

Genuine hospitality in Munich

Creating networks and personal exchanges



Lewis Kaplan

The collaboration between Durban University of Technology (DUT) and Munich University of Applied Sciences (MUAS) was initiated by the MUAS department of tourism in spring 2014. The exchanges of students and faculty have enjoyed great popularity since then and collaboration has been extended to additional departments. Since 2016, the partnership between DUT and MUAS has been supported through a grant from the Erasmus+ Program with partner countries. Therewith, many additional mobilities at student, staff and faculty level could be realized.

Lewis Kaplan, Senior Lecturer at DUT, is one of the faculty members who has taken part in a teaching exchange. In the following interview with the Passport team he shares his experiences and thoughts.

Why did you come to MUAS on the exchange and what did you teach?

Ms Veronika Wäniger of the MUAS central International Office had visited the Durban University of Technology and presented many interesting insights about the university and its various departments including possible joint ventures between our two universities. The idea of lecturing and visiting Munich has excited me. As I am also very interested in history and global views a visit to Munich sounded appealing. In addition to the variety of programmes offered, the idea of meeting other (visiting) lecturers was the big attractor and subsequently on visiting my expectations were fulfilled. The exchange provided me with the opportunity to have lengthy discussions with academic and administrative staff and to gauge the level of some of the programmes.

I taught an element of Strategy and Agile Project Management to a number of students from different programmes in the Department of Tourism. The interactions and after class discussions indicated that the



Lewis Kaplan during one of his lectures.

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students were able to relate the theoretical aspects of the lectures to their studies. There was a very strong sense of accomplishment from the MUAS staff, students and myself.

What were your major impressions?

Of the city: Landing at Munich airport, I discovered it to have the branding 'Living ideas – Connecting lives'. The branding as it turns out began defining how the rest of my trip progressed. My immediate impressions from landing at Munich airport and then travelling into the city was the level of neatness and helpfulness by the people. The city of Munich was easy to navigate around with many forms of transport available. People were always very friendly and polite in any and all my interactions. Google translate was very rarely used! During my short stay, besides lecturing and having meetings with the staff, I managed to visit a few icons of Munich – Marienplatz and the old town for example. The BMW tour was also a fantastic opportunity to view firsthand German engineering. I will always remember the level of pride and professionalism the people have in whatever they were undertaking.

Of the department: The academic and administrative staff made my stay an awesome experience. The

warmth and inclusiveness towards me by everyone I met was genuine hospitality. I met many of the professors and staff of the Department of Tourism and all made me feel as if I was part of the team. There was a deliberate sharing of excellent ideas during the meetings for projects and engagements. The working environment of the department such as the offices and lecture venues was impressive, especially the layouts, furnishing and technologies. I am looking forward to our future academic debates and other projects.

Of the students: Firstly, this was one of the main reasons I applied to lecture at MUAS and what interested me was the opportunity to engage with international students. On arrival I was made to feel very welcome by the various groups of students. During the lectures, the students really impressed me with their interest and questions about the subject matter. Overall the students had an impressive view of the world and the global environment into which they were preparing for.

Did you notice any differences concerning tourism studies in South Africa and Germany?

Generally, the tourism and hospitality studies in South Africa and especially at DUT have a major emphasis in the

knowledge areas of tourism and hospitality. Whereas in Germany the emphasis is within the management subjects.

What are the challenges of the tourism industry in South Africa today?

The major challenge facing tourism in South Africa, in my opinion, is the extent of competition from various countries. Air travel is becoming more affordable and the general rise of wealth from within the G20 countries means that more people can visit more exotic and distant places. Even saying that there is increased competition, the tourism industry has been growing in South Africa by about 4.2% in the past year. This industry accounts for about 10% of the jobs here.

Thus there is pressure on the tourism industry in South Africa to offer more, such as experiences to visitors. In previous decades, waves of tourist would generally visit a place to look, take photos and then leave. Those days are phasing out fast. The tourism industry is beginning to address the need to expand offerings of experiences to both local and international visitors.

When you think of tourism and politics in South Africa what comes to your mind?

As I said previously, tourism is ex-

panding in South Africa. I think visitors factor in the risks associated with international travel and make informed decisions before booking. The politicians seem to be working hard to improve the tourism environment which in turn then facilitates more visitors. We have a stunning country with many varied experiences and opportunities for travel. South Africa has such a diverse landscape and markets itself as "a world in one country".

What are your favorite sights and destinations in Germany?

Germany has so much to offer that in a month I would find it difficult to visit and enjoy all of Bavaria, let alone Germany with all the cultural, shopping and outdoor activities. And then there are the winter activities, which I would also look forward to at some time. I also really enjoyed a day visit to the Bodensee with friends.

... And in South Africa?

Here in South Africa there are many and varied experiences for both the 'arm-chair' and the energetic tourist. My favourite sights and destinations are the Drakensberg, game parks, Blyde River Canon, the Garden Route, Cape Town and the various running and hiking trails across Kwazulu-Natal and the Western Cape. But there are still many places in South Africa I have



Lewis Kaplan with his German colleague Ralph Berchtenreiter

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yet to visit and look forward to in the near future.

Would you recommend such an exchange to fellow lecturers and students alike?

In one word – DEFINITELY. To elaborate, we cannot live and work in isolation in the current global system of products and services. That is why it is up to each individual to develop and work in association with colleagues and students from other universities. I feel creating networks and personal exchanges is essential to individual and group development.

Thank you again for the opportunity to be a visitor both in Germany and at your wonderful university.

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