

BBM Youth Support Award for Brendon Woodward - World Skills Recipient

Wow, what an incredible experience!

Applying for an BBM Youth Award was one of the best decisions I have made. My 7 weeks overseas was a steep learning curve and definitely not something that would have been possible in Australia. I applied for the Award after the World Skills competition in Melbourne. I knew that if I won gold I would be "too old" to compete internationally, but didn't know of any other avenues to go overseas until the Head Judge for the bread competition, Ashley Schmidt, mentioned BBM to me. Once I knew of the award I couldn't wait to apply!

Going overseas to learn and work wasn't something that was of immediate interest to me up until September 2016. I was competing in a national baking competition that had a 1st prize of a trip to Paris! It was a team competition and we were confident of winning, but as it turned out, finished 2nd. That really lit a spark to want to go abroad.

I wanted to learn and see in person that quality of bakeries and patisseries around the world, especially France. I wanted to learn more about sourdough and long fermentation breads and also visit patisseries. Patisserie is something that I have wanted to learn and since arriving home I have followed up on that.

The preparation work I did before leaving involved researching overseas bakeries and patisseries, contacting companies in Australia and also people in Australia that I knew would have connections overseas. Since I was only going for 7 weeks, I wanted to have guaranteed work experience and training sorted before I left to make the most of my time. I had lists of bakeries/patisseries that I wanted to visit in the various cities I was in. I managed to get placement at 2 bakeries for a week each as well as various training throughout my travels. I was mindful in not staying at the 1 place too long.



Chalk Hills Bakery

Chalk Hills Bakery is an independent bakery located in Reigate, UK. It's about an hour south of London and is surrounded by Surrey Hills National Park. I found it to be a really relaxing area. I came in contact with Chalk Hills by researching online and calling them directly. The Bakery has a retail shop and also supplies wholesale. Chalk Hills bases its products on organic flour and artisan breads. The 2 bakers there were both Polish which made for some interesting conversations. I stayed in a hotel that was walking distance to the bakery.

Chris, the owner of the bakery, showed me the business side of the bakery, took me to see some of their wholesale customers and had some really good values in regards to interacting with their customers. I have never really seen too much of what goes on behind the scenes so that was valuable. In the baking side I learnt their methods and recipes and seen what their customer

demand was. Everything is made from scratch and the most unique bread for me was their seaweed sourdough - smells just like the ocean!. The culture at Chalk Hills was something that really stood out for me, everyone was really welcoming and it had a family feel to it, where everyone would look out for each other.

Greenhalgh's

Greenhalgh's is a big bakery! They are based in Bolton, UK. They have 60 retail stores and also have a large wholesale base. I got in contact with Greenhalgh's through the British Society of Baking. This was the first time I have been in a bakery of such a large scale. There are 3 different production sections, Bread, Savoury and Confectionary as well as Distribution. I spent a week working in their Bread section which employs 50 staff alone! It was really interesting to see how a large scale production operates. Being such a large facility they base their sales on volume. The first day I worked there we made 25000 brioche slider buns and for the next 12 months one customer had ordered 5 million! Although the style of breads that were made at Greenhalgh's weren't what I prefer to make, it was a really good insight into how large bakeries manage production and staff.

Scottish Bakers Conference

I attended the Scottish Bakers Conference in my first week of being in the UK. It was held in Glasgow and had speakers from bakeries around the UK as well as speakers with a business point of view. One of the talks that really stood out for me was from a motivational speaker and he talked about having 5 seconds of courage. Having 5 seconds of courage to go ask the question, to go talk to someone, to introduce yourself, to start something. It seemed like that talk was tailored to my whole trip, being in places where I didn't know anyone or much about anything.

Whilst I was in Glasgow I made the short trip to Edinburgh Castle. All through my travels I was amazed at the history each country has and how it is still visible with castles, palaces, buildings and monuments - the opposite of Australia. I tried to travel around as much as I could and make sure I was seeing more than just bakeries/patisseries. I stayed in 17 hotels in 49 nights!

Puratos UK



Puratos is one of the world's leading bakery ingredient companies and specialise particularly in ingredients for sourdough application. Puratos was the easiest place to gain work experience as I already knew some Australian contacts. I spent the day working with one of their senior bakery technicians. The facilities at all the Puratos centres were incredible! All the equipment, ingredients and machines that you could ever want were there. Their UK centre is based in Oxfordshire, about 90mins from London. The day was based around UK style breads and also rye bread. The UK is similar to Australia in that they prefer soft breads but the artisan bread market is really strong also. I learnt more about par baking, rye bread and the role of different ingredients.

Puratos Brussels

The Puratos centre in Brussels is their HQ. I spent a day working with Morgan Clementson, an Aussie who got involved with Puratos through an overseas scholarship. The day was spent making products for a photo shoot that would then be used to make their annual calendar. We made Brioche, sourdough, croissants, danish and baguettes. Puratos HQ was one of the places that I was really looking forward to visiting. The set up of the whole centre is like an organised maze. Rooms that lead to more rooms, with each having their own purpose. It was hard to believe that the bakery was used everyday with it looking more like a show room being so clean, open and organised.

The centre of Brussels was full of chocolate stores. Chocolate stores next door to chocolate stores! I tried to visit as many as I could, the same with bakeries/patisseries but there is only so much one can eat!



Puratos St Vith

St Vith is a quiet town in Belgium, about 5 mins away from the German border. St Vith hosts the Puratos Sourdough Library. A collection of living sourdough cultures from around the world. The cultures that are in the library are studied and are being used to form a data base of information on sourdoughs. There are just under 100 sourdoughs in the library with one being from Australia. I spent 2 days at St Vith working alongside one of their trainees. The atmosphere was really relaxing to work in. We had an open pantry so made use of the ingredients. Most the breads were sourdough based and included fermented grain baguettes, honey and nut loaves as well as a beetroot, cinnamon and sesame loaf - the bread is bright purple! I really enjoyed St Vith and being able to learn without feeling the pressure of time.

Lesaffre

Lesaffre along with Puratos were the 2 highlights of my work experience. Being international companies the quality and knowledge of the bakers was something to aspire to. My Lesaffre

visit was organised through Lesaffre Australia, they also have a strong presence in Australia. The company is based around yeast but also have products for all applications of baking. The training was one day in Lille, France, working with one of their international bakers. The day was based around French bread and the products that were specific to regions in France. Baguettes, brioche, croissants, sourdough and crémique were all baked and devoured! True to what you expect of French baking, there was plenty of butter and sugar used!

I spent 5 nights in Paris but could have spent my whole trip here. It was more than I thought it could ever be. The quality of the patisseries was incredible. The standards were so much higher than Australia. I spent most my time feeling full from constantly eating, every place I went to I had to try something. I lost track of how many macarons and eclairs I ate. Paris was without a doubt the highlight of my trip and has definitely inspired me to learn patisserie.



Sourdough School

I found the Sourdough School whilst researching online. It is run by Vanessa Kimball - her sourdough culture is in the Puratos Library. It is located in Northampton, 2 hours north of London. The 2 day course was based around the theory knowledge of sourdough and how to apply it. I found it to be really in depth and useful for what I wanted to learn. Her knowledge on the science of bread was quite remarkable.

I stayed in a small historic village nearby. The houses in the village date back 350 years with stone walls and small doorways. The streets were narrow and picturesque.

Recommendations

For future awardees travelling overseas I would recommend traveling outside of the UK. For me, travelling to Europe really was like stepping into another world and outside of my comfort zone. Food is appreciated worldwide but the appreciation for baking in Europe was evident everywhere I went. I was only overseas for 7 weeks so mainly stayed in big cities, but if time isn't an issue than visiting smaller towns would definitely give you a different perspective of the countries.

Researching where you want to visit and having clear goals of what you want to achieve whilst overseas will help out. When looking for work placement, international companies that have businesses in both Australia and overseas will make it easier to connect and network. Your industry body in the UK is a really good place to ask for advice and recommendations. I contacted the British Baking Society to help me out with looking for suitable placement.

Whilst overseas there were times when I just wanted to be in a bakery making something. I wanted to explore the ideas I had and try things that I had seen. Being back home I can now do that. Seeing so many high end bakeries/patisseries has made me change my perception on what I think is high quality in Australia. It's given me extra motivation to really strive for excellence and make something of myself. Working with some highly skilled bakers has shown me that I am on the right track to making it there also.

In my immediate future I will be learning pastry and patisserie and working on fine tuning my bread skills and knowledge. It's always hard to say what or where you will be in the future, but I aim for improvement and to keep going forward and have a presence in the baking industry.

I am really grateful for the opportunity that BBM has given me and I know that without it I wouldn't have the ideas, knowledge and extra drive that I have. Thank you for the chance to grow.

Brendon Woodward