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Stellenbosch University
Department of Economics

The Double-Degree Program in
Development Economics - An experience
from a study abroad at Stellenbosch
University - South Africa.

A guide through the Stellenbosch University

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1 Introduction and overview

Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world. (Nelson Mandela)

Taking this quote literally, education should change the world and as Mandela refers to, it should change the world in a positive sense. However, education is unfortunately not always practised in a way that it changes the world in order to make it fairer and education is not always benefitting the poor and underprivileged. South Africa is an example.

In the following, I want to give a broad overview about my experience with the study program of a Double-Degree in Development Economics which is done by a partnership between the Georg-August-University of Goettingen and the Stellenbosch University - South Africa. Thereby, I give you my point of view about what is necessary to consider within the application process for both - the study program itself and within the visa application process. Furthermore, I will point out my expression about the country, the culture and people and about studying at the university in Stellenbosch.

When I decided to study Development Economics and the Double Degree program with the Stellenbosch University, I motivated my decision in an almost altruistic way. I wanted to experience another country and culture beyond the borders of Europe and familiar culture. Moreover, I was interested in how a emerging market economy like South Africa works and what the social structures are like. South Africa, the "Rainbow nation" called, hold a lot of potential for a well-functioning multicultural society / economy as well as a high potential for conflicts due to the big differences in beliefs, religion, ethnos, education, income and life standard. That is, what my expectation was about.

Ex-post, I can conclude that these expectations were indeed fulfilled and more than that. Thinking about a country, its potential and problems, and being and living there are two different things that also affected my personal opinion about different countries and my personality in general. Notwithstanding the fact that I saw various parts of South African living and working, I only saw a small part of the country and its people what also makes me think about how much I really know about my home country - Germany. The rest of my report is structured as follows. In section 2, I will summarize what I think is important to consider for preparation before going abroad. I will refer to the study and visa application process, the area (Stellenbosch) where one will live and to different accomodation possibilities. In addition to that I will briefly underline the importance of a medical insurance and necessary inoculations. I will tell you my experience concerning the flight booking process and other important things which make the start in Stellenbosch easier as well.

Section 3 describes my experience about living in Stellenbosch and everything not directly connected to studying. Section 4 will refer to the university in Stellenbosch and the studying experience. Section 5 concludes.



Here, you see a first impression of the campus of Stellenbosch university. And yes, the weather is almost all the time this wonderful and hot.

2 Preparation

2.1 Study application

First of all, one has to apply for the Double Degree program in Development Economics in combination with the application for the Master program in Development Economics itself. If one gets accepted, necessary formalities have to be done:

- The contract with the DAAD (Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst) has to be signed in Göttingen. Thereby, it is important to consider scholarships that one may already get in his or her home country.
- For being accepted at the Stellenbosch University, several documents (Responsibility of the student - have to be signed by the student and the parents, a copy from the passport, a CV, the school and the Bachelor certificate in English) have to be filled in and sent to the Stellenbosch University. This can be done via mail.
- After being accepted at the Stellenbosch University, the student gets a *letter of admission for study visa application*. This one has to be handed in when applying for the study visa.
- In order to finish the registration, the *university academic fee for the year* has to be paid. For me, that was R 6200. I could pay this fee personally after arriving in Stellenbosch in the administration building at the university.

2.2 Goettingen Exams in Stellenbosch

Since the study schedules are overlapping, it could happen that some exams from lectures taking place in Goettingen, have to be written under supervision in Stellenbosch. Usually, that is not a problem. But it is important to inform the lectures in Goettingen and Stellenbosch and arrange the supervision. Therefore, a formular *Request to take Home University exams at Stellenbosch University* has to be signed by the lecturer or another person who is responsible for the lecture in Goettingen. Formally, the student has to show this document at Stellenbosch University to the person who is responsible to arrange the exams in Stellenbosch. This person can be your supervisor or the office manager at the department where you will study. From us, it was in the end not required to show this document.

2.3 Visa application

Since the study visa application process slightly changes from year to year, I can only give my experience with the visa application process. Generally, my study visa application was fast and uncomplicated. The people at the embassy in Berlin were very friendly and cooperative. Nevertheless, I also know from some fellow students that this process can be complicated and take more time in some cases. Maybe, it depends who you are talking to or who is handling your application. The following documents were required for my study visa:

- International passport (Reisepass) which has to be valid for no less than thirty days after the foreigner's intended departure from South Africa. You send the original document to the embassy and get it back - hopefully with the desired visa inside.
- The completed application form. At some points, the answers required remain a little unclear when filling in this document but if you think logically, it is quite easy and fast to fill in this document.
- The *letter of admission for study visa application* which you get from Stellenbosch University.
- A proof of financial means. Here, the embassy just wants to see if you are in case of emergency able to pay the journey out of the country. An official bank statement is enough.
- Earlier, it was stated by students that a cash deposit was necessary. For me, it was not required.
- Proof of medical cover. All the students that I know had an insurance from *momentum health*. This insurance pays in case you get sick in South Africa for seeing the doctor or a necessary medical certificate if you cannot attend an exam due to sickness.
- Original police clearance certificate. You can get this at the town hall of the city where you are registered.
- A medical report stating your general state of health.
- A radiological report certifying that you have been examined and that no signs of active pulmonary tuberculosis can be detected (must not be older than 6 months at the time of its submission). It is

important to arrange an appointment with the radiologist as early as possible because this process could take some time.

- A proof of payment of the application fee. So, you have to transfer the money (52 € in my case) beforehand.
- A DHL Expressbrief Prepaid envelope to return the applicant's passport.

Generally, I suggest to apply for the visa as early as possible (latest 3 months before the departure to South Africa). I still could send my documents to Berlin but some fellow students who went to South Africa a semester later had to travel to Berlin and hand the documents over at the embassy personally. So, make sure what is required in your case.

2.4 Accommodation

Accommodation possibilities in Stellenbosch exist a lot. You could live in a university accommodation (e.g. Academia residence). Therefore, you have to apply at the homepage of the Postgraduate office for such a residence. The rent is affordable (150 – 400 € per month depending on the residence and room you want to get). You can also decide to get a room in a private house (shared facility). There are also rooms and apartments at the homepage of the Postgraduate office. Usually, you can trust these offers. In any case, you may have to transfer the deposit and the first-month's rent in advance from Germany.

If you prefer to search for a room directly in Stellenbosch, it is also possible to book a room in a Hostel (also suggested once at the University homepage) and search for a permanent room in Stellenbosch. This could of course take some time and you have to find out where to ask and look for a room. For me it took some time to find the better and cheaper options when I talked to fellow students and friends in Stellenbosch. Because I wanted a save accommodation when I arrived in Stellenbosch, I searched and found a room at a private house when I was still in Germany and I had quite good roommates. Of course, you may have to adjust your standard of living or your expectations.

2.5 Medical insurance and inoculations

Generally, a foreign medical insurance like *momentum health* is enough to go abroad. Therefore, I paid approximately 30 € per month. If you go to the doctor in Stellenbosch, you always have to check in advance if this doctor accepts *momentum health*.

Moreover, you can get an additional foreign medical insurance which is located in Germany, e.g. by the *Hanse Merkur*. This insurance pays if you have to be transported back to Germany in case of severe sickness. In the end, I did not make use of this insurance.

The required inoculations are also stated by the ministry of foreign affairs. Depending on what you want to do in South Africa (e.g. travelling to other countries where more inoculations could be necessary), the following list is not complete:

- All the standard inoculations suggested by the Robert-Koch-institute
- Typhus
- Tetanus
- Hepatitis A and B
- Malaria provision is only necessary if you travel in the areas of South Africa where malaria is present (e.g. the Kruger national park). But if you want to stay in the Western Cape, the provision is not urgently necessary. If you still want some preparation, you can buy pills that you take directly before you visit an area in which malaria is present. But these pills are quite expensive and the side effects could be bad. If you really get malaria, the people (doctors and hospitals) in South Africa know better how to deal with the situation anyway. I never took any of these pills but I also did not visit any areas in which malaria was present.
- Yellow fever inoculation. Only necessary if you are planning to visit a country in which yellow fever is present or if you travel through such a country because in this case, the officials in South Africa could check whether you are prepared against yellow fever.

2.6 Flight booking

Generally, I suggest to book the flight as early as possible. I got a direct flight from Frankfurt to Cape Town and paid approximately 500 €. If you do not know exactly when to go back to Germany, it could be wise to book the back flight later when you are in Stellenbosch. Of course, it could sometimes be better to book the flight very late in order to get special last-minute offers but this is a case of good luck. Therefore, I would rather go for a safe flight as early as possible.

2.7 Arriving - transport to Stellenbosch

Usually, it is easy to arrange the transport from Cape Town International airport to Stellenbosch by the International office of Stellenbosch University. The Postgraduate Office offers this possibility. I strongly suggest to take this opportunity since you are new in the country and may not know where exactly to go and to whom to talk to. The organisation from the university was excellent. First, they brought us to the International Office at the university where a short pre-registration and welcoming took place and later, they also brought us to our different homes.

If you want to leave the country in between your study due to travelling in holidays or at the end of your stay, you have to organize your transport back to the airport alone. Several transport organizations are recommended by the university. I used *Bettina shuttle* - www.bettinashuttle.co.za - which was not the cheapest but worked quite well (for one transport I paid between R350 – R420. Of course, this is cheaper from other organizations but I suggest to rather go for a safer option. I will talk about transport in general later in this report.

2.8 Finances

With an usual German bank account, you can work in South Africa. You can draw money with your credit or debit card but in this case, you will pay a fee for any transaction. This fee varies if you pay with the card or pay cash. Another option is to get a student bank account from the *DKB - Deutsche Kreditbank*. There, you can open a bank account and transfer money to this German account. When using the credit card of this bank account, it does not cost any fee to draw money or pay with the card. A third option would be to open a South African student bank account (e.g. at the ABSA Bank in Stellenbosch). This is also for free for students. Then, you can transfer money to this bank account and work with a South African debit card. In this case, I suggest to transfer a bigger amount of money to the South African bank account and only pay the international transfer fee once (25 – 30 €).

3 Living in Stellenbosch - experience

3.1 Accomodation in Stellenbosch

As described above, I do not regret my accomodation choice. The house where I was living in was big enough and offered a big and beautiful garden. My roommates very friendly and helpful. The big advantage was that I got in contact with locals from the beginning on. That offered the possibility to go beyond meeting fellow students from university and international students.

My only problem with this accomodation was that we always had problems with the cleaning status of the house. Of course, it could be that my opinion about this was too strict but in any case, I strongly suggest to talk and make clear rules.

3.2 Safety

You will get a good introduction about safety in Stellenbosch and South Africa during the introduction week of the Postgraduate office. It is very wise to attend this week because you get in contact with other students who are also new in a new country and culture. Furthermore, you will learn a lot about studying and living in Stellenbosch.

Generally, you have to be a lot more careful about your safety and property than in Germany or a country like Germany. Even if I never got robbed and nothing got stolen, I tried to follow some simple rules:

- Do not go out at night alone if avoidable and if so, do not do it (too) drunk.
- Be aware of the *green route*. The *green route* is an area in the inner city in Stellenbosch and around the university which is protected for 24 hours. There is police and there are safe guards. So, if you feel unsafe, just talk to them.
- Do not let your valuables lay around outside in a restaurant or visible in a car. Maybe, it is also wise not to wear your most expensive jewelry when you go to South Africa.

- Be careful in outside Stellenbosch in the countryside area. Do not talk to people, you do not trust or at least be careful. I never had any problems and was very open when talking to people but at least, I tried to keep my eyes open.
- Be careful at what time you use public transport. Regular buses are rare and trains most of the times full and safe only during the day.
- What I write here, sounds worse than it actually is. I think when you are in South Africa, you will consider for yourself what you can do and what you rather should not.

3.3 Communication

It is quite easy and cheap to get a South African SIM card at the university in the Neelsie where the social life takes place. There, you will find the Vodacom store which offers the best network quality and which is not much more expensive than the cheaper providers of telecommunication.

In the shopping centre within the city - *Eikesstad Mall* - you will find other providers such as *Cell C*. I got two different SIM cards due to 2 reasons. For going out at night, I used a cheap and old mobile phone and left my more expensive one at home in case of a robbery. Moreover, *Cell C* offers a possibility for cheap calls to Germany which made it quite easy to communicate if Skype was not available.

3.4 Mobility and transport

In Stellenbosch, almost everything is in walking distance. If you want to see the landscape a little bit or you want to take advantage of the gym - which I can recommend - a bicycle would be appropriate.

Nevertheless, to travel out of Stellenbosch, you need faster transport systems. Therefore, you have the following possibilities:

- Busses and mini busses: Mini busses are little transporters which bring you to certain places. Most of the times, these travelling opportunity is safe, fast and cheap. But not always are the busses in a very good condition and the driving style is exciting.
- Trains: There is a train going from Stellenbosch to Cape Town. I would only use it during day time when other passengers are travelling with you. Otherwise, you could end up as an easy victim and the journey becomes more expensive than expected...
- Car: At the university and outside of the university in Stellenbosch, there exist companies that rent out cars for weeks, month and even a whole year. This opportunity is by far the most expensive but you will also me the most flexible. Companies like *Avis* or *Hertz* have special offers and it is always clever to negotiate or think about when you really need a car. Sometimes, it is better just to hire a car for the recess weeks and go on a journey then.

Maybe, some of your roommates or fellow student have or rent a car which you then can share.

I took a car from a private person who is working at the International Office at the university. The price was ok - R4500 per month - and therefore, the car was safe and working whenever I wanted

it to work. Technical problems were solved quickly and therefore, I do not regret this choice.

Last but not least, you could also buy a car at the beginning of your stay and sell it in the end. Here, you should inform yourself well and talk to locals to get a good offer and also a working car. Nice oldtimers like a VW Beetle or an old Mercedes Benz are great but only if they do what they are built for.

3.5 Free time activities

Stellenbosch and the area around offers a lot of activities such as wine tastings, hiking, mountain bike tours, experiencing Cape Town, its nightlife and the beautiful beaches. Almost everything is affordable in times of a weak South African Rand but, of course, some things are more expensive than others. Just talk to fellow students and inform yourself at the university what is possible. Everybody should be able to find something.

Stellenbosch in August (Winter) invites for a walk through the beautiful landscape.



After seeing the nature, you could rest at a wine yard and enjoy a wine tasting at one of the wine yards that are at the edge or around Stellenbosch.



3.6 Travelling around Stellenbosch and in South Africa

Around Stellenbosch, there are various wine yards, beautiful mountains and beaches. This variety of landscapes offers the opportunity to experience different forms of trips and free time activities. You can have a nice day at the beach (be careful, in summer, the sun will!! burn your face), or you get up early in the sunrise and climb Stellenbosch mountain or table mountain if you have the possibility to go to Cape Town. In the evening, you enjoy the sunset with a glass of wine in one of the wine yards or in a nice (but for Germans) quite cheap restaurants. In the following, I want to give you some expressions about what I have seen:

1. Wine yard *Tokara*

If you have the time and possibility and if you like wine, there are more than enough opportunities to visit one (or more than one) of the beautiful wine yards in and around Stellenbosch. Stellenbosch lies on the wine route which you can drive yourself if you have a car available. Besides, there are guided wine tours which are offered by many companies (information will be given in university). These tours become cheaper if you go on a wine tour in a bigger group (4-10 people are ideal) because then the fixed payment for the driver decreases. Moreover, everybody can drink more than one little glass of wine. You will be picked up at an agreed point in Stellenbosch and bring you back after the tour. Depending on how many wine yards you wish to see within one day (tour), it can take the whole day and you will be at least a little drunk.

If you prefer to go on your own - which I did most of the times - I give you an impression of the view from the wine yard *Tokara* which is a 10-15 min drive away from Stellenbosch. Here, the tasting of 6 wines per day is even for free. Furthermore, I can recommend the restaurant which is also

located at the wine yard. It is quite fancy and offers an advanced kitchen but at normal German restaurant prices.



2. Cape Town

A first trip to Cape Town was offered by the International Office in the introduction week. A lot of these trips were and are organized by ISOS (International Student Organisation of Stellenbosch). Every (international) student can become a member of the ISOS for a small fee of R100. Members can join a lot of trips (e.g. to Robben Island, Cape Town, wine yards, hiking trips, music festivals) over the whole semester for small money. The advantage is that everything is organized.

In Cape Town we saw for example the Water Front:



In addition to that, we had the chance to take a first look at one of Cape Town's beaches - Camp's bay (the Miami beach of South Africa):



Of course, this is just the first step to explore the city, its attractions and nightlife later on:



3. Safaries

If you like to get to know the South African wildlife, you can visit one of the national parks in South Africa (e.g. the Kruger national park - quite expensive, the Karoo national park) or one of the Private Game Reserves (smaller national parks).

Depending on the kind and duration of the trip, it is more or less expensive and time intensive. The following two pictures are from a Safari at the Aquila Safari Private Game Reserve in the Western Cape in South Africa. It is approximately 2,5 hours away from Stellenbosch and in the ex-post view more an activity for families than for wildlife experience. Nevertheless, it was worthwhile to visit:



4. River Rafting on the Breede River You can plan this trip very flexible on different levels. Either you join just for one day or the whole weekend.



3.7 Bank accounts and finances

As already mentioned, you can use your German or different home country bank account or look for a bank like the *DKB* which offers the opportunity to pay with card or draw cash for free in certain countries like South Africa.

A third option would be to open a South African student bank account (e.g. at the ABSA Bank in Stellenbosch). This is also for free for students. Working with ABSA was easy and safe. You only have to be a little careful where you draw money. Don't do it at unsafe or dodgy looking places but in shopping centres or the bank itself. Then, the probability for juggled cashpoints is lower.

Depending on what you do (dinners, trips, renting a car or enjoying wine which is not affordable in Germany), you can spend more or less money per month. If you live in a usual way, South Africa is cheaper than Germany. Especially, the weak South African Rand makes it attractive to buy new clothes or go out more often than you are used to. Hotels and trips are cheaper anyway.

When buying groceries, it depends where you go and what you want to buy. For example, country specific goods like certain vegetables and meat are cheaper, whereas cheese and imported products are more expensive than in Germany and even increasing in price in times of a Rand depreciation. Nevertheless, the average variable costs usually lie between 250 – 400 €.

4 The Stellenbosch University

The Stellenbosch university is big but personal. Especially, on the Master's level, the classes were smaller and the relationship between lecturer and student much closer than in Germany. Student support was never a problem, you only need to ask. Most of the times, you do not even need a fixed appointment because the *open door policy* at the department of economics where I studied gave me the chance to just go to the lecturers and talk. If the door is open, you are welcome to. If you need data or recommendations for your ideas or chosen literature for an essay, you always meet people that are interested in what you are doing.

You will also receive much help for your administration process in the beginning or if you have any questions regarding a possible extension of your visa, social engagement or trips you want to plan.



4.1 Arriving and administration process

After arriving in Stellenbosch and a first *pre-administration* at the International Office, you will be brought to your new homes.

The week before the lectures start, the university offers an introduction week which I strongly recommend to join. You will be told about the life and culture of the people, about safety issues, the use of the library and the university online portals.

Especially, the knowledge about how using the library is very important since you will spend a lot of time there, searching for literature to read or data to use for your analysis (if you study something which is data-related.)

Moreover, you have to pay the registration fee at the Administration A building if you have not trans-

ferred it electronically beforehand. You will have to make a photo at an announced place in order to get your student card which opens the doors for your in a literate sense. Most of the doors are electronically locked so that you need your student card to enter and leave the working places. Furthermore, you can load printing money on the student card and therefore, will be able to use the printers, scanners, etc. I suggest to do the administration as soon as possible after you have arrived because in the first official lecture week, all the administration offices are full of students (mostly undergraduates) and you will have to plan some (a lot of) time to wait until it is your turn.

4.2 Courses - choice, content and workload

At this point, I can only talk about courses in the Master's economics program which I studied. In the Double Degree in Development Economics, you have to pass *Dynamic Economic Theory*, *Master's Macroeconomics*, *Master's Microeconomics* and three further courses of your own choice.

The three mentioned mandatory courses will give you 6.7 credits in Germany and the workload for one of these big courses is indeed higher than in Germany. Often, you have to hand in group essays (sometimes also with own data work), assignments or pass two 2 hours exams. On the one hand, it will stretch your effort over the semester and your mark will be a composition of different marks. On the other hand, the workload is higher than in Germany and since most of the lectures are mandatory to join, you are less flexible with trips during the week or the preference to study at home on your own.

As additional courses I took *International Finance*, *Economics of Education 1 and 2* and *Advanced Time-Series Analysis* that will give you 3.3 credits in Germany. I can recommend all three courses, whereas in the education courses, the focus is more on South Africa and the Sub-Saharan African countries. So, you will have a narrower focus for your study in these courses. But, the lecturers are always encouraged to implement your own ideas in the course program. Therefore and because I have learnt something about education from another perspective, I enjoyed these courses.

Generally, the organization of the courses is more in your hand regarding the topic you consider for an essay or the data you want to use. In addition to that, the work is more empirically related than theoretical. Hence, I experienced as an enrichment to my more theoretical studies in Germany.

Nevertheless, the support from the department is manifold. So, make use of it.

4.3 Societies and voluntary engagement

The university offers a wide range of societies and engagement opportunities. For example, you can join the dancing or acting society if you are a passionate dancer or actor/actress. But make sure that you have the time beside your studies. In the beginning of your stay, the likelihood is high that you accept to many responsibilities and plan too much. Maybe, it is better to focus on your studies first in order to experience the workload that you will have to fulfill and then see what you can do on the side.



As a Double Degree student - receiving a scholarship from the DAAD - I was asked to participate in one social project in every semester. I decided to engage in the Voluntary Community Engagement (VCE) program. There, I taught grade R children at the Ikaya primary school in the township Kayamandi which is located nearby Stellenbosch. We organized and taught onetimes a week at this school. It was amazing to experience another part of the culture in South Africa beside the university and the beautiful holiday feeling you will consider during your stay in South Africa. Moreover, it broadens your view on a country of contrasts. Most of the children in Kayamandi come from very poor families and may not have the chance to use their full potential as you and I have. Besides, there exist a lot of projects, some of those you have to organize yourself to a bigger extent. The VCE program is almost fully organized by the International Office.



5 Conclusion

If you have the opportunity to experience South Africa, the life and the studies there, then take it. South Africa is beautiful, fun and holiday, hard work and studying at one of the best university of the country (Stellenbosch) but also poverty, contrasts and persisting racism and problems.

It will not always be easy going but it will in any case enrich your life and personality.

A

Addresses and numbers to consider

In the following, I give you a list of email addresses and numbers that you can consider:

- Carina Smit (Part-time lecturer and responsible for exam and lecture organization) Title: Ms Email: carina@sun.ac.za Phone: +27 (0)21 808 2898 Office: Schumann 506A
- Werner de Wit (Short Programmes, Incoming Summer Schools and Integration) Phone: +27 21 808 9002 Email: wdw@sun.ac.za He rents out cars to students.
- Mr Grant Demas (Community Engagement and Support Services) Phone: +27 21 808 9021 Email: gdemas@sun.ac.za He is responsible for the VCE program.