

# Essay from Expatriate in Germany

KIM Yong Tae

## 1. Introduction

I was assigned to KYB Europe GmbH (hereinafter "KEU") in Germany in February 2021. I experienced many things as an expatriate for about two years until returning to Japan in December 2022. KEU is a sales base of commercial shock absorbers (hereinafter "SAs") for western Europe. I was in charge of purchasing operations during the expatriation.

I had never imagined that I would live in Europe, and it had been about 10 years since my father and I had travelled to Germany when I was a university student, so I was deeply moved when we arrived at Frankfurt Airport. Given that the memories of ten years ago have led to the present, you can hardly know where there will be a turning point in your life.

The following introduces some of the short but very valuable experiences I obtained both on business and in private life during the two-year stationing.

## 2. Life in Germany

Germany (the Federal Republic of Germany), with a population of 84 million and a total area of 350,000 square kilometers, is a federal republic located in Central and Western Europe.

Düsseldorf, where I was stationed, is located on the banks of the Rhine River and has a population of approximately 620,000 and an area of 217 square kilometers. With these figures, Düsseldorf may look like a small- to medium-sized city but is well known in the economic and artistic fields. Economically, several global companies are headquartered there. In the arts, the Düsseldorf Academy of Fine Arts is located in the city.

Geographically, Düsseldorf is easily accessible from the Netherlands and Belgium. Many Japanese companies have their bases in Düsseldorf and around 5000 Japanese people live there. One of the attractions of Düsseldorf is that you can experience Asian culture in spite of being in Europe.

I have written only good things about Düsseldorf, but one of the difficulties was the cold due to the extremely

low amount of sunshine during winter. In winter, when the solar radiation drops to an extreme level, it was dark both when I reported to work in the morning and left each evening. The decrease in sunshine affects people's lives to the extent that there are reports of an increase in the suicide rate due to depression in Germany. In fact, winter was like a long tunnel. During my first winter in Germany, I took extra care to keep my spirits up both on business and in private life as far as possible. I also tried to go out and move my body even when it was cold.

In addition, COVID-19 hit all of Europe immediately after I was sent to Düsseldorf. In Germany at that time, the daily number of people infected with COVID-19 exceeded 60,000 and all shops except supermarkets were shut down. It was almost impossible for people to go out accordingly. I continued a round trip between work and home every day. Naturally, all restaurants were closed, so I had to cook my own meals every day, even though I was expatriated abroad. This was the first time in my life that I had been stationed overseas, but I was not allowed to go out, which was a hardship at the beginning of my expatriation.



Photo 1 Masks for protecting yourself

### 3. Work in Germany

As mentioned above, I was in charge of purchasing operations during my expatriation in Germany. KEU is a commercial product sales base whose main distribution channel is stock sales to the European market and has about 30 employees in Germany. The main businesses are purchasing and inventory control of commercial SAs, coil springs, and mounting kits, which are primarily purchased from the KYB Group's production sites and outsourced suppliers.

The purchasing operations cover a wide spectrum including ordering of commercial SAs, following up on suppliers' delivery dates, appropriate inventory management, improvement of order fulfillment rates, and new development work. I had never experienced any of these operations, so I had a very difficult time at first. The work of forecasting demand based on sales forecast data and deciding on order quantities while maintaining a balance between stock levels and fulfillment rates requires the exchange of information and collaboration with factories and other departments. I experienced firsthand how important communication in the workplace was. In particular, salespersons or customers complained to me, as the person in charge of purchasing, when product delivery was late for instance. But, I learnt a lot by listening to the real voices of the market and sincerely responding to customer requests through such complaints and advice. I was also able to build a relationship of trust with them. These were my big achievements.

Beside these, the external influences during the expatriation included the COVID-19 problem. The infection spread throughout the world from 2020 and hit each production site, sharply lowering order fulfillment rates at times. However, the team worked as one to recover the fulfillment rate by steadily following up on production and shipping plans every month. We had meetings every day, spending days under a constantly tense atmosphere. Looking back, however, that was a very valuable experience for me.



**Photo 2** KEU purchasing team

### 4. German Cuisine

It is no exaggeration to say that meat and potatoes are the chief staple of Germany. Immediately after arriving in Germany, I thought that German food was simple at first glance and the menu was poor in variety. But, soon I noticed that, when you take German food and beer together, you can taste just the right balance of flavors.

The most famous German food is probably the German sausage, but there are several traditional dishes other than sausages. One of the most typical traditional German dishes is Schweinshaxe, which is, in brief, roasted pig's feet. It is a dish in which pork shanks are roasted until the skin is crispy and served with potatoes, giving it a unique texture.



**Photo 3** German dishes (Schweinshaxe on the left)

Besides the above-mentioned Schweinshaxe, another famous traditional German dish is Schnitzel. It is a meat dish that is widely eaten not only in Germany but also in Western Europe. Its taste is very similar to that of Japanese pork cutlets. However, it is not deep-fried in as much oil as Japanese pork cutlets, so the taste is softer. You can taste a deeper flavor if the schnitzel is accompanied with oven-baked potatoes, French fries, or potato salad. It may seem a simple dish, but it is certainly an addictive one.



**Photo 4** German dish (Schnitzel)

## 5. German Beer

What's indispensable to the dishes stated above is definitely German beer. Particularly in Germany, local beer brewed at regional breweries, rather than beer produced by the major beer manufacturers, is very popular. Therefore, there is a wide variety of beer categories. The beer seems to be generally classified by region and color.



**Photo 5** Local beer (Kölsh) in Cologne

For example, the northern area of Germany has mainstream beers called "ale", many of which have a long-lasting rich flavor, whilst the southern area has a mainstay called "lager", which is characterized by a refreshing taste. German beers also vary in taste by color and can be roughly divided into three types: Weissbier (pale beer), Schwartzbier (black beer), and the normal type often seen in Japan.



**Photo 6** Weissbier (pale beer) in Munich

In this way, you can enjoy a variety of delicious beers in Germany and have the pleasure of comparing them. In the busy days as an expatriate, a glass of beer on the weekends was a treat for myself.

## 6. World Cultural Heritage and Traveling in Germany

As one of the most historic countries in Europe, Germany has numerous cultural heritage sites. Among these, Cologne Cathedral, the largest Gothic building in the world and a World Heritage Site, is one of the most popular tourist attractions in Cologne, which is a big city in western Germany. The Cathedral was built over around six centuries from its start of construction in 1248 to its completion in 1880. Standing in front of the building, you are overwhelmed by the huge scale of it.

The city of Münster located in the northwestern area of Germany is a beautiful place that has flourished around its cathedral since ancient times. It is one of the most popular tourist spots in the country because of its historical architecture and universities. Particularly, Münster Abbey, which is a masterpiece of the transitional period between Romanesque and Gothic architectures, has been registered as a World Heritage Site and is a typical sightseeing spot visited by many tourists.

## 7. Traveling in Europe

The neighboring countries of Germany include France, the Netherlands, and Belgium, which are only a two-hour drive away. I often visited these countries on weekends. Crossing a border by car was new to me, so it was a very surprising experience. Particularly, I often travelled to Amsterdam in the Netherlands, which is my most



**Photo 7** Cologne Cathedral



**Photo 9** National museum of the Netherlands



**Photo 8** Inside of Münster Abbey



**Photo 10** House museum of Rembrandt, the leading Dutch painter

favorite city in Europe, by car for about two hours from Düsseldorf as if I was just taking a drive. Amsterdam, which is also known as an "art paradise" in Europe, has various tourist attractions including the Rijksmuseum (the national museum of the Netherlands) and the Rembrandt House Museum (Rembrandt van Rijn was a leading Dutch painter). You can fully enjoy Dutch art in the city.

## 8. In Closing

I would like to express my gratitude and appreciation through this report for the warm support of my supervisors, senior engineers, expatriates, and local staff who helped me to complete my stationing in Germany for nearly 2 years without any problems. At the same time, I am convinced that the experience I obtained in this expatriation will provide me with the base and confidence to work on future operations. Thanks a lot for giving me such a valuable opportunity.

— Author —



### **KIM Yong Dae**

Joined the company in 2014.  
Aftermarket Sales Dept No.1, Global Business Unit (Sales Headquarters)  
Took present post after working in Product Planning Sect., Aftermarket Business Dept; Aftermarket Sales Dept; KYB Europe GmbH.