessarily in the West. Universities from Eastern Asia are making a timely entry the country. Most students are never interested in applying for such scholarships, partly because they believe that the scholarships are never awarded on merit or simply shun them.

Sometimes, it is often disturbing that many such programs require a certain quorum for them to go through but there are never enough students to attend. Part of the reason is mostly the costs involved, but those determined always arrange for fundraising, seek sponsorship from politicians and funding institutions such as DAAD, Rattansi and even university departments have been known to support determined students. Depending on the nature of the visit, there is always someone out there who can offer the necessary sponsorship.

Traveling opens many doors academically, entrepreneurially and professionally. Even as the Far East opens up more students should start seeking opportunities in such countries. It is through traveling that you get to learn to appreciate the beauty of diversity and even thanking Africans for our generosity and camaraderie. The whites long dispensed on the casual generosity like buying meals and drinks for friends.

This writer was shocked that, such a culture is not existent. And much to his shock, I learnt that there are homeless individuals in the streets of Hamburg who very much lay down their mattresses at night and sleep in the cold. And to think winter is upon them. As one female student from University of Hamburg told me,

“We are not perfect. We all have our own problems, right from our education system, to poverty and unemployment. And the situation is not getting any better.” While foolishly, I had assumed that something like housing won’t be a major problem, it hits you right on the face. Of course not in comparison to the situation in Africa.

It takes traveling in order to appreciate these small and bigger differences. It takes traveling to know how far humanity has solved the issue of racism and how advanced economies take care of business. And you just learn, in spite being enormously endowed, the key to prosperity in such countries had to do with the collective mentality of the people. And it is so easier to replicate the same at home.

Students should travel, not just for tourism, but for the exposure that will definitely open many avenues.

The youth speak one language the world over

Sarah Tischer, a student representative from the University of Hamburg quips that they were ill-prepared to handle the guests from the University of Nairobi. It turned out to be the easiest task and the liveliest group she has ever had to deal with.

It was the first time for us, students' representatives at UHH to welcome such a group of foreign guests. Honestly, we didn't at first have any idea on how to deal with it at all. We had been asked to involve the Kenyan students in our day to day programs both in and out of class in order to help them learn the best and the most about the German language and culture for the short period they were visiting.

But, behold! We had a situation. What were their expectations and were we in a position to fulfill them? What can we show them to get a good insight into the German way of life and our university? Maybe take them to the cafeteria for lunch or let them join us in one of our classes. What turned out was four days of fun without a single break for us as we moved with the group to class, to the cafeteria and their guided city tours...

We expected them to be shy, overwhelmed by a First-World country and its differences from theirs. Maybe they would be overstrained or even afraid. But we met a group that was open and curious to the German culture and way of life. For us it was interesting to explain things, which are completely new to them but part of our daily life. Like we don't have to show our tickets when we enter the bus or that we of course we leave the house during winter, even when the temperatures are far below zero.

It was quite interesting to answer these questions and to discover that even ourselves did not have any plausible answer or explanation to some of them. We usually don't think that much about our own culture anymore, but the impressive part was that these people made us think about it again. What became ordinary or even worthless to us was so new to them and suddenly center of every conversation you could hear around.

And these conversations became a distinctive feature of the visit. From the first minute we started talking, we couldn't stop. There were eleven Kenyan students and their lecturer, Dr. Masumi Odari and round about the same number of German students and each of us had to talk with and to each of them. I remember one evening when we escorted them to their hotel and were not able to say goodnight because of the interesting conversations going on, we stayed



Sarah Tischer

another three more hours deep into the night.

We enjoyed comparing these two cultures. We saw the differences like the role and the behavior of women, which was in some parts a little bit hard for us to understand. At some points we differed in opinion. At times we had a completely different point of view and some of the things we exchanged were utterly unbelievable. But there were also similarities like women's chatting about other women and men, which seems to be the same all over the world.

Suddenly it felt like these girls could have been my best friends for years already because if it comes to this, all women are the same. It was also enthralling to hear how they see us, not only as Germans but also us as individuals.

This coming together of two cultures was aided by lots of out-of-university activities like common lunches and dinners, city tours in the evening and cooking. We had the chance to know each other's authentic diet. Soon each of us found these special ones in the group you could talk to best or you find most interesting, so you could see rapports being built and maybe even friendships. These were the times we enjoyed most. We really had lots of fun with these Kenyans and not only because it was part of the university program to join them but because their company was worthwhile.

The unfortunate bit of the trip was that the Kenyan students were short on time. For a trip of this magnitude, there ought to be a reasonable duration in order to get all the new dimensions about the German culture. They still had so much they wanted to see and we wanted to show.

As one of the students' representatives I also want to say that this visit was really a gift to all the students of African languages and cultures. Some of them have never been to Africa yet and so hardly know anything about the African way of life. It was an awesome opportunity to get a selected insight into the culture and information no lecturer can ever teach us. Like the bigger part of the students from our University have to spend a semester abroad in sub-Saharan Africa. We are mostly indecisive of which country to choose, but I am sure my colleagues and I are certainly considering Kenya. Touch wood

And besides I think exchanges like this can help so much to strengthen partnership between universities so it will be easier for students to go abroad in the future. We also hope that the connection between us students will persist so that we as the representatives of the study of African languages and cultures in Hamburg will always be able to help if there are questions about the study or life in Germany and hopefully we can welcome some of the Kenyan students for their Master or PhD at a University in our country.

But I think what impressed entirely all of us most was the warmth and cordiality of the Kenyan group. They made us smile from the first moment we met and even if we talk about them now we always have a big grin on our faces. They still thank us so much for our kind hosting but in my opinion we have lots of reasons to thank them as well. These people became our friends in only four days and all of us wish they could have stayed a little longer. We really hope there will be a reunion soon and at least I am honestly going to keep my promise and come to Kenya next year, but of course the whole group is always invited to visit us again too.

At last I want to thank again everybody who was involved in this program and made this wonderful come together possible!

The writer is in her third year at the University of Hamburg, pursuing a degree in African Studies.

Experiences

“It was a world class experience”

Wellington Nyokabi had a technological culture shock and believes that our leaders and technocrats have so much to learn from Germany

It is only a frivolous love that cannot survive intellectual definition; great love prospers with understanding. -Leo Spitzer.

Whether Germany greatly fell in love with me, or I greatly fell in love with her; it really doesn't matter because as far as I am concerned both happened. My body took less than half a day to understand Germany's weather and on the other hand Germany had already accepted my skin colour many years ago, so for us to be in love was something that was meant to be.

Our stay was short but I have to admit every second counted and mattered because something new to me was happening. Being the first nation to tour abroad, the country offered me some glamorous kind of experience, and this ranges from what my eyes saw to what the enzymes in my stomach digested. Cultures of course did collide but not to the level of fatality since we had been well prepared on what to expect and besides, great love for newness was looming in the air given that my hobby is to travel and see new stuff.

Since it was a study trip, the German varsity lecture room situation was our primary concern. Thanks to the Memorandum of Understanding that University of Nairobi has with University of Hamburg and Dresden University of Technology, our academic experience was world class considering the fact that the two are amongst the top most universities in Germany.

At UHH, we were received by the African Studies Department pioneered by Prof. Rey, Dr. Kiesling, Dr. Gelaye and Dr. Schreiber just to name but a few. The students whom we often referred to as “the girls” were the most amazing people because when around us we felt at home since they all study Swahili and some of them have toured East Africa. One of the students was male and he played his part too by ensuring that we spoke a little bit of Deutsch.

I was so much moved by the love they showed us and getting to know how much they understand African cultures more than I do, was somehow shameful but at the same time encouraging. It was notable how they fully utilize technology in lecture halls by for example ensuring that there are functional projectors to aid in lecture delivery in most of the halls that we visited. Lecturers arrive fifteen minutes before time for their lectures!

At TU Dresden, what remained in everybody's mind are the questions; how were they able to build such a gigantic, electrifying, updated, well equipped, museum-like library. How the interior has been designed leaves one dumbfounded of what technology can deliver. The feeling inside it is like the one has under a hot shower after a long day of work. You just want to be in the bathroom all night long. In that library, you are simply conquered by what it has to offer. Picture this; accommodates almost thousands students at one time, lends you a computer if you don't have one, has three-sitter and

five-sitter leather sits where you can relax and read as if you are at home, has a music room and library as well, has a museum consisting artefacts that dates back to medieval times and even before and the list goes on and on.

My Goodness! It was very exhilarating meeting Dr. Tilo Weber, Madam Antje and her colleague Madam Katja ensured this experience never passed us. In addition, I got to learn that literature is so diverse that romance literature does exist, offered as a blend of Italian, Spanish and French studies.

Another reason that added to my love for Germany was the level of organization of the transport sector and infrastructure. The cities of Hamburg, Berlin and Dresden would make the Nairobi Metropolitan leadership to think twice and challenge them to look for a plan on how to make our capital a world class city. Imagine moving from Westlands to the Jomo Kenyatta Airport by an underground electric train, isn't that some development everybody would be prepared to welcome?

The three cities had maps to guide you just in case one got lost and that too was something which was new to us and would like to see someday implemented in our country. The cities also have the central train stations (Hauptbahnhof) ready with trains to take you where you want so long as you observe punctuality if not perfection when it comes to time management. Berlin and Dresden roads swayed me with their trams-some kind of mini-trains that are electric and shares the roads with other vehicles. The buses too were new to me. They too said something about technology. I wasn't used to bus doors opening themselves for me or having a TV screen showing me the next stop or where I need to go.

There are also seats for the crippled just to ensure they are as comfortable as everybody else. The super highways have arrived in Kenya but one needs to tour Germany to understand that what we are establishing is just the tip of the iceberg. Germany was a divided country and also destroyed terribly during world war two. But it is through hard work, right mentality and good leadership which has provided a 24 hour economy and also invested in scientific research, hence the Mercedes and the BMWs as well as other industries. That is how they have been able to achieve world class standards with an economy to be reckoned with today. It was a nostalgic experience that will remain with me forever.

The feeling inside the library is like the one has under a hot shower after a long day of work

German! Words can't explain the experience!

Bella Okoth -UoN, Kikuyu Campus.

Germany! Mmmm! What can I say? Beautiful country. Really beautiful. The city, the roads, the railway system are all beautiful and orderly. I dare to say Kenya has a long way to go! Ooops, I didn't say that. Everything just seems to be in place. The use of trams, buses and trains; in new, beautiful and exciting, always on time ensured that we never saw or experienced any traffic jam.

My experience in Germany has been exhilarating and mind-blowing. But I must concede that I had the most fun in Hamburg. May be it is because it was our first stop and I was overwhelmed by excitement to be in Germany or the wonderful students who took us in and treated us like their very own. I can't exactly tell.

I guess having company around and meeting new people, developing friendship, has a way of making a person's day. Which is the case in point. The Hamburg people we interacted with were friendly beyond measure. We got to

tour Hamburg and attended classes on Literature and African studies in University of Hamburg. Some student representative even offered us a lesson in German... 'Guten morgen, guten tag, danke, tschuss etc. And the pre-Halloween party, what fun! Although brief. But we did miss the real Halloween party.

The most surprising thing was when I run into my childhood friend at a shopping mall in Hamburg! Indeed it is a small world. I last saw her like more than seven years ago. It was exciting as we excitedly hugged and the little catch-up we did.

Our next stop was the great city of Berlin. Much more life was in Berlin. Everything just seemed to be breathtaking! The museums, the castles, the cathedral were all magnificently build and structured. I must say, I have great respect for German architecture and order.

Our last stop was the ridiculously historical

and beautiful city of Dresden. The most outstanding thing for me here was the hygiene museum! Yeah! Totally opposite things going on there from what the name suggests. It was informative but also a funny sort of museum. You just had to have a great time there and the Martin Luther Cathedral was too amazing.

I guess this is all I can say in a nutshell. Oh the food was good. We all kind of added weight in German. It is said that in the morning one should eat as a king, lunch as a prince and supper as a beggar. The most hilarious moment was one of us got lost in Germany, in Berlin and had to approach the policewoman and use the 'Idiot Shit' given to us by the helpful tour guide Oliver Kurta. ...

It is said that in the morning one should eat as a king, lunch as a prince and supper as a beggar-European culinary clichéd saying



Wellington is now a final year student studying Literature and Swahili and the University of Nairobi's Main campus.



Bella Okoth

Experiences

The tour revealed the rich heritage of Deutschland

METHODY FLORIAN

To say that I enjoyed my stay in Germany, will be an understatement from the outset. The brief stay exceeded all my expectations and truly Germany is a country in its own league with everything going on for it.

I have had an opportunity to visit China, and in comparison, Germany was too much fun and a revelation to me. Right from the arrival in Hamburg Airport and the tour through the three cities, I endlessly enjoyed the stay, however brief. Our tour guide was extremely helpful, the lectures and the students went out of their way to ensure that we all identified with them.

I enjoyed the beautiful conservative architecture, widespread in the three cities, the rides in the city buses, trains and trams which all have the desired comfort for a public means of transport. The guided tours were well executed as we visited some of the world's most remarkable museums that spoke volumes about the rich heritage of Deutschland. Of particular interest was the attention paid in safeguarding the environment, especially the idea of recycling plastic or glass and the efficient and responsible disposal.

Frankly, I would wish to tour Germany once again, live and may be work there for some time.

Many thanks to DAAD

What a great desire to spend the rest of my life in Germany! Many thanks to DAAD.



Methody Florian

Talk about unforgettable experiences!

George Maangi -UoN, Kikuyu Campus

My visit and stay in Germany was and is the best thing that has occurred in my life so far. It was my first interaction with a First-world country, an enduringly unforgettable.

What struck me first was the level of organisation and the precision with which things move in the country, thanks to our tour-guide. The exactness of the schedule followed a near military routine (in every positive sense of the phrase) and indeed I learnt that our tour guide Mr Oliver Kurta served in the force.

First, the reception and hospitality that we were accorded as a group was the warmest, beyond our imagination. The students from University of Hamburg became our brothers and sisters and joined us for the four days, went to class with us, to the Mensas and during the guided tours in the cities. The two universities (Hamburg and Dresden) we visited were an inspiration, given the sheer beauty of the architecture that gave them the quaint campus setting, ideal for learning.

Visiting some of the places I have only read in my elementary Geography and History in High School was like a dream come true. I never imagined that it could happen sooner. The Berlin Wall is a world famous entity and seeing it was something else. The Jewish Museum, the ancient palace, the Court of Justice, the Pergamon Museum, just to mention but a few as well as the statues of Sophocles, Moliere, Shakespeare and Martin Luther that decorate the cities were the best interaction I could have with these philosophers whose ideas inform what we study in higher learning.

Much has been spoken about the infrastructure, and I cannot over-emphasize the efficiency and the magnificence of the same.

I am optimistic that I will ever find my way back to Germany to have a taste of the same and get to see my friends once again, it won't be long.

Many thanks to DAAD for its immense support to make all these happen to me; the trip will remain etched in my mind eternally. Danke!



George Maangi

The tour in picture



UoN and UHH Students outside the Hamburg University main building



At Hamburg University



Inside the African and Ethiopian studies office at UHH



Sharing a lunch AT A student 'Mensa' in Hamburg University



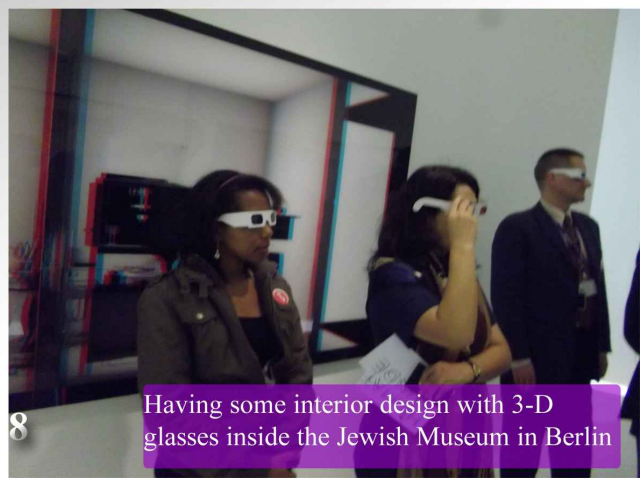
Electric rails for the renowned trains



The very fast electric train



Steve, Mercy & Lencer having a light moment inside the comfortable trains



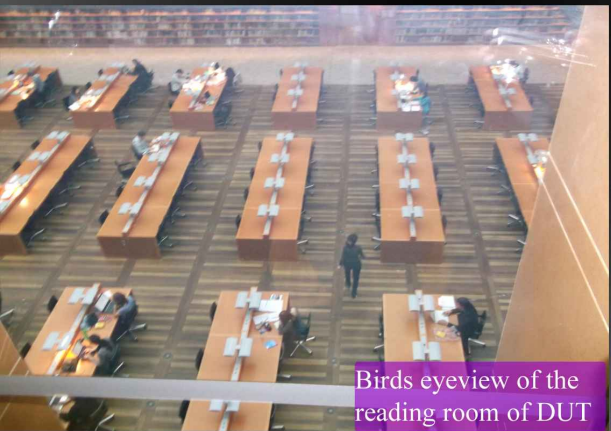
Having some interior design with 3-D glasses inside the Jewish Museum in Berlin



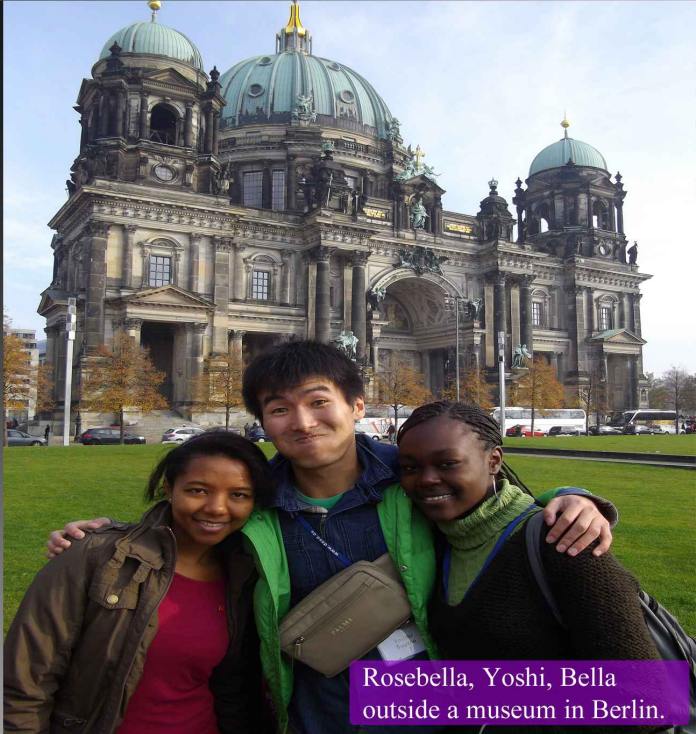
Dr. Weber and UoN students at Dresden



Dr. Odari handing a book gift to Dr. Woebecke at



Birds eyeview of the reading room of DUT



Rosebella, Yoshi, Bella outside a museum in Berlin.



Conveyor belts tha deliver ordered books to the librarian at DUT



Hamburg girls during the final farewell.



Oliver Kurta as a Maasai elder at the farewell

Experiences

‘A double-exchange’, it was, for me

As an exchange student from Soka University at the University of Nairobi, Yoshiaki Sugano had a rare opportunity to be on another exchange study trip to Germany. He calls it a ‘double-exchange’

I came to Kenya to study at the University of Nairobi in September, 2011 as one of the exchange students from Soka University. In October, Dr Masumi Hashimoto invited me to join other students traveling to Germany for a study trip. I have been to Italy, France and the UK in Europe and this was a great moment to tour Germany as well.

At first it was a little confusing for me, given that I had hardly started studying in Kenya. But, I saw this as an opportunity to travel some more and experience the world from many dimensions; socially, academically and even politically.

Prior to the trip, we had to rehearse some presentations for our German hosts and that was an experience itself from the outset. We practised songs and a play, and it was precious learning something new given they were all Kenyan, hence additional knowledge for me. Just after arriving in Hamburg, the first city we visited, I frankly could not relate with the environment or the people. I frankly could not relate with the weather or the people at first. However, once we got to Hamburg University, the students and the teaching staff accorded us great hospitality. I couldn't have been more wrong with my first impression. I was impressed by the German students studying African studies given we share the interest. Some could even speak Swahili, fluently. I felt encouraged.

As someone on an exchange program already and having another exchange study trip on top, I came to appreciate the role of such initiatives. I attended a session where students and staff debated on the merits of such initiatives and how institutions and individuals can make the most out of the programs. I learnt about the challenges that students who partake in these kind of visits face such as insecurity, accommodation, tuition fees and incompatible study schedules in respective universities, but above all, in the session they also debated on how these problems can be tackled.

These programs can be attractive. Personally I chose to go to Kenya, privy with the challenges but aware of the opportunities ahead. They offer a

unique and precious prospect to learn about other people, their language and culture.

In Berlin, for two days, we toured several museums, churches, attended a ballet and ate the traditional Germany sausage. I was really intrigued by the way Germans value so much their culture and it was a challenge to me, to really question my commitment to my culture. The two days though, were not enough for me to experience the Germany capital desirably.

The most comfortable days for me were in Dresden. In spite of the unspeakable past, the people in Dresden were so calm and friendly. The town was pleasantly quiet and well-planned. I am convinced that the uniqueness of Dresden gave this trip a brand-new essence and made me so interested in going back there someday.

Finally, what I really want to insist is that without Mr. Oliver Kurta, our tour-guide from DAAD, our trip would not have been nicer. His friendliness and gentlemanship made me forget the differences in our backgrounds. And of course, I also want to show great gratitude to Dr.Odari and my colleague Kenya students for the kindness and generosity. I will make use of this experience for the next generation of University of Nairobi and the Soka University because I am a ‘Double Exchange Student.’



Yoshiaki Sugano

An ode of a missed hope.

Peter Oduor missed out on the DAAD trip due to extremely inevitable circumstances and could only register his disappointment in a poem

When they say hope...
I will know where to dream
And learn to hope again
Late hopes of Hamburg travels
And dreams of journeys in the air
For I have the bird's path
Mine, a dream to hatch
Of this journey to Angela's land
That I took; here begun and here ended

When they say hope...
I will know where reality starts
The place of death
For hopes' dreams
Where they've planted
Beautiful flowers
On freshly dug ground
Plucked at the fingers
And let to dim
And dim

When they say hope...
I will walk towards daylight
To see dew steaming off the earth
Letting in the day
Erase
The failings of yester-days
To birth new hopes
and strengthen the dreams
Plucked at the fingers
Dreams of borderless flights
Sights
And limitless growth



Peter Oduor

Experiences

Ten days treat, Lifetime Experience

By **Rosebella**

Words cannot begin to express the amazing experience I had in Germany. Ten days may seem short but the experience will last me a lifetime!

Hamburg was the first town we visited. Despite the cold, we enjoyed a guided tour of Hamburg and learnt a bit about the history of its original inhabitants. The students we met from Hamburg University were so warm and welcoming; I barely missed home, if at all. They took their time to show us around their campus and were eager to share with us their experiences in their school and town. The lecturers were especially helpful and very accommodating. Learning Swahili with the German students was quite an experience. Most Kenyan students (myself included) find studying Swahili to be quite a chore but the enthusiasm that the students showed in the class gave me a new appreciation for a language that I take for granted. (Asante sana Bi. Zainab)

We were invited to a Literature class by Dr. Woebecke, which I really enjoyed. I realized that the teaching style is not that much different from those of my lecturers. I really enjoyed that everyone had a chance to give their opinions, which is not so easy in some of the large classes I take. Luckily, for us, the students arranged a German lesson for us. It was difficult at first but the students made it fun and many of us went home with the goal of mastering the German language. Dr. Gelaye was especially helpful in ensuring that we were enjoying ourselves and was very active in showing us around Hamburg.

Berlin was our second stop. Unfortunately, we only had a day to take in the sights. It was a great time, nonetheless. Attending the ballet performance and visiting the Berlin wall were epic! Seeing the Berlin wall with my eyes was a cruel reminder of a past that we would rather forget. However, it does remind us of the importance of peaceful human interaction, especially by understanding and accepting other ideas and cultures. Oliver, our tour guide was great in showing us around and was determined that we would love Berlin.

Our last stop was the beautiful city of Dresden. Learning of their history with the bombings during the Second World War was an eye opener. It was, however, amazing to see how quickly the city has been rebuilt and yet maintain its iconic structures that represent what they went through. The palaces as well as the churches were so beautiful, it was overwhelming. The students at TU Dresden and the professors especially Dr. Tilo, were very warm and welcoming.

I loved the whole experience but I really enjoyed Hamburg and can't wait to visit again! I would like to thank our guide Oliver Kurta who was very patient with us and was always smiling and energetic when showing us around. I appreciate the hard work it took to ferry around 13 people, always making sure we were okay and having fun. Thank you Oliver!

I would also like to thank DAAD, the Literature Department at the University of Nairobi, the various staff and students at both Hamburg University and TU Dresden. Because of all of you I had an amazing time and I learnt that no matter the place in the world, the culture and language, we still the same all over the world.

Germany; What a trip, through space and time?

By **Stephen Mburu**

As early as March 2011, I was informed of an opportunity to participate in an exchange program to Federal Republic of Germany. So enthusiastic was I about it that I immediately applied and waited for a response. The day came on 31st October 2011. The evening found us heading to the airport. Having never experienced life in another continent I had a reason to have a broad smile. To learn the way of life of other people. Yes, it was going to be a great experience and in deed it never disappointed.

We boarded the plane and landed at Dubai International Airport, the transit city. This was another great opportunity, having a Middle-East experience. It was a time to see the famous Dubai shopping Malls. When the plane left Dubai, I enjoyed an aerial view of the desert and the waters below.

We arrived in Hamburg at last. It was not very cold after all, contrary to our expectations. Students of the University of Hamburg awaited us and that marked the alfa of an unforgettable German experience under the guidance of Mr. Oliver Kurta- the tour guide.

I was fascinated by the architecture and especially the old building that had a historical message to put across. And the visit to the harbor was equally gratifying. It was I actually discovered that it was colder than Kenya. Those who think July is cold in Kenya should visit Europe in winter and they would withdraw their statement. It was cold, biting cold.

A visit to the department of African and Ethiopia studies in the University of Hamburg offered a chance to interact with the students. The beauty of an exchange is interaction. You learn about others, you exchange ideas and most important you make new friends. A visit to different areas that one has never been before makes someone exposed, broadminded and makes a wide range of experiences.

ur performances gave the Germans a taste of an African experience. The audience had an opportunity to learn about the African culture.

It wasn't all academic though; we went to a student's pub and had a chance to interact with students amid music and dance. It was a welcome party for first year students of the University of Hamburg that brought memories of the fuss that comes along with welcoming first years in Kenyan Universities.

A visit to historical sites, Museums and other tourist attraction sites helped the participants to learn about the German history and culture. This includes a visit to the Museum of Ethnology Hamburg; and studied about "Africans in Hamburg," the Jewish and Pergamon museums and the most interestingly of all, the German Hygiene Museum.

One interesting thing to note is the number of German students especially on the areas of African Studies who take an exchange to an African country especially Nigeria, Tanzania and Kenya. This gives them a chance to speak an African language such as Swahili, Hausa, and Amharic, among others and also to experience the African continent firsthand.

Another important thing is that Kenyan students can explore study opportunities in Germany. However, anyone interested in such an initiative should have decided well in advance so as to take care of German language requirements. Some schools have a six months German preparatory course that is offered prior to the beginning of the course.

Tuition and other academic fees are relatively low in Germany compared to most countries. However one should not expect to finance his study and living expenses through working since it may lead to straining or poor performance in school.

It was great visiting Germany and I look forward to visiting Germany again some day.



The Ethiopian Scholar Dr Gelaye of Hamburg University who was extremely helpful



Rosebella



Stephen Mburu

Why learning foreign languages is no longer a choice

By Silas Nyanchwani

There is something tellingly embarrassing when as a Kenyan adult you discover you can hardly sustain conversation in fluent Swahili without reverting to English intermittently. That also happens when you are forced to pray in Swahili or deliver a brief impromptu speech to an audience that cannot understand English. It is equally discomforting when you are in Europe and you find a European who speaks Swahili better than you and insists on using it, given he knows you come from a country where it is a national language.

I found myself in one such embarrassing moment at the University of Hamburg, in North Germany. I was asked to introduce myself to the handful Swahili students at the university. I could barely finish the introduction without throwing in an English word here and there. The students could scarcely take me seriously. I wouldn't be reporting this here, were it not that there were at least 11 of us university students from Kenya who had difficulties sustaining the introductions in Swahili to the eager audience.

While Swahili is the standard means of communication, hardly do most Kenyans prefer to use standard Swahili. Sheng is a popular choice and English for the elite. Needless to mention that when I asked my Kenyan colleagues, all of them had an excellent grade in Swahili in High School.

Foreigners' fascination with Africa's linguistic diversity

While attending a guest lecture at the University of Hamburg as visiting students from the University of Nairobi, I couldn't help but observe the serious academic attention the hundreds of languages in Africa are being accorded. It is a centuries old attention that they have been able to sustain, to date. It saw them through the scramble for Africa, through colonization, through neo-colonialism and now globalization.

You have students in various universities in Europe who take semesterial exchanges with African Universities and other destinations to study various languages such as Swahili, Zulu, Yoruba, Hausa, Amharic as well as Arabic. The universities overseas take these initiatives more seriously. The exchanges are never mutual. There seems to be an imbalance whereby the foreigners tend to take the studies seriously than Africans scholars.

Locally, foreign languages such as French, German, Chinese, Japanese and Korean are normally subsidiary studies, for the students interested. A luxury. Yet, as a progressive country that is ready to mine on the opportunities that globalization presents, institutions need to start treating languages and cultural studies of foreign countries seriously, not as electives and minors in degrees.

At best, we should adopt these studies at younger ages. It is much easier to teach younger children newer languages and cultures than it is older people. Those who study foreign languages later on in life, invariably have difficulties.

Studying the languages is never a luxury for the presumptuous lot. If you are an English speaker and you traveled to a country where no one gives a hoot about English, you will be frustrated even ordering a meal in a restaurant, let alone conducting business.

You need to look at the level of investment the Chinese and the Koreans are putting in the country and their futuristic interests cannot be overemphasized. While the locals are benefiting from their scholarships and support, we all know who is benefiting. It will serve everyone intending to expand their horizon to equally learn and understand these cultures for future strategic interests. It ought to be a government policy. This will ensure that globalization is not a one way lane.

Most of our limitations are self imposed. If the world is becoming a global village, the first ground as Kenyans and Africans must break is to get out of the linguistic comfort zones that English and French are. If you know the language and the culture of a people, it encourages many productive engagements including marriage. We need to study Gujarati, Chinese, Japanese, Korean, German, and Spanish in large numbers. We need to study other widespread African languages as we opt to seek opportunities elsewhere.

Our curriculum developers have failed by designing the language syllabi as sciences rather than arts. That is why we labour so much with Swahili and later abandon formal Swahili once we are unshackled from academic chains. Linguistic interests must be impacted on young ones if we are to enjoy the diversity of languages in Africa.



In Africa, languages are more of a problem than a solution. They are normally for identity demarcation. Yet, even at a very cursory level, the Luhya around Luanda region who knows Dholuo, have been able to tap into the opportunities in the Luo side of the boundary. Similarly, many Kisii individuals who have settled in Kisumu have had to adopt Dholuo as their first language and it makes their daily lives easier. The Ameru and the Aembu have often hung onto Agikuyu as a strategic key to their entrepreneurial interests in the region. The Agikuyu and Dholuo, going by their relative numerical strengths often never see the need to do the same, though individually some have succeeded quite enviably.

There are many individuals who have succeeded by mastering foreign languages, both in career and business. The authorities must ensure that they give the public, especially those not very privileged, the requisite information early enough in their lives in order to utilize it productively at a premium stage in their lives.

The foreigners know the usefulness of languages, hence there continued interests in studying the diverse languages in Africa. We can only return the favour by equally exploring newer languages and cultures, more so to the East.

Exerpts of this article was published in the Sunday Nation, November 20, 2011

Pictorial Experience



First day in Hamburg, ready for the city tour



Attending a Swahili lecture at the University of Hamburg



Performing to eager crowd of students and staff at UHH



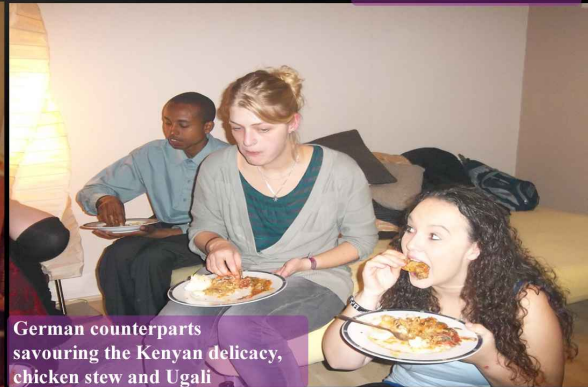
Having a moment at the Ethnology Museum, in



Treating our Germany hosts to a Kenyan delicacy at Sarah's apartment



Mercy Nzia, trying her culinary skills, preparing something Kenyan, exchanging some kitchen notes was necessary



German counterparts savouring the Kenyan delicacy, chicken stew and Ugali



Rosebella Hashimoto & Lencer Achieng having a Berlin moment



George, Rosebella and Mercy marvelling at the historical Berlin Wall



Enjoying a rare autumn sun at Dresden University of Technology



Dinner at Prof. Weber's residence in Dresden



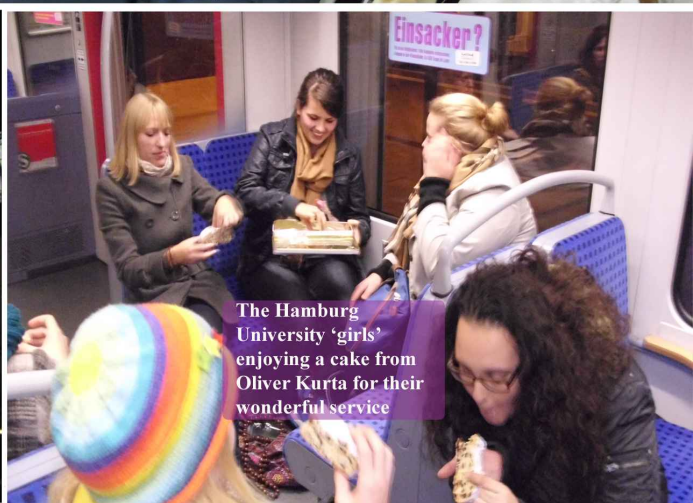
Recording the breathtaking beauty of Dresden City, from a church



Janneke and Christine of University of Hamburg, bidding the UoN group farewell in Hamburg



Silas Receiving a gift from Sarah Tischer on departure day from Germany



The Hamburg University 'girls' enjoying a cake from Oliver Kurta for their wonderful service



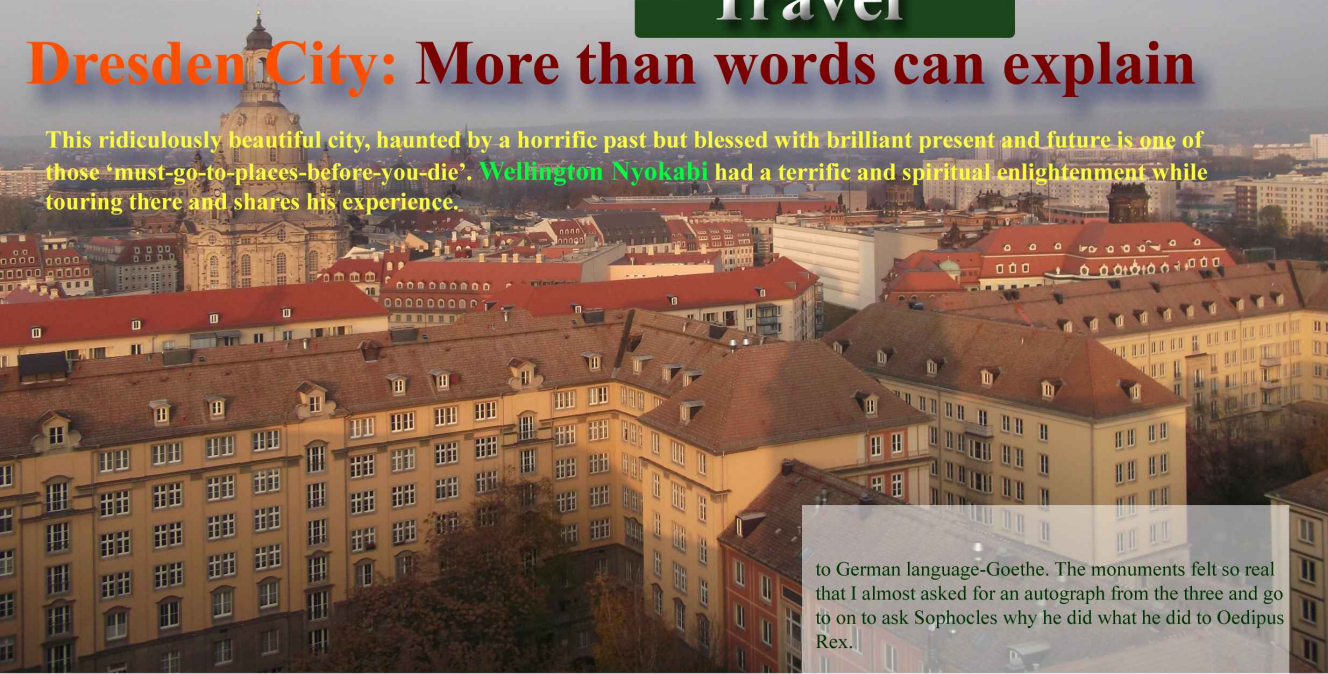
Final collective photo at Hamburg Airport before departure



Delivering a 'Thank You' cake to our coordinator back in our University

Dresden City: More than words can explain

This ridiculously beautiful city, haunted by a horrific past but blessed with brilliant present and future is one of those 'must-go-to-places-before-you-die'. Wellington Nyokabi had a terrific and spiritual enlightenment while touring there and shares his experience.



to German language-Goethe. The monuments felt so real that I almost asked for an autograph from the three and go on to ask Sophocles why he did what he did to Oedipus Rex..

Few places are more beautiful than Dresden in autumn. You can take that to the bank.

What struck me first was the pervading tranquility that graces the exquisite and picturesque look of the city. Even my most fertile imagination could not conjure up the quixotic nature of the city. The people, young and old, were all smiles, yet winter was beckoning. Dresden looked to me a place one can retire to and live a happy and peaceful life forever. As a resident relative had told me, the city subscribes to a Romanticism of sorts in spite of the horrifying wars of the 17/18th century and the more recently in 1945.

Dresden (pronounced as Dra-zen) is the capital city of the Free State of Saxony in Germany and sits back in an area that races back human habitation to the Neolithic period. It is on the far east and only a few miles from the Czech republic.

What strikes a visitor about the city are the unique surroundings. The most noticeable being are the many well-preserved medieval buildings, one being the Frauenkirche, 'Church of Our Lady', which is one of the memorial sites of the past wars and destruction. The Church stands as an indication of reconciliation worldwide considering the fact that it was rebuilt with funds contributed from across the world to the tune of 200 million-dollars, and this is after WW II up to October 2005 when it was consecrated.

One cannot help but be moved by the architecture of the interior which appeared almost crafty, especially the dome at the top which as our tour guide informed us took the exact temperament of the original church, and notably from afar, it dominates the skyline. Nobody noticed but

being an evangelical Christian, my body felt warmer and had a sense of serenity and after walking back outside I felt as if I had an afterglow. It was unforgettable no wonder pictures were not allowed inside. The peace within me was just soothing. As we continued with the tour, I particularly marveled at the variety of attractions the city offered. The Zwinger Courtyard/Palace is one of the most famous buildings and a must see for any visitor. Its regal architecture is what intrigued me. I had never seen anything like it. The baroque building is modeled on a Roman amphitheater, and the lavishly-decorated exterior impressed me most. If man elected to propose here, there can only be one answer: YES. Prompt and definite.

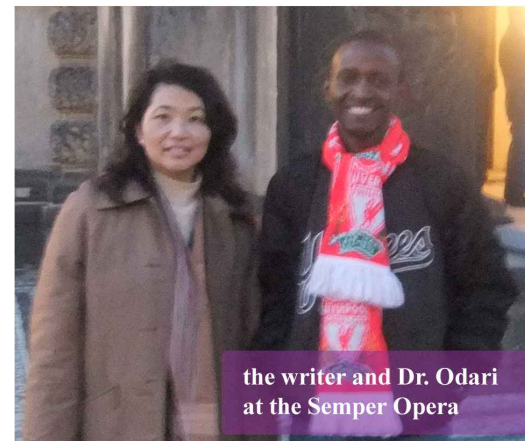
It was surrounded by galleried and charming pavilions, and the inside prided itself with more than 2000 paintings, the foremost being the famous Sistine Madonna by Raphael. Other relics of Saxony can be found inside like the remains of the war, though regretfully we didn't get a glimpse of them. The lushness of the courtyard and its verdant nature was enough to make us linger around that even the tour guide had to be indulged in. Exceptionally beautiful.

Not far from one another, we got to visit the Cathedral and Castle (1738-1754), and the Semper Opera House (1871-1878). These two gave a simulacrum of Paris, given their amiable reception, glamour and a sense of tradition without even going inside. Belonging to the realm of literature, the Semper Opera House enthralled us, and the reason being that just outside sat monuments of great men in literature such as Moliere, Sophocles and Germany's own Goethe. I couldn't help it having a photo with our lecturer Dr. Odari in front of the man whom German linguists argue that he gave beauty

River Elbe, upon whose valley the city sits gives the city composure, coziness and ebullience. It hardly went unmentioned anyway by the guide. Since I come from Central Kenya, rivers remind me of my childhood and naughtiness at best. I wanted to strip and dive to swim and luckily catch Njururis (tadpoles) that swim in rivers back at home, but there was no such luck. It was unforgivingly cold and the city rules would not be too charitable for me. At dusk, the neon lights from the city dazzlingly reflected on the river bringing an extraordinary panoramic view.

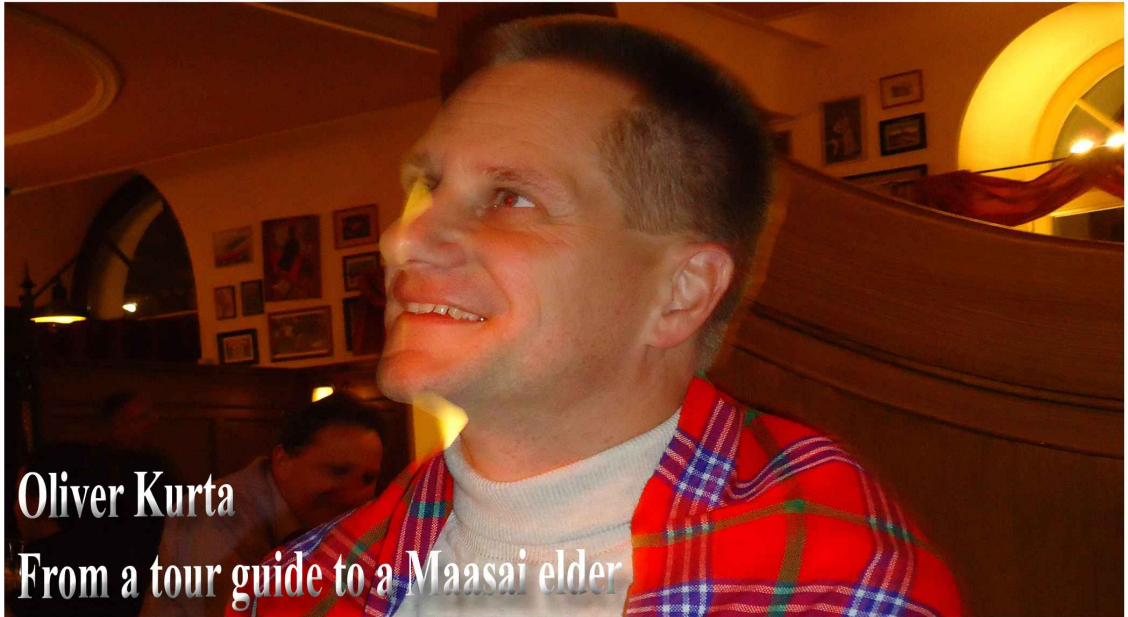
To sum up, Dresden is an Emotional and Romantic city, and the irony of the latter being that it was dreadfully flattened on Valentine's Day 1945 hence the emotions poured in when the magnitude of the damage was made known to us by the tour guide. As manifestly witnessed, the city had shrugged off its austere image of the past and the citizens have picked up the pieces, and in addition the benevolence of the people could not go unnoticed, something we noticed to the Germans we interacted with. Despite its compact size, Dresden offered us a few days of exploration, dining and shopping, and it is hard to forget the special cake (available during the festive season) that Mr. Oliver bought us on our way back to Hamburg, and offered its ornate and Renaissance heart. In Germany they have this saying that goes like,

It is better to trust the eyes than the ears. I can't agree more.



the writer and Dr. Odari at the Semper Opera

Of funny tour guides, German beer and the 'idiot sheet'



Oliver Kurta

From a tour guide to a Maasai elder

Silas Nyanchwani on the side issues during the ten-day trip to Germany

A funny tour guide is the last thing we expected in our visit to Deutschland. We must have underestimated the German's capacity for humour and overstated the seriousness with which they take life. Blame it on stereotypes and the man who briefed us our expected conduct while in Germany.

Our tour guide, Mr Oliver Kurta made our study trip and stay in Germany worthwhile, even though he failed to convince us that Berlin is great and Hamburg "sucks" to use his own word. Sorry Oliver, in life you win some and lose some. But Oliver can blame the lively girls from Hamburg University who made our stay in Germany exciting and memorable. There hospitality was second to none. In Berlin it was too brief and too frantic.

The tour guide who took us through the geographical and historical tour of Hamburg was another character. During the tour, he delivered every sentence in a calculated version, with an odd punch line here and there. But it was Mr Kurta who captured our imagination the most and nearly stole Germany from us. There ought to be a limit to how humorous a man should be.

For starters, he gave us name tags claiming to be bad with memorizing names. But in astonishing speed, he had known all of us by names, temperament and the right thing to say at the time. Coordinating 12 people in busy cities like Hamburg and Berlin is no easy task, but it should be for a 43-year-old, ex-military man. His professionalism was cordial and above warm in an extraordinary way.

It was always fun when we were boarding the trains as he counted all of us to ensure that none was left behind. Even so, he had taken enough precaution by giving us an 'Idiot sheet'; a card with directions to our hostel, in the unlikely event that one of us got lost...It seemed unnecessary until one of us was left behind in Berlin and it came in handy. Nobody would have noticed given the frantic movement from one museum to the next.

Thirty minutes into the huge Pergamon Museum, Oliver received a call from a policewoman who had been gracious enough to show the lost friend to the museum. He instantly became an 'idiot' and gave us the highlight of the trip. It was totally unanticipated and from then on, we were constantly vigilant-but only towards the friend. Oliver was a great gift to us, given his natural patience and was helpful in our shopping, always showing us where to find 'cheaper and better' deals. He taught all of us the benefits of frugality, which is a typically German trait, and positively so. Oliver ensured that we got the best impression of what Germany is and revise our prior opinion on Deutschland. In fact DAAD could not have found a better ambassador to give us an insightful look into Germany.

Of course it was not all work and no play. We got to tour the cities in evening, a memorable ballet and sample the German sausage and their diet. The German diet might be forgettable, but not their beer.

As an occasional drinker, and having heard and read so much about the 'notorious' Oktoberfest, sampling the German beer, particularly Bavarian was my tertiary goal for our study trip. Mr Kurta recommended some brands for the two us who like the

brown/green bottle. It was hard to fault his choice. Hopefully, I won't discover much more superior quality other than the ones we he recommended. It took Oliver to disabuse me of the idea that Heineken is the world best beer invention. Thanks to the European Champions League that is sponsored by the brand, anyone in Nairobi easily presumes that Heineken is the best liquor export from Europe.

"The Dutch have no respect for beer," he told me as I sampled the Weizenbeer served from a royal-looking glass. It totally confounded my taste buds. I could only agree more. A couple of months back a friend of mine had told me that I lack the software to decode the advertised crispiness of Heineken, but I could not miss the powerful quality of the Weizenbeer. And I had to concur that great beer need not be advertised, it should be sold in regal glasses and just taste good. Period.

While in Berlin, I spotted a Hummer in the street and told Oliver, that it is one of the most respected cars in the streets of Nairobi,

"I am persuaded that whoever who drives a Hummer should be forced to undertake an intelligence test," offered Oliver. I thought about names that drive Hummers in Nairobi and I kept it to myself. Of course he said it with a pinch of salt. Oliver ensured that we remained upbeat throughout the period and delivered us back to the airport safely where we reunited with the University of Hamburg students for the farewell party. The trip totally exceeded our expectations and I eavesdropped everyone hoping to go back for a longer period, to work or to study in Deutschland.

Thanks to DAAD for the wonderful opportunity.