

## Field Report for the Marshall Plan Scholarship

- Lena Flörl
- Period of stay: 29.07.2019 to 14.02.2020
- Home university: University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences Vienna
- Host institute: Joint BioEnergy Institute (JBEI) at Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory (LBNL), Berkeley, CA, USA

My stay abroad was a full success in a way that I got to know many amazing people and made friendships for a lifetime, as well as developing a variety of new skills that would not have been possible in Austria.

My host institution, the Joint BioEnergy Institute (JBEI), provided me with excellent resources like spacious lab facilities, full support and advice from my coworkers and aspiring talks and presentations. The infrastructure, funds and equipment at Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory (LBNL) are exceptional and I highly valued the unique possibilities that were offered at a very low threshold. JBEI allows its researchers to work highly independently and freely follow their curiosity.

My coworkers were always really helpful and inclusive. We had weekly happy hours and organized board game and movie nights together. The Bay area is a vibrant place to live and there is an incredible high number of cultural programs, food from all over the world and of course plenty outdoor activities. The nearby sea provides many hidden beaches and cliffs to hike along. Mountain ranges and hills further inland offer a variety of interesting landscapes and nature to explore. The cozy town of Berkeley is crowded with students and cute book shops and across the bay San Francisco offers the amenities of a metropolis.

Living in Berkeley can be challenging as rental prices are exceptionally high (app. \$ 1000 for a single room per month) and the general standard of living notably lower. Public transportation is better than in other places in the US, but not comparable to European cities. Having a car (or friends with cars) is absolutely required for almost any excursions. To get to work and friends places I rode my bike, although the roads are quite bad and poorly lit. Depending on the area, supermarkets (especially ones selling fresh produce) can be scarce and one should definitely gather information of doctors and hospitals close by, to be ready in case of an illness.

To prepare for staying abroad I would recommend getting a good health insurance and to be aware what to do in case of an emergency. I only had a minor medical incident, but the hospital bills just skyrocketed and unlike in Austria one does not simply call an ambulance.

Earthquakes and wildfires are common but the laboratory prepares its employees relatively well. To read into the basics of what to do in case of a heavy earthquake and to be mentally prepared for this case is recommended nevertheless.

The climate in northern California can vary a lot depending on the location. In the Bay Area the weather is almost always sunny and very mild, in the summer as well as in the winter. But further up north the winter can last until May. The best time for travelling definitely is September, as it will not be raining yet but also the wildfires probably have not started and it is still quite warm.

Getting a working visa for the US can be a lengthy process (at least 6 weeks) and it is most important to stay in close contact with your host university about it. Other formalities like signing a confidentiality form or working contracts are much less of a bureaucratic effort and rather straight forward.