

A year in Saxony: a Polytech student shares her impression on the year abroad and local culture

Hardly having set foot on the Russian soil Maria Ilatovskaya told us about her year at the Freiberg Mining Academy and her feelings about being a Polytech PhD student taking a course at an overseas college and the ways of getting there, about the study plan, the number of Russian food shops across Germany, the barbeques frequency and the difference between Russian and German cuisines.



- Maria, why did you take decision to study in Germany?

- As a PhD at the Institute of Metallurgy, Machine Engineering and Transport, I used to attend international conferences where I was once approached about taking a training course at the Freiberg Mining Academy in Saxony. I welcomed the opportunity and successfully completed the course. A year's training was part of the project SFB920 "Multi-functional filters for metal melt filtration", subproject A03 (Thermodynamics of filter surface/inclusions) carried out under the supervision of Fabrichnaya Olga Borisovna, a renowned specialist in this field.

- Tell us more about your research work. Where did you start at and

where did you end up?

- I started with metallurgy studies at Polytech. The course got more specific in my third year as I embarked on the study of thermal analysis and phase diagrams. It is a study of thermal effects on materials.

- How long was the course? What tips would you give to would-be trainees that might make their lives abroad easier?

- The course lasted a year precisely, the larger part of which I spent in Germany. You'll have a good start if you don't take long choosing the college and supervisor. Then go through the details of the application process with the hosts in order to avoid misunderstandings and problems with the invitation letter. According to the list of required documents provided by Polytech, I submitted my passport details, high school diploma, a CV, and the examinations results. You will have to have these documents translated into English at least, but the language of the host country would be more welcome. As soon as you have the visa, you can buy the tickets and leave.



- What kind of welcome did you receive upon the arrival? Did everything go well?

- Everything was fine. I was picked up at the airport, assisted through the

enrollment process starting from the contract stage to the residence rental and medical insurance.

- Tell us a little more about it. Did you live in a student residence or an apartment? Did you like the city?

- There are housing opportunities for students, but I opted for an apartment. I had no rental problems, had everything I need in my apartment which was within a walking distance from my work. Freiberg is a typical college town with only 30-40 thousand people living in it.

- Can you tell us about the curriculum planning?

- I spent most of my time working on the project and attending classes given by my supervisor and other professors. My only setback was the lack of German language skills, but it turned out that English was widely spoken in the scientific community. My language of tuition was English, but I also attended lectures that were taught in German.

- Is there something in the Freiberg Academy that is uncommon in the Russian universities?

- There is a tradition to get together for the end of term celebration. The party is thrown on the university grounds. The celebration is quite informal: students, teachers and administration staff all make themselves comfortable on the lawn, cook barbeques and have fun. The party is thrown again in summer. The tradition has been going on for years. It is a common thing for students to have a barbeque right on campus after classes, especially in warm weather. This is certainly something you wouldn't see in Russia.



- You have quite an extensive experience of life in Germany, were you lucky to witness any local holiday celebrations?

- I joined my colleague's family for Christmas celebration. Despite living in Germany for twenty years, she can't imagine a Christmas without the "Olivier" salad. The streets are brightly decorated; there are Christmas fairs that last four days in all towns. The German have a curious innate characteristic: as soon as the celebrations are over, the decorations are removed, so there is hardly any reminder of Christmas in Freiberg on the 25th of December. There is little time for rest as you are expected to show up for work on the 2nd of January.

- What places did you visit while living in Germany? Is there anything you would recommend as a must-see?

- I have crossed almost all of Saxony which includes Freiberg, stopping at many little towns along the way. However, being a city person, I longed for the open space which I found walking in Dresden. I came to love the walks along its river banks. Many people find it hard to live in small towns, but if you are focused on your work; you have to think up other kinds of pastime and entertainment.

- What about the local cuisine?

- I can't say German cuisine is refined and original. In fact, it's not too different

from our food. The typical German food is sausages, potatoes and sour kraut, soups are creamy, even solyanka, which is also very popular with locals, is a lot thicker than its Russian version. And there are Russian food shops, there is one even in Freiberg.

- It is thought by many that Germans have a taste for contemporary art? Do you agree?

- It depends on the city. If you are in Berlin, you would feel that contemporary art is all around you. In Dresden finding it will take some time. As for little towns, they are quite conservative.

- Maria, thank you for your story! We wish you all the best with your scientific career!

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