

Vignettes of Educational Trip to Germany

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Recently, I was offered a scholarship from Goethe Institute in the form of an all-expenses paid educational trip to Germany from 12th to 19th June. This trip was organized by the Goethe Institute New Delhi. I thank Goethe Institute New Delhi for providing me this wonderful opportunity.

In all, there were 22 student participants, who were accompanied by three teachers from Goethe Institute New Delhi (Ms. Shilpa Sharma, Mr. Matthias Dünwald and Ms. Puneet Kaur) and the travel agent (Mr. Anil Chetwani). Besides myself, there were four other students who had gone on full scholarship. All of them were from Kendriya Vidyalaya. There were 18 students who had come at their own expenses.

The trip comprised of visits to renowned German Universities including Frankfurt School of Finance & Management, RWTH Aachen and University of Cologne as well as sightseeing in Amsterdam and Bonn. We visited not only the universities, but also various historical monuments and museums.

Trip Itinerary in Brief

Day	Plan for the day
Day-1 (12.06.2023)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Departure from New Delhi• Dinner and stay at Frankfurt
Day-2 (13.06.2023)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Visit to Frankfurt School of Finance and Management• Frankfurt city tour• Interaction with Ms. Nandini Dung, social media influencer
Day-3 (14.06.2023)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Visit to RWTH Aachen• Sightseeing in Aachen• Dinner and stay at Aachen
Day-4 (15.06.2023)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Amsterdam city tour• Rhine cruise• Stay at Hennef (Sieg)
Day-5 (16.06.2023)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Visit to Cologne University• Cologne city tour• Dinner and return to the hotel at Hennef (Sieg)
Day-6 (17.06.2023)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Visit to Cologne Cathedral• Rhine Cruise• Visit to House of History, Bonn• Sightseeing in Bonn
Day-7 (18.06.2023)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Drive along Rhine to Frankfurt• Visit to Drachenburg Castle• Sightseeing at Deutsches Eck• Departure from Frankfurt Airport for India

Day 1 (12.06.2023)

The student contingent as well as the teachers arrived at Delhi Airport in the morning. All the procedures in the airport were carried out by us as a group and were facilitated by escorts from Goethe Institute. We flew to Frankfurt in a 9-hour flight.

We landed at Frankfurt at around 5.30 pm. A bus was arranged for us. Hans Peter, our bus driver, pointed out and explained in detail the prominent places along the way. We came across *Rennbahn* (a football stadium that was earlier a horse racing track) and *Eintracht* (administration office) among others. We were taken for dinner in an Indian restaurant and finally to a hotel.

Day 2 (13.06.2023)

We had a delicious German breakfast and thereafter visited Frankfurt School of Finance and Management. We went on a tour of the campus and offered three orientation sessions that highlighted various aspects of the institution. We were offered a demo lecture on accounting by Prof. Rama Subramaniam. We had our lunch at Frankfurt School.

In the mess, we were supposed to serve at once as much food as we could eat, and it was weighed. The cost was determined as per the weight and it was added to the Goethe Institute's bill.

In the evening, a city tour was organized. Our guide, Ms Alexa, was a Portuguese-German who explained very well about the city in German and English. We began from the "city-center". The tour comprised of a brief bus tour of North and South Frankfurt. We gazed with delight and wonder at the tall glass skyscrapers of North Frankfurt, which were mostly banks. On our way, we were briefed about the Paternoster, which is a lift that moves up and down without stopping. We witnessed the huge *Eiserner Steg* (Iron Footbridge) on river Main. We also came across the museums of Frankfurt, some of which include, Gu Museum, Städel Museum, Museum of Communication, Deutsch Filmmuseum, Museum of Applied Arts. In all, there are 39 museums in Frankfurt.

Among local people, North Frankfurt is popularly known as the site of work and business and South Frankfurt as the site of leisure and pleasure. We were explained about the famous strategy Frankfurt has devised to address the increasing problem of drugs, where drug addicts are treated not as criminals, but as patients. This is popularly known as the "Frankfurt way".

We were then taken for a walk around the historic city center of Frankfurt. Some of the highlights included *Pauls Kirche* (Paul's church; built in 1818, now functions as the reception hall of the city), *Römerberg* (hill of the Romans), *Zumröme* (the guest house of the Roman Emperor), *Sachsenhausen* (houses of Saxons) and the *Imperial Cathedral* (where the election and coronation of the Holy Roman Emperor used to take place).

We were then asked to explore ourselves the market. I interacted with several gypsy musicians on the streets. I came across a dance group, Mr. Vladimir Bodunov, a violinist (<https://vladimirbodunov.com/>) and a guitarist.

We interacted with social media influencer Ms. Nandini Dung and created an Instagram reel with her. Thereafter, we had dinner with her and went to the hotel at around 8:30 pm.



Fig. 1: Photograph of glass skyscraper with reflection of another glass skyscraper on it



Fig. 2: Photograph with Mr. Vladimir Bodunov (Concert violinist)



Fig. 3: Dancers performing on street



Fig. 4: Photograph with social media influencer Ms. Nandini Dung

Day 3 (14.06.2023)

We started early after breakfast for Aachen. The journey took about three hours. Aachen is a border town at close proximity to the Netherlands and Belgium. Geographically, the beautiful city is of volcanic origin. It was totally devastated during World War II. The entire city was reconstructed after the war. Interestingly, Aachen was the first German city where the war ended. We visited RWTH Aachen, which is Germany's second biggest technical university and one of the most renowned universities for engineering. We interacted with Ms. Azadeh Hartmann-Alampour during an orientation session. We interacted with an Indian student, Mr. Soham as well.

We went on a campus tour as well as a city tour. We were guided by Ms. Anna, a professor of History at RWTH Aachen, who also worked as a German-French translator. We visited the town hall and Aachen Cathedral. One of the most famous Holy Roman Emperors, Charlemagne (aka *Karl der Große* in German and *Carolus Magnus* in Latin) was buried at Aachen Cathedral. We were fortunate to have a look at the four holy relics, which are exhibited once every seven years. We also witnessed a large religious briefing taking place outside the cathedral for school children. We visited the market as well. Our guide offered us *Printen* (Gingerbread), one of the delicacies of Aachen. Gingerbread comprised of cinnamon, saffron and cardamom among other spices.

We had dinner at an Indian restaurant. One of the participants (Mansi) had her birthday, so the Goethe Institute had organized a brief celebration. We were joined by three Indian students at RWTH Aachen: Pawan, Abhimanyu and Anshika. Interaction with them was enlightening.



Fig. 5: Kuhuk Katiyar (left) and me (right) with Ms. Azadeh Hartmann-Alampour (centre).



Fig. 6: Photograph with Mr. Soham (Indian student at RWTH Aachen)



Fig. 7: Religious briefing for school children outside Aachen Cathedral



Fig. 8: Replica of Charlemagne's treasure at Aachen Town Hall



Fig. 9: *Some school children returning from a seminary.*



Fig. 10: Sculpture at town hall entrance: *This sculpture features the Father (Jesus Christ) sitting on the throne at the centre, the mightiest figure of all. On his left, Charlemagne is holding the oldest part of the cathedral on his left knee. He is the second mightiest figure. On Father's right is the weakest figure of all, Leo III, the pope around 800 AD. For the first time, the pope was weaker than the king.*

*Underneath the sculpture, the Latin phrase "**Maiestas domini**" is inscribed.*



Fig. 11: Charlemagne's signature at Town hall, which is incidentally the logo of RWTH Aachen. It features his first name (**K**arolus), his function (**R**ex – Latin for king) and his enemies (the **L**ombards and the **S**axons). He called himself "The King of Saxons and Lombards".



Fig. 12: The Council Hall



Fig. 13: Prof. Anna distributing Printen (Gingerbread)



Fig. 14: A transverse cross-section of a Printen (Gingerbread)



Fig. 15: Prinzess Printen (one of the varieties of gingerbread) in a shop



Fig. 16: Photograph with Indian students at RWTH Aachen: Pawan, Anshika and Abhimanyu

Day 4 (15.06.2023)

We had breakfast at Aachen and began our journey to Amsterdam. We reached Amsterdam in about three hours. We explored the market and the streets and had the famous French fries of Amsterdam. A Rhine cruise was organized for all of us. The beautiful view of the city from the Rhine River as well as the river itself captivated us. After the cruise, we had lunch at a Lebanese restaurant.

Then, we went to Hennef (Sieg), a town in Germany and had dinner *en route*. We spent the next two nights at Hennef (Sieg) as it lies between Bonn and Cologne.



Fig. 17: A street in Amsterdam



Fig. 18: A historic clock tower



Fig. 19: A floating restaurant

Day 5 (16.06.2023)

After breakfast, we were taken to a nearby Aldi store to have a look on the variety of German chocolates and then we set onto a three-hour journey to Cologne (aka *Köln*). We visited Cologne University, one of the most renowned German Universities for humanities and natural sciences. An orientation session was conducted, followed by interaction with south Asian students at University of Cologne. Thereafter, we enjoyed a campus tour, followed by lunch in a mess.

After lunch, we proceeded for a sightseeing tour of the city. Goethe Institute had hired a guide for the same. We visited the love padlock bridge of Cologne. Couples write their names on a lock and fasten it to the bridge and throw the keys into the Rhine River after locking. This practice has its roots in Rome, but has spread to several parts of Europe, including Cologne. Thereafter, we went to visit the *Kölner Dom* (Cologne Cathedral), which is the largest building in Cologne. Unfortunately, a ceremony was going on at that time and hence, there was a lot of crowd. As a result, one could go only a few steps inside. The visit was postponed and we were taken to the market. Our escort, Mr. Dünnwald, advised us about the souvenirs one could buy from Köln.

We had dinner at about 7 pm. Another participant (Kuhuk Katiyar) had her birthday, so a brief cake cutting ceremony was carried out. Then, we returned to our hotel in Hennef (Sieg).



Fig. 20: Photograph with Albertus Magnus sculpture outside University of Cologne



Fig. 21: Mr. Matthias Dünnwald, providing authentication for entering into the International House (University of Cologne) to attend the orientation session.



Fig. 22: Central Mess in the university campus

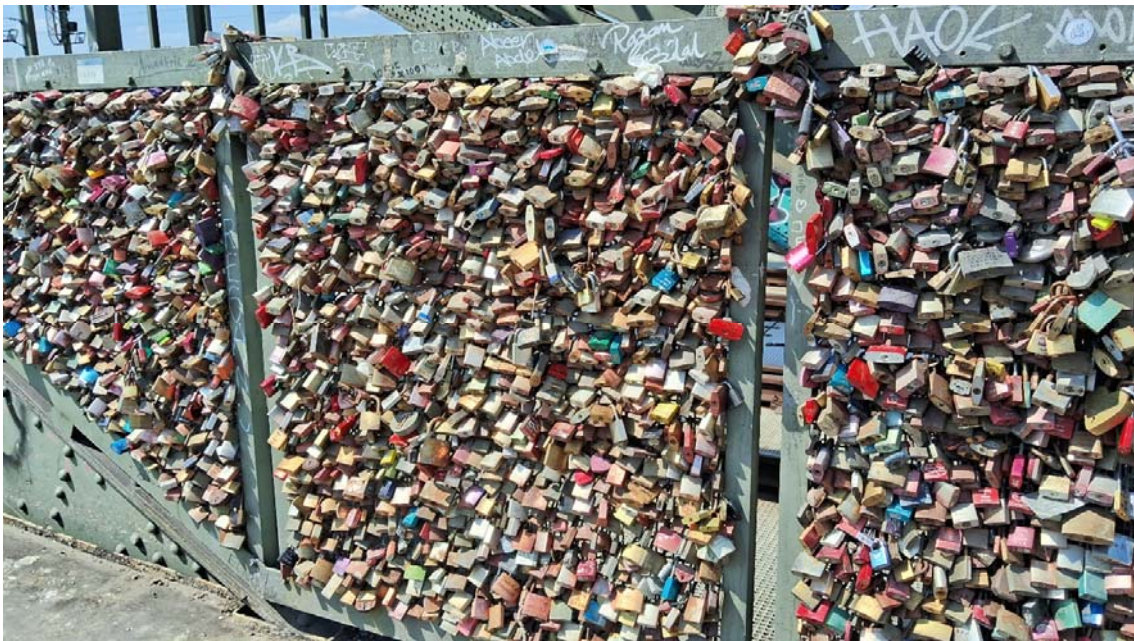


Fig. 23: Some of the Liebgeschlösser (Love padlocks) on a portion of the love padlock bridge in Cologne



Fig. 24: A closer look at one of the *Liebgeschlösser* (love padlocks)



Fig. 25: Another *Liebgeschloss* (love padlock) from 1976



Fig. 26: A sculpture near the Rhine River bank



Fig. 27: A group of musicians at Cologne near the cathedral

Day 6 (17.06.2023)

After another guided brief visit to the Aldi store, we start early for Cologne once again with the hope of visiting the cathedral. Fortunately, there was not a lot of rush that day. Therefore, we went inside and explored the cathedral. The enormous structure was conceptualized by the citizens of Köln and construction began in the mid-thirteenth century. It is still undergoing construction in the form of renovation of some of its oldest structures. The cathedral was intentionally not bombed by the Royal Air Force and the US Air Force so as to preserve it as a landmark to the city of Cologne in the absence of GPS and navigation systems.

We went on a Rhine cruise and set out for Bonn. After lunch, we visited the *Haus der Geschichte* (House of the History), a museum shedding light on the various aspects of post-World War II German history. Thereafter, we explored the streets and the market. We had dinner in a German restaurant. Yet another participant (Susmitha) had her birthday. Another cake cutting ceremony followed and we had the delicious German apple cake.



Fig. 28: A model of the Cologne Cathedral inside the cathedral



Fig. 29: One of the glass windows at the cathedral depicting a story about Jesus Christ



Fig. 30: A snap from the Cologne Cathedral



Fig. 31: Another snap from the Cologne Cathedral

Day 7 (18.06.2023)

We set onto a long road trip to Frankfurt along the Rhine River after having breakfast. We took some detours to visit some of the prominent tourist spots. Our first stop was the Drachenburg castle. Drachenburg lies in between Hennef (Sieg) and Bad Honnef and is popular due to the castle. There is a legend associated with the castle, which is about a dragon who lived there and demanded a person once every month as part of a pact with the local inhabitants to maintain peace. Once, a Christian lady was sent to the dragon and she thrust forward and showed the Christian cross and the dragon disappeared, thereby encouraging the local people to adopt and develop a faith in Christianity.

Viewing the mesmerizing vineyards along the highway, we stop around Koblenz, at the *Deutsches Eck* (literally, the German Corner), the confluence of two of the biggest rivers in Germany (Rhine and Mosel). At the viewpoint, one finds the German flag in front of the two columns of the flags of the sixteen German states. At the rearmost point is an equestrian statue dedicated to *Wilhelm der Große* (William the Great), reminiscent of the Prussian victories in the German Wars of Unification.

We had lunch en route and reached Frankfurt airport by 5:30 pm. After all the procedures at the airport, we boarded the flight at about 6:50 – 7:00 pm and landed at New Delhi on 19.06.2023 at about 8:30 am.

The wonderful and enlightening trip came to an end, which to us seemed to be too soon. All the participants longed to spend some more time in the German culture and with each other.



Fig. 32: Group photograph outside Drachenburg castle



Fig. 33: A fountain near Deutsches Eck depicting the activities in Koblenz.

My Impressions of the Trip

This trip was one of the most enlightening trips that would remain engraved as an indelible memory in my mind and heart forever. I learnt a lot through this trip and widened my perspective and knowledge. This brief introduction to the German culture was very exciting. We were intrigued by some of its interesting aspects. We loved the organized yet lively and dynamic German society. The German people were very friendly and helpful. I am grateful to the increasing Indo-German community who always put in their best to help us.

I thank Goethe Intitute New Delhi, our escorts (Mrs. Shilpa Sharma, Mrs. Puneet Kaur and Mr. Matthias Dünnwald) and our travel agent Shri Ani Chetwani for conducting the trip in such a planned manner.

I am thankful to my school German teacher Ms. Lavleen Adwani for her guidance, support and motivation. I am grateful to my school Kendriya Vidyalaya IIT Kanpur and our Principal Shri RC Pandey for facilitating German language instruction in school.

[Photograph Courtesy: All photographs except Figures 2, 4, 5, 6, 16, 20, 32 have been clicked by the author.]