ERFAHRUNGSBERICHT ÜBER STUDIENERFAHRUNGEN IN BAYERN
[Report on study experiences in Bavaria]

Herkunftsland [county of origin]:	Croatia
Studium in Bayern [program in Bavaria]:	von [from] 10.2021 bis [until] 03.2025
Hochschule in Bayern [university in Bavaria]:	JMU Würzburg
Studienfach [subject of study]:	Biomedicine
Abschluss [degree]:	PhD in Bavaria

Practical experience and tips

I am pleased to share my academic journey in Bavaria at the University of Würzburg, which was made possible through the support of BAYHOST. Here, I would like to highlight some essential tips and tricks that helped me during this experience, and I hope it will assist others pursuing a similar path.
After obtaining my double master's degree in molecular biology and life sciences, I was determined to earn a doctoral degree. Fortunately, a professor from the University of Würzburg was looking for a new PhD student who could be funded by a BAYHOST scholarship. I contacted the professor through a professor from my home university, the University of Zagreb.

My first step was to prepare the necessary documentation to **apply for the BAYHOST scholarship**. One of the most important aspects of this preparation was to start early, as the submission deadline was December 1st. While most of the documentation was relatively easy to gather, it is worth noting that my degree and grade transcripts needed to be translated into English and certified by a notary. The most challenging requirement was proving my English language skills. Since the University of Würzburg and BAYHOST required a C1 level of English proficiency, I decided to take the academic IELTS exam, which was one of the accepted exams as proof of English skills by the University of Würzburg.

After receiving confirmation that I was selected for the BAYHOST scholarship, I could **apply for a doctoral degree program** at the Graduate School of Life Sciences (GSLS) and the University of Würzburg. First, I needed to complete the GSLS application, which required a supervision agreement, proof of funding, and a certified copy of my master's degree in English. Once I was accepted to GSLS, I could apply to the University of Würzburg through the International Office.

To **apply to the university**, I needed to fill out their application forms, which are available on their website. Along with the application forms, I had to submit a certified copy of all my degrees in English, proof of English language proficiency, confirmation from GSLS of my admission, and evidence of health insurance. A copy of the European Health Insurance Card (EHIC) is accepted for EU students. This administrative process was time-consuming, as both GSLS and the International Office are short-staffed. Therefore,

it was essential to prepare certain documents in advance and verify by email with GSLS and the International Office for a complete list of the required documents.

Würzburg is a charming city of perfect size with a rich history and good wine. It has around 130,000 citizens, with approximately 20% of them being students. It offers excellent entertainment options for young people, including various festivals, concerts and wine-tasting events. Sports facilities are also readily available and of good quality. The University of Würzburg is the biggest employer in the region and has multiple faculties with modern equipment for teaching and research. Finding **accommodation** in Würzburg is quite challenging, especially for PhD students who are not eligible for the students' dormitories. It is crucial to begin searching for a room or apartment at least six months before your move. I found it helpful to search for accommodation through websites such as WG-Gesucht, Immowelt, and ImmoScout24.

I have **arrived** directly in Würzburg from Zagreb by bus. The travel was around 12 hours long. I chose to travel by bus because I had much luggage, although it was quite exhausting. If you do not have as much luggage, I would recommend flying instead. There are direct flights from Zagreb to both Frankfurt and Munich airports, from which you can catch a fast train to Würzburg.

The biggest issue in Würzburg is **public transportation**, particularly the bus system. The main problem is the inconsistent frequency of the buses. Often, two or three buses with nearly identical routes arrive one after another, leaving 30 to 60 minutes with no transportation options. For example, if someone works late in the lab, until 8 p.m., getting home can be quite challenging. Therefore, biking is a much more reliable way to get to the lab or university. Additionally, only specific night buses operate during the night, and they do not cover all areas of Würzburg and rarely come.

In my opinion, the **BAYHOST scholarship** is sufficient to cover most of the basic living costs, such as accommodation, food, and semester fees. My rent was 560 euros, including utilities for a small studio apartment; however, due to the current housing crisis, the rent for a studio apartment without utilities has increased to approximately 600 to 700 euros. There is also the option of renting a room in a shared apartment, which typically costs between 300 and 400 euros, depending on the location within the city. A typical lunch at the university canteen ranges from 3 to 5 euros, but I usually cooked my meals, as my laboratory was not close to the canteen. The semester fee, which includes a transportation ticket, is around 150 euros per semester. If you do not possess an EHIC, a typical student health insurance policy will cost between 80 and 90 euros. I received additional funding from the university to cover all my living expenses. If you do not secure additional funding, I strongly recommend finding a part-time job, which BAYHOST must approve in advance. Additionally, it is wise to have some savings set aside to cover any unexpected expenses that may arise.

Academic experiences and further qualifications

I completed my PhD at the Institute for Pharmacology and Toxicology, located next to the University Hospital Würzburg. The **laboratory** was well-equipped, and I had the support of a fantastic team. During my

time at the Institute, I attended literature and scientific seminars. Through the GSLS, I participated in various **workshops**, including Good Clinical Practice, EndNote, Visual Communication of Science, and Project Management. Additionally, I attended three international scientific conferences: two in Würzburg and one in Malaga, Spain. These conferences covered topics that interest me, allowing me to learn and exchange experiences and ideas with scientists worldwide. I also participated in three summer schools, which were held in Zagreb, Croatia; Hasselt, Belgium; and one that was conducted online due to at the time ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

I am delighted with my **PhD work**, as it resulted in a scientific publication in one of the leading journals in the field of toxicology. I believe I was well-integrated into the department, as my colleagues at the Institute continue to seek my advice on various research methods even today. My relationship with other researchers and my supervisor was great, and we frequently discussed scientific and technical challenges and supported one another in our work.

The most important skills I developed as a PhD candidate were writing different types of **reports and applications** and effectively presenting my work to targeted audiences. These skills are crucial for my future career goals as a regulatory affairs specialist or clinical researcher.

The title of my **PhD project** is "Cellular effects of hemp and its cannabinoids in vitro." The goal of this project was to use hemp and its constituents as a model to characterize the biological effects of widely marketed hemp phytoproducts in depth. This research aimed to enhance understanding of their health-promoting properties and potential adverse effects. The data obtained during the three and a half years of funding from BAYHOST were excellent and contributed to both peer-reviewed publication and my dissertation. The past three and a half years have been incredibly productive and exciting. During my time in Bavaria, I gained substantial knowledge in developing and designing scientific projects and protocols. Additionally, pursuing a PhD is not only a vital step for a successful career in academia or industry, but it also offers the chance to acquire diverse skills, including critical thinking and efficient organization, which will undoubtedly benefit me in my future career.

Plans and activities after the BAYHOST scholarship

The most important step soon will be **defending my doctoral thesis**. Following that, I plan to seek a position in the pharmaceutical industry where I can apply the qualifications and skills, I have gained during my PhD project and through the BAYHOST. In conclusion, I would like to express my gratitude to the BAYHOST for providing me with an incredible international experience that has significantly contributed to my personal and professional development.