Wie fühlt es sich an, in einer fremden Kultur zu leben und in einer fremden Sprache den Alltag zu bewältigen? RITA FORBES hat diese Frage fünf Gesprächspartnern gestellt, die entsprechende Erfahrungen im Ausland sammeln konnten.

Studying or working abroad is an experience unlike any other. It allows you to go deeper than you ever could during a few weeks on holiday. You can find out what everyday life is like in another country, immerse yourself in its language and culture and form lasting friendships. You can also combine your own passions and interests with a stay abroad, whether that means studying an intriguing academic subject, doing volunteer work, caring for children as an au pair or taking a new step in your established career. When you study or work abroad, you transplant your life into a new setting.

On the following pages, you will meet five people who did — or are doing — just that. They have had very different experiences, but they would all give you the same advice: "Do it!" Spending a few months (or more) abroad can vastly improve your language skills, make your CV stand out to potential employers and give you a new sense of self-confidence. Are you ready to be inspired? Let’s go!

You'll find more stories as well as a list of travel organizers at www.spotlight-online.de/abroad
A big move to Berkeley

Working for a German company doesn’t necessarily mean working in Germany. Three years ago, Florian Michahelles, 41, moved to Berkeley, California, as part of his job with Siemens. He describes the opportunity to relocate as a “great coincidence.” “Various factors came together, such as the company strategy and my personal profile and plans.” Siemens has locations all over the world. “Usually, there is a mix between local hires and employees working abroad,” Florian says. He is the head of a research group in the field of device communication, the internet of things and semantic technologies. “My job is to scout for new ideas at universities in the Bay Area, to shape them for industrial needs and transfer them to the business units of my corporation,” he says. Working abroad has many benefits. “Routines, procedures and forms of behaviour you take for granted are continuously challenged. This allows you to embrace new opportunities, experience alternatives and select from options you wouldn’t have even looked for.”

Florian and his wife have three children, aged five, nine and 12. “This was a major decision for our family,” he says, “and it was important to consider the impact and consequences. Key considerations involved availability of schools, accommodation, quality of life and cost of living. It didn’t seem to be such a big step at the beginning. But in the end, it took my family and myself about a year to get adjusted to the various differences with regard to culture, ways of communicating, education, the health-care system and cost of living. We considered it important to have a fulfilling everyday life, including the compelling job position and a joyful social life.” The family plans to stay in Berkeley for at least four more years.

Florian’s advice to people making a similar move: “Embrace the new opportunity with curiosity. Go beyond good-bad and right-wrong judgements, and throw away the constant temptation to compare your host country with your home country. Be open and grateful to experience, and learn, so you can get empowered to select the best from both worlds.”

Volunteering in beautiful Bali

Annika Wohne, 20, wasn’t sure what she wanted to do after finishing school. “So I decided to take some time to ‘recover’ from the 13 years of school and to do something for myself,” she says. Working at a German company’s branch in Grainau, Bavaria, she was interested in spending time abroad. When she was considering her options, the internship programme in Science and Engineering (RISE) provided insight into many different aspects of the profession of a neuroscientist.

Melina describes English as the lingua franca of science — she was used to reading scientific papers in English. Working in an English-speaking environment was new, however. She felt nervous about speaking the language during the first few days, but she soon became more comfortable. “It was great,” she remembers, “because I could use English as my work-and-think language. I learned many new technical terms in English, too.”

Melina has always been interested in spending time abroad. When she decided to take some time to “recover” from the 13 years of school and to do something for herself, “I could use English as my work-and-think language,” she says. “I learned many new technical terms in English, too.”

A helpful resource

The Deutsche Studierendeninitiative (DSI) has listings of reputable German companies that can help you organise your trip. There are several advantages to using such a company: it can simplify the process for you, German law applies if anything goes wrong, and since you don’t have to send money to an organization in a foreign country, you avoid expensive banking fees. In addition, the DSI’s website has a helpful search tool — “Sprachreise Finder” — where you can look for trips according to language, country, type of programme and more: [www.fdsv.de](http://www.fdsv.de).