Gastunternehmen

Name des Gastunternehmens: Qawra Palace Hotel

Erfahrungsbericht

Since the Intercultural Project is a compulsory part of my master studies, in April 2015, I began searching for an internship abroad. The internship had to be taken in a country where English is the official language. I was guided in my research by Dr. Helga Quadflieg, my master coordinator. Firstly, I intended to have ability to improve my communication skills and work in tourism sector in a multicultural environment. Secondly, taking my internship abroad also had to be based on two important factors: 1) it had to be no longer than 2 month’s internship that I could complete during my semester holidays; 2) my accommodation didn’t have to be far from my work placement.

After one month of searching some internships, I received some job offers in England but unfortunately these job offers were for a longer period than two months, and it means that I had to take an academic leave of absence for one semester and continue my studies after internship. Then, I came across one Maltese company on ‘Student und Arbeitsmarkt’ LMU website, that manages internship programmes and I decided to ask them for information. They replied me very quickly and therefore, I relied on their assistance to organize my job and accommodation placement for 2 months in Malta. I sent them my application and my preferences and already after two weeks they informed me about my job placement. Since the conditions were convenient I further accepted their assistance. In order to prepare for this internship I did online research about Malta, reading about history, customs, traditions and websites. During the 2 months while I was working for Qawra Palace Hotel, my main duties were:

- To undertake front of house duties, including meeting, greeting and attending to the needs of guests, to ensure a superb customer service experience.
- To deal with guests requests to ensure a comfortable and pleasant stay.
- To assist in dealing with customer complaints in an affective and courteous manner, providing or seeking solutions as quickly as possible.
- To report any maintenance, breakage or cleanliness problems to the relevant hotel department.
- To carry out word processing and filling hotel key cards, reservation forms, hotel restaurant vouchers and etc.
- To make reservations, check guests into and out of the hotel, give them information about facilities available, advise visitors about places of interest.
- To provide information about the hotel facilities, the area around the hotel e.g. pharmacies, supermarkets, clothes’ shops, restaurants, bars, transport system.

Before taking this internship at the hotel, I had already gained some knowledge from my studies and experience in customer service from my previous positions, therefore it helped me to fulfil receptionist’s tasks in the Qawra Palace Hotel. The first week I was just learning how to deal with my new tasks and responsibilities, but then I was already given more and more responsibilities and my work became more interesting for me.

The hotel where I had my internship, is very good for families and couples and it has got a wide range of facilities therefore during these two months I noticed tourists of different ages come to stay there. There were tourists from around the world, but most of all, English, Irish, Scottish, German, Russian and Italian tourists arrived to stay in this hotel. I had to work at the reception desk 40 hours per week, sometimes also at the weekend. I also had different weekly shift, from 9 am till 5 pm or from 5 pm till 1 am, therefore I could learn and observe working process in the hotel at different time. I was trained very quickly and then my supervisor already could rely on me and time by time left me alone at the reception desk.

The most difficult that I found working at reception is understanding different pronunciation and accents of people speaking English. People come from around the world, they use different body language and in order to find out the nature of their enquiry can be very difficult even if you are language skills are very good. Thus, at the beginning I found it a bit hard for me, because I hadn’t learnt all my duties and responsibilities yet and moreover I could not understand some clients’ inquiries very well. When clients were asking me some information about available hotel facilities, places of interest or even information about public transport service, I was not able to give them a precise response. I asked for my supervisor’s help and she was very patient with me and explained me everything step by step. I just needed more practice and time and also to listen to clients very attentively. Therefore, after the second week, when I already understood applicable standards procedures, was getting used to this multicultural environment, to work there became much easier for me. I could provide clients with all information, regarding the hotel and its facilities, assist clients and refer them to appropriate contacts, either in organisation or elsewhere. I already was able to handle multiple tasks, moreover I became more confident and relaxed to stay without my supervisor’s assistance alone sometimes.

As regards the country, I was very satisfied with my choice. Malta or officially the Republic of Malta is very beautiful country comprising an archipelago in the Mediterranean Sea. The country covers just over 316 km² and therefore during my internship I could visit all towns and some of them even several
This country has two official languages: Maltese and English. Maltese language is closely related to Tunisian Arabic due to the cultural and historical ties between Tunisia and Malta, but about half of the vocabulary is derived from standard Italian and Sicilian. Moreover, English words make up between 6% and 20% of the Maltese vocabulary. For these two months I only learnt a couple of Maltese words, but it was not my aim to be good at Maltese language after internship, I was happy to get acquainted with this language and listen to Maltese people speaking English, but my aim was to improve my listening and speaking skills of English language. Thus, I was always communicating English with Maltese people, and since I was at the reception desk in the international hotel, I had ability to speak English with tourists from all around the world.

I also noticed that most of Maltese people speak Italian well. Italian tourist who arrive at any Maltese hotel or in Malta in general, they expect that the Maltese speak Italian with them. The Maltese told me the reason of their good knowledge in Italian language is Italian telecommunication in Malta. Maltese population watch either Italian or English programmes, listen to the Italian and English radio with pleasure, complaining about the fact that their Maltese telecommunication is becoming more and more boring every year. Then, I read about Maltese history, and as it turned out, it is not the only reason why two-thirds of the population can speak it fluently. Italian served as Malta’s official language until 1934 and Malta was politically subordinate to Italy. Political circumstances, however, took a hand in the matter, so that this mixed dialect crystallised to become the only Semitic language still spoken indigenously in Europe. When Malta became a part of the British Empire marked the beginning of the decline of Italian, at first slowly, but later gathering speed, and the beginning of the gradual penetration of English in the islands – at first timidly, and then on a large scale. Today, Maltese and English are compulsory languages at primary and secondary school levels and they’re included in every student’s curriculum. Together with Italian language, German, Russian, Spanish, Latin, Chinese and Arabic languages are taught at the secondary school. I was told that Arabic language also was compulsory language before, but later one it was excluded as an compulsory subject from the student’s curriculum. Nowadays, students can choose between these languages, but many of them choose Italian, and according to many Maltese people, the reasons are: Malta is geographically situated close to Sicily, Italian island; and Italian tourists are the second after English tourists who visit Malta the most. I found it interesting and amazing how on this small territory, can be widely spoken all these languages: Maltese, English and Italian if to consider the fact there are just 450 thousand people living there.

Since I have stayed about two months in Malta, I also was very interested in gaining some insight into this country’s traditions and culture. The Maltese Islands have an extremely rich culture, entwined with their eclectic history and dating back hundreds of years. As a result, the Islands are home to numerous
lively activities and events, including annual feasts and special occasions. Most celebrations have at least an indirect relationship to religion and it is noteworthy to point out that over 98 percent of the population are Roman Catholics and there are about 400 churches in Malta and in Gozo altogether. But while the Church still has a strong political influence on the country, the Maltese still have no divorce or abortion, for example, it has much less of an influence on people’s daily lives than before. And I got the impression that Church attendance among younger generations is declining. While older generations may still get scandalised by certain discussions and behaviours, the younger generations of Maltese are much less likely to do so. Nevertheless, they are probably still somewhat more closed-minded than their northern European counterparts. Besides, visiting churches in Malta which are a common feature of the Maltese landscape, at the weekend I have been to some museums as well. Since I have always been very interested in history, I went to visit the National War Museum in Valletta. It is one of the most popular museums in Malta and its collection mainly focused on World War I and World War II. At my weekend I always tried to visit new places, parks, museums, churches, or just simply to take a bus and go to another town and observe how Maltese people spend their free time, where and what they eat.

As regards the Maltese cuisine, I was very delighted. Besides the fact that I could try some Maltese dishes at work, sometimes when I was in no mood for cooking at home, I have eaten out in some small restaurants. In Malta there are a lot of English pubs and Italian restaurants in order to attract tourists who come from these countries to visit Malta. As for me, I prefer to try national cuisine of every country that I visit for the first time. The Maltese cuisine is amazing and it is full of seafood, rabbit, dairy products, vegetables and fruit. I also was impressed by finger food such as pastizzi and used to eat 2 of them per day. They contain either ricotta cheese or peas wrapped in folded pastry with margarine. The great thing about pastizzi is you can have it for breakfast, lunch, dinner, take them around someone’s house as a snack. Just like an ice cream in Italy, or chocolate in Belgium - in Malta, pastizzi is a way of life.

It was a great pleasure for me to have an opportunity to know some Maltese people either at work environment or outside, and with some of them even to build a strong friendship. I noticed they are very similar to Italian people, referring to personality, a way of life and attitude towards family in general. Maltese people are very friendly, cordial and communicative. It was very easy to become a friend with them. They are a little bit more reserved than Italians, but more easy-going than the English. In Malta the family is the centre of daily-life and the ties between the family members whether young or old, are still very strong. I was told that the many public holiday and Sundays offer the best opportunity to get together and celebrate. As regards their way of life, I noticed that they don’t seem to have a serious relationship with rules. People can ignore
rules and get away with it for their own needs. For example, when they drive, they tend to break the rules, therefore being in Malta for the first time, it is better to be very careful when you cross the road. But in general, I like their way of life, they attribute a great importance to their nutrition, they spend their weekend on the beach, arriving there with their family and friends, they do any sea sport. The Maltese have passion for football, they support either England or Italy and it is related to the fact that they have always bonded very strongly with Italy and England. Maltese people also love bingo, lottery or other gambling such as horse race betting. They like to have bets with small stakes, with each other regarding any topic. The Maltese are very nice people and some people from other countries should follow their example how to enjoy the life.

Moving on again to my job experience at the reception desk at the hotel, the most interesting and important things that I found working there: were communicating with either employees or tourists and ability to work in multicultural environment. I also had opportunity to work with the hotel reservation system and improve my computer skills. I discovered that I can be flexible and calm during difficult situations or in a very busy environment, and moreover that I can efficiently and effectively use time to complete tasks. This internship also helped me to improve my administrative skills and it gave me some basis for writing my master thesis.

My internship was unpaid, but, fortunately, accommodation that was provided by the agency, was not expensive, it was also very close to my work, so I didn’t have to pay for transportation and meal that was provided by my work. My accommodation was in a very nice neighborhood, close to the sea, so before or after work I always had time to go to the beach and stay under the sun.

In conclusion I would like to say that these two months I could not only gain some professional skills, but also I had ability to know another country, its history, culture and traditions, know some people with whom I will keep in touch in future. I highly recommend other students, searching an internship abroad, to do it in this beautiful country and especially in summer.