

"Like Disney World"

Memories and Impressions of Schwerin

by Ian Richardson

In 1992 I had not even heard of Schwerin when a German colleague suggested I might like to come and work in his Architects office here. From my atlas I could see that it was surrounded by lakes, not far from the Baltic Sea and about half way between Hamburg and the Polish border.

Driving in from Berlin, the first impression was of a lot of green space, trees and 1930's villas... Then the Castle, like something out of Disney World, standing on its little island, and the Cathedral towering over the old town. The town itself was rather grey and drab, but had charm. On this visit I saw my first Schrebergarten, much more attractive than a typical English allotment, had a

look at Wismar, and ended the day with a meal on the terrace of the Strand Hotel at Zippendorf. A lovely July evening, boats on the lake, the Castle and Cathedral in the distance, and my first taste of Eisbein mit Sauerkraut.

Office hours took a bit of getting used to - in England I normally started work around 9 o'clock. I also had to plan my shopping times a bit more carefully. I was used to supermarkets being open until 8 o'clock evenings and 6 o'clock on Saturday. I soon found everything I needed,

the choice of cooked meats was better, and food was generally cheaper than in England. The only thing I have yet to find is a yeast and vegetable extract that I am rather fond of and still have to bring back from England.

Particular memories from that first winter are the smell of brown coal and the yellow ash. In 1992 I could see that Schwerin had been and would be a beautiful city. Most of the old buildings had survived the war and the efforts of 60's and 70's architects and town planners, but needed a lot of attention. Some

had already been restored and each month others emerged from the scaffolding in all their newly decorated glory.

In England, although I lived most of the time about as far away from the

sea as you can get there, I had managed to go sailing fairly regularly on the North Sea, and hoped I could do the same here. This was not to be. Despite being surrounded by water, I have been sailing only three times in the 14 years I have been here.

When I came here, I assumed not many people would speak English, and hoped I would be able to learn the language fast, not easy at the age of 49! OK. I knew "ja, nein, bitte, danke" but not much more. I am afraid to say, that 14 years later my German is still lousy.



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