

## **Field Report: Carinthia University of Applied Sciences -Villach**

During the first semester of my master's program at San Diego State University I was presented with the opportunity to apply for the Marshall Plan Foundation scholarship which would fund a summer research opportunity in Villach, Austria at the Carinthia University of Applied Sciences. This was an exciting opportunity although I was initially hesitant because I was unsure how well the research would align with my ultimate research goals of assessing the ability of drones equipped with thermal infrared cameras to identify primates in forested areas and Austria is not known for their abundance of monkeys. However, in consultation with my potential advisor in Austria I learned that there is a monkey research facility near to the University that was open to the idea of participating in this research. Upon hearing this rather lucky bit of news I proceeded to write and submit my application to the Marshall Plan Foundation with enthusiasm because of this opportunity to not only spend the summer in Europe but to also conduct research using real monkeys which is something that I would not have access to at my home university. When I was notified of my acceptance into the program, I began preparing for my trip which included applying for a Visa. When applying for my Visa at the Austrian embassy in Los Angeles I was able to talk to the person processing my application who was from the Villach area and mentioned that it was the great area for people who like outdoor recreation and as an avid hiker this seemed like the perfect place to spend the summer.

The term of my stay started in late in May 2019 and coming from San Diego the transition from a densely populated city surrounded by desert to Mountainous region of Villach was striking. Taking the train from Villach to Vienna I was routed through the Salzburg region which was spectacular with the still snow-covered mountains looking like something straight off a travel brochure.

In Villach my residence was in the student housing just across the street of the campus of CUAS. The international office was wonderful and provided me with information about the university and helped me acclimate to the area. They even provided a bike for me to use for my time there which was wonderful and gave me the chance to explore and use the fantastic bike trails around Villach. Being from San Diego where cars are the main means of transportation it took some getting used to having to bike or use public transportation. After I time though, I came to really appreciate the trains and buses especially when going through the mountains or when exploring in cities and not having to worry about parking. One of the advantages of staying in Villach was also its proximity to both Slovenia and Italy so I was able to experience the different cultures of the area all within a one to two-hour train ride.

One of the things that struck me about my stay in Villach was the number of holidays and town events. The holidays usually fell on a Thursday which allowed me to take long hiking weekends to Slovenia and Italy. I was also able to attend Villacher Kirchtage which is large traditional festival that takes place over a week in downtown Villach. The festival itself reminded me of the

American State fair with carnival rides, fried foods and live music but with less livestock and more heritage.

I also had a great experience with my interactions at the university. The facility and resources available were exceptional and the faculty I had the privilege to work with extremely knowledgeable and challenged me to look at the research in new ways and increased my knowledge on the subject considerably. My time at CUAS also provided the opportunity to meet other graduate students from Austria and learn about their experience. I was even able to meet with some student that participated in the Marshall Plan program from the Austria to U.S side and it was fun to hear about their experiences in the states from an international perspective.

My time in Villach not only provided me the opportunity to conduct research that will be at the core of my master's thesis but also gave me the unique experience of living abroad which increased my confidence, challenged me academically and allowed me to explore the region in a way that a tourist might not have been able to. During this I was able to experience unique cultures, meet interesting people, and hike in the beautiful mountains of Austria. My recommendation for future Marshall Plan students and fellows is enjoy this amazing opportunity and fully experience everything your host country has to offer.