

Internship report: Walhalla of Whisky

In poetry there is cadence. In bartending there is rhythm. In both, the art goes beyond the mere word or the fluid ounces. The beauty lies in the pause, the gesture, the well-timed line, the way you shake, you strain, and you pour. My internship at the Walhalla of Whisky offered a special space where the literary and the liquid met: a museum that values both craftsmanship and narrative. Whether I was conducting tours, pouring rare drams, or translating the website, I found myself switching codes, back and forth – between cultural insight and the vocabulary of sensory experience, between handling bottles and reading them, between teaching and being taught. In the lovingly nicknamed Mother Church of Malt and Spirit, the museum Walhalla of Whisky, I experienced first-hand how my profession as a bartender and my academic pursuits as a student of the M.A. program in British studies beautifully blend together into a rich and fragrant distillate.

My very first encounter with the museum was not as an intern, but as a student in the context of an excursion of the cultural studies seminar *Introduction to Scottish Culture* by Lisa Feige. Both my professional and my scholarly interest were piqued, but it was not until many a declined application for internships across Germany in various literary establishments, libraries and publishing houses that I finally stumbled back into the time-honoured walls of the Walhalla – the one with the oaken casks, not the marble busts. The solution to organising my internship was so overt, it was covert, and in hindsight I cannot help but be thankful for all the internships that did not happen, because it meant that this one could.

The start of my official internship was a period of observation and orientation, during which I familiarized myself with the museum's procedures and its general workflow. Thanks to my background as a professional bartender, I could meaningfully contribute from my first shift onwards. In the museum, I was starting behind the bar counter where my expertise in spirits, guest interaction, and hospitality gave me a natural head start. My assistance with the museal work was greatly appreciated by the entire staff, and the founder, the *Spiritus Rector*, Pit Krause. I was never once "just the intern", but a valued member of the team. From my very first step into the halls of the exhibition, I was warmly welcomed, trusted and immediately trained as a future tour guide and tasting co-host.

As I settled in, I expanded my focus beyond working behind the counter into the broader world of whisky. I learned about the intricate processes of whisky production, delved into the rich and often surprising history of the distillate, gathered detailed knowledge about all the rich exhibits, and explored their deep cultural resonances. This growing expertise enabled me to conduct guided tours on my own, which was a major milestone in my time at the museum. Leading visitors through the Walhalla, I had the privilege of not only informing but also sharing the same sense of wonder around the history of whisky that was once instilled in me during my first visit. My designated task quickly became the hosting of our international visitor and presenting our exhibition in the English language. And the Walhalla of Whisky naturally attracts whisky enthusiasts from all around the globe, because it is the largest exhibition of its kind in the entire world.

In addition to my role as a tour guide, I supported a variety of tasks behind the scenes. I assisted with whisky tastings, helped inventory the exhibits, and contributed to promotional efforts. One of my most significant contributions was translating the entire Walhalla of Whisky website into English, helping to make the museum's content accessible to a broader international audience. Everything in and around the museum is handcrafted with the utmost care and dedication, so I knew my translation needed to pass that bar. This responsibility required precision, creativity, and a deep understanding of both the source material and its cultural tone, which helped hone my skills as a translator. The final document of the webpage's translations surmounted to over 22 pages and 6.000 words and a translation of the museum's introductory movie has already been commissioned and is currently a work in progress.

Speaking of care and dedication: Time-honoured is not just an adjective that is attached to the walls of the museum for the sake of shallow museal promotion. The Walhalla of Whisky lies within the former barrel repository and cooperage of the *Spitalkeller*, which is situated atop one of the biggest and oldest historical brewery cellars in Bavaria, directly within the connected beer garden. Oskar Schindler was a regular there and the terraced garden used to be a vineyard and later a rose garden of the nobility. Some parts of the museum's walls and the cellar below have a history spanning over 400 years. This location was already used as cooperage, forge, stable, malt- and grain repository, warming room and public house until the 1930s. One of the last existing barrel lifts is still fastened to the first floor. There is hardly a more fitting location for a whisky museum. However, the condition of the part of the building where the museum was to be erected was far from usable: Neither water, nor electricity, nor heating were there. The ceiling was perforated, the floor unstable, entry was blocked, open walls, mold and broken roof beams were the outset. Solid walls or resilient structure were scarce. Only the Sisyphean dedication of multiple members over many years could refurbish this location. But as Camus puts it: "One must imagine Sisyphus happy." They have braved the odds, and despite many a tumbling down boulder, Pit Krause's crew kept pushing their rock up the *Dreifaltigkeitsberg* for six long years to realise their dream: A museum of the finest spirits. Almost everything was custom-made, with attention to detail, to give this place its own, unique identity, in which every helper's fingerprint can now be traced.

Unexpectedly, this internship formed an essential part of my M.A. program in British Literature and Culture, and the Walhalla of Whisky proved to be the perfect setting to merge my academic pursuits with my professional background. Prior to my working at the museum, I was already looking forward to any kind of work experience, but I fully underestimated how important an impression the compulsory internship would leave me with. I thoroughly enjoyed my time at the Walhalla and my experiences there allowed me to deepen my understanding of whisky not only as a commodity, a luxury good, or something to be added to a cocktail, but as a cultural artifact that is deeply woven into the social, historical, and literary fabric of the United Kingdom. I was able to approach whisky not just as a beverage, but as a narrative steeped in stories of tradition, regional identity, craftsmanship, and even colonial history. This enriched my appreciation of British culture and complemented my academic coursework in ways I

had, admittedly, not anticipated. My internship was both professionally valuable and intellectually stimulating. It has built on my already existing skillset, added new ones, broadened my cultural horizons, and given me a new lens through which to view the intersections of culture and scholarship.

But the subject matter in itself was not the only reason I so genuinely enjoyed my stay at the Walhalla. The people in and around the museum were equally contributing to this very successful internship. There is very little I enjoy more than simply learning new things. Hence, I deeply appreciated working with Pit Krause and the entire team behind his museal operation. Pit is a tried and tested landmark figure in the international whisky scene. He basically radiates knowledge about and around whisky and not a lot of talks have passed where I did not gather at least one new insight. In addition to that sheer amount of expertise, Pit has the almost infectious ability to spread passion, excitement and his grand enthusiasm for all things whisky in his tours, his tastings, to his coworkers and anyone that is just vaguely curious about the world of whisky. That is also why I am beyond proud to have my name fastened to the famous museal lauter tun (Ger.: Läuterbottich, nicknamed the Leute-Bottich). Having your name plate added to this revered vat is an honour that was until now only reserved to the founding members of the museum and I am sincerely looking forward to staying a part of the museum's staff well beyond the official internship.

Before working at the Walhalla of Whisky, I saw the shelves of cocktail backbars as lined with mere products. After my time at the museum, I now see them as lined with legacy, with history, cultural significance, the memories they are going to create, and the past they are bottling up. Working within Pit Krause's revered walls felt like handling artifacts rather than bottles and after this internship I am certain that a good whisky is not just an aged spirit, but a story to be read. A dram can be appreciated like a verse and the more people that share in it, converse and bounce ideas off one another, the richer it becomes. Just as a great book is more than its words, whisky is more than a drink. If to study literature is to study what cultures remember, then the Walhalla of Whisky made me realize that whisky, too, is a vessel of memory, aging in wooden barrels, shaped by time, and poured into stories. As part of my M.A. in British Literature and Culture, this internship allowed me to bridge the world of text and taste, scholarship and the service industry, and made me appreciate both whisky and British culture in an entirely new light.