

Cambridge organic chemistry internship 06/01/2020- 04/07/2020

I am 22 years old, and I studied pharmacy at the LMU. As a part of becoming a pharmacist, every student has to finish a practical year. Half a year in a German pharmacy, the other half in any pharmaceutical area, e.g. hospital, industry or research. I chose my first half to be in research and in a foreign country, the UK. With the help of Erasmus +, I was able to financially support my needs for 6 months in the UK.

After some successful internships in organic chemistry in Germany at the LMU, I was able to apply to a research group in Cambridge, Prof. David S's group. Just as I finished my final exams at the LMU, I prepared everything for my new adventure. Compared to Munich, finding a new room in a shared flat was relatively easy. The University of Cambridge provides every worker with an accommodation service. This is very convenient and also safe, as all the landlords are tested and evaluated by the University. So I found a room in a house shared with 5 other tenants (two British, one French, one Spanish and one from the Netherlands). Although, it wasn't cheaper as Munich, commuting to my Department was shorter. By bike, it only took me 7-9 minutes to get there, which was very convenient. I immediately felt very welcomed by my housemates and the city in general. We had a great dynamic and communication. Cooking together in the evening was very common and we took advantages of our different origins and habits. We had a great variety of food, from curry, pasta, spaetzle to a pumpkin tarte. We even made our own orange jam, which sustained for more than a month.

As I started my internship in the research group of Prof S., I felt the support and kindness of each and every member. They showed me every part of the lab, how to use different instruments and how to organise everything to successfully work independently. So after the first two to three weeks, I was ready to start synthesising new compounds for my project. I was assigned to work on a project, which a second year PhD candidate started on a few months ago. Ellie, who was my mentor for this time, always helped me if I needed assistance or a different approach to solve a problem. As I had to send her my weekly report, we worked closely together, and she was always aware of my actions. If she was busy with her own research or on a conference, I was more than welcomed to seek for help in the lab and ask other members. It was a very helpful and friendly environment, where I did not feel any pressure to not ask questions. Therefore, my skills and knowledge around organic chemistry

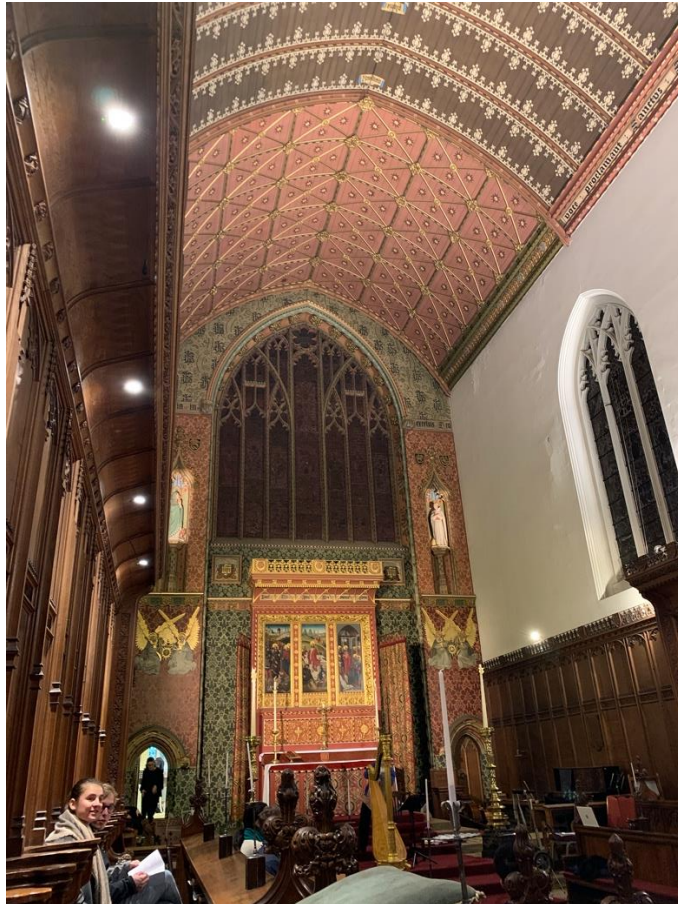
and synthesis increased quickly. Every week, the group came together for group meetings for several presentations and a general update from the professor. After 2 months of my internship, I had to present my progress in front of the whole group (approximately 25-30 people). As someone who has always struggled with anxiety and nervous feelings, I was terrified. But with proper preparation from my housemates and my mentor, I felt ready. About 10min after I started my presentation, it was already finished. My professor was happy about the progress and how the project was developing. Also, the general feedback from everyone else was positive and curious about the future. I felt relieved and supported in my ideas and strategy. Besides working in the lab, I joined a volleyball team, which trained 2 times a week. They were a diverse bunch of people from all over the world and with a different working background as it was a local sport club independent of the University. After a month of training, I started playing competitively for my club. As I have been playing a lot of volleyball during high school, my skills and motivation were much appreciated.



St. John's college in Cambridge

With the rest of my free time I was exploring Cambridge with my housemates. We visited the famous Fitzwilliam museum with its infamous artworks, roamed the streets and different colleges of Cambridge and attended several concerts of choirs with classic music assembles.

As my Dutch roommate studied art history, she was explaining every detail in the most interesting and exciting ways. With her knowledge, I was able to understand the ways of how the British society collected and saved artworks from all different times and origins. My French housemate was really engaged in classical music and looked out for the most exciting, beautiful concerts for us to listen to in the old chapels of the colleges.



Just as I was preparing my reactions for the weeks to come, Covid-19 arrived in Europe. It wasn't a difficult decision for me to make, after my professor told me that the lab will be closed for a long time that I would leave the UK and return home to Germany. Most of the international students in Cambridge chose to follow the same path. Unfortunately, things happened very quickly: On Saturday the 14th of March, I was cooking dinner with my housemates as my mother called me and informed me about my flight the next day from London Stansted. I did not have any time to say goodbye to any of my lab mates in person, nor my volleyball team. It simply felt surreal leaving the place I made my home after 3 months. After a rushed packing, some tight hugs from my housemates, who were also preparing their leave, I took the train to the airport and left the country.

Back in Germany, I was very happy to see my family and to know everyone was safe and healthy, I continued my internship as good as possible. There are not that any things to do if

one is a scientist in organic chemistry without a lab. I collected all of my experimental data, attended online seminars, read a lot of papers and books, started my report and proposed a future plan for my project. As I was always talking to my mentor and my professor, I still felt like I belonged to the group. Group and subgroup meetings were now being held online via Zoom and everyone tried their best to continue their work. As the pandemic progressed, my hopes of returning to Cambridge were getting smaller and smaller. Where the restrictions and the numbers of infections in Germany fell and normal life started to return, the situation in UK was still very bad. The department of Chemistry just recently re-opened for permanent staff, whereas visitors like me would have to wait for a long time to be allowed to re-enter the lab. Therefore, I decided to stay in Germany and finish my internship from my desk.

Although things didn't turn out the way I expected and hoped for, I collected a lot of joyful and live-changing memories, learned an immense amount of skills in organic chemistry and will always hold this time dear to me.

Overall, this internship was everything I wanted it to be and even more. Thanks to Erasmus+ I was able to enjoy my time there and don't have to worry about financial issues or that I wasn't prepared for my "journey".