

## **Newton Kelvin Ollengo, Kenya**

**Intern at ARTORG Center, Switzerland**

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When I was yet a young energetic but dreamy kid of twelve years, my dad used to pop names of countries such as the Netherlands, Switzerland, New Zealand amongst others. Just the association of a country's name with land was confusing. I remember him mentioning that I could travel to any of them if I wanted to. Just a spark, lit by a conversation on possibilities, stayed with me. The impossibility of doing it always lingered but we can all dream.

We all have dreams, and hope. I, Newton Kelvin, would like to tell the tale of the realization of a dream I have had since childhood, from Kenya to Switzerland.

I learned of IAESTE through one of the advertisement posters and immediately the spark of traveling was refueled. It was during my final year and the scare of attachments was still very vivid. I was challenged by a friend, that if you are to an attachment, why not do it outside the country?

Fearing but hoping I applied on the very last day, interestingly, the opportunity that matched my skill set was in Switzerland, and it was the only offer. It was during the peak COVID-19

cases time hence the fear of failure was real confounded by the knowledge that in 2020 no one had gone to any due to the pandemic. However, the positive support I got from the International Office told me of a possibility. I quite didn't believe it even as I got onto the plane to Switzerland. In fact, I only believed this reality when I arrived at my apartment in Berne, Switzerland.

On arrival, a lot of fears such as who will I talk to, will I be alone, How will I survive the 7 months, what will I do during the weekend, what will I eat, do they have any Kenyan food (Ugali) were all allayed when my Tutor welcomed me to his house the next day for a meal. He was Macedonian and his friends were from all over the world, India, Spain, Germany, Serbia, Switzerland, Italy, Macedonia, etc. The diversity of the group warmed me up to the possibility of enjoying my time and gaining friends. The guys were so happy to add me to their little family that I felt right at home.

Switzerland boasts of a lot in terms of Tourism. The Alps, beautiful environment, falls, diverse cultures, museums nice lakes amongst others make Switzerland a hive for tourists. With its fondue, Chocolates, cheese, Swiss knives it's quite impossible to know what to expect in Switzerland. However, coming from a tropical country, I had quite a brush with Swiss life. The Swiss people are really time conscious, they find coming five minutes early rude and five minutes late completely unacceptable. It's hard to get the Swiss as a friend but once you do, they value you a lot. You get invited to activities, events, get introduced to new ideologies that leave you reeling.

My Supervisor, Mr. Fredrick is an Electronics Engineer who owned a company in Switzerland. My Task was to work on the SurgTrain device he was developing as an Electronics Engineer. I worked under his tutelage in embedded system design. My previous exposure in the field seemed minuscule to the kind of ideas and process of being an Electronics Engineer I was exposed to. I doubt there has not been a day I did not learn

something new. I constantly had to ask questions at the start. However, with time, I was able to grow as a Researcher and how to function effectively. He kept reminding me that technical skills and raw knowledge are not all that is required as an Electronics Engineer, but rather the ability to provide solutions to the people who need them. However, he kept me busy with tasks that challenged me to be better every time, leaving no room to chance. I am a better Engineer and Teacher than I left Months ago.

With the Efficiency of the Swiss, you get the weekends off. Also, as my internship was during the Summer, I had extremely long evenings. Having friends from different countries brings the need for cultural exchange hence every Friday evening seemed to be like a visit to a different country. The meals, the games, the laughter, the tales of the country. We used to have presentations from a different country which would be followed by a meal from that country and possibly some chatter time as we exchange tales and jokes from the different places.

Weekends were basically traveling time. Switzerland had a lot to behold, and different languages- Romanisch, Italian, German, French, meant diversity amongst the Cantons. I also had very adventurous friends hence I traveled a lot ,e.g. to Fribourg, Luzern, Geneva, Zurich, Basel, Berlin, Dresden, Chemnitz are just some of the places I had a chance to visit. Berne, the canton I was stationed in had a lot to offer, It's quite impossible to fully explore the small city of Berne.

My most memorable moments include the quiet boat ride, cultural dinners I had with friends, random breakfast meetings, coffee breaks, and lunch breaks-some that took hours due to the joy shared, hikes on the alps, snow-fight, and finally the tearful goodbyes I shared with friends who became family. Calling them just friends seems an understatement.

I would like to state my gratitude to God, my family, IAESTE International DeKUT, who worked day in day out to help me during my application process, IAESTE Switzerland for the overwhelming support and help in getting settled in Switzerland. Ivan Ginovski, IAESTE LC Bern who was my tutor for all his help, I have no idea where to start. My Supervisor Mr. Fredrick for his Tutelage. I also appreciate the harmony and joyous moments I shared with my friends in Switzerland and Colleagues in India.















