

Planning a Professional Training Year (PTY) abroad during a pandemic was a challenge I could never have foreseen, leading to much uncertainty about whether the year could even go ahead. Despite the setbacks and difficulties, I was determined to complete as normal a year abroad as possible, as spending time in the countries where the target languages are spoken is a key part of my Languages degree. Over the course of the year, I was lucky enough to be able to study at the Otto-Friedrich Universität in Bamberg, Germany and work as a Copywriter and Content Assistant for VeryChic in Barcelona, Spain.

My PTY was by far the best experience of my life and something I am grateful for every day. Meeting people from all over the world and building a life in new countries was a really special opportunity, and I gained skills and experiences that I feel I could never have gained from staying at home. The chance to explore new cities, enhance my academic knowledge and linguistic skills, and develop into a better person was invaluable.



*Outside the Altes Rathaus (Old Town Hall) in Bamberg's town centre*

Academically, it was enriching to study a range of niche subject areas during my study exchange. The variety of modules on offer differed from those available at Surrey, so I was able to deepen my understanding of German language and culture in ways I hadn't been able to before. I also experienced different teaching styles, as the German academic system differs slightly to the British one, so it was interesting learning to adapt to new methods of teaching, albeit online as all classes were unfortunately delivered virtually during the pandemic.

While working for VeryChic, I was able to gain professional experience in the travel/tourism industry, a sector which interests me as a future career path. This placement was also not without disruptions, as I spent the first half of the semester working online from home due to travel restrictions. Once I was able to travel to Spain, I worked in the office every other weekday due to pandemic-related measures meaning only half

the employees could be in the office at one time. Such an unusual experience was certainly challenging and at some points quite lonely as it was difficult to meet people, but it highlighted the importance of flexibility and adaptability as we navigate new circumstances beyond our control.

During my work placement, I was able to acquire new skills while working with the company's software and websites, while also increasing my organisational awareness in terms of how different departments work together to ensure products are published online at the correct time with the correct information. I was also able to enhance skills I already possessed, including research skills and proofreading, which will be useful when writing my dissertation, plus I was able to be creative while writing engaging texts to advertise the different hotels and attract customers.

Learning to make the most of new, unusual and difficult situations is perhaps the most valuable thing I will take away from my time abroad.

Although it was not the year I originally planned, as my original work placement in Germany was cancelled, I was able to remain determined and explore alternatives, such as study exchange, to ensure I could still spend time abroad. Exploring new countries, increasing my



*Exploring Park Güell, an iconic Gaudí site in Barcelona*

language knowledge, and making friends for life has made me a more open-minded and independent person, with the confidence to tackle new challenges from a place of enthusiasm, not fear.

For students considering spending time abroad during their degree, my advice would be to not think twice! Adventures of a lifetime await, so research all your options, be open-minded and curious, and make the most of any opportunities that come your way. I believe life-changing experiences, the most special people, and enchanting new places can only truly be sought abroad, so be brave and take a leap into the unknown – it may be the best thing you ever did.