This is fantastic!! I have never won anything ever before!” I emailed Suzy after the good news that along with nine others who had made early bird bookings for the 2011 BACD conference, I had won an all-expenses paid trip to Hamburg! The purpose of the trip was to visit the DMG factory, where well known products, such as Luxacore and Luxatemp, are made and to be shown round Hamburg.

Four months later, off we all went, meeting up at the airport as we flew into Hamburg from all over the British Isles. We arrived at DMG HQ (after a 4:30am start for many) to be told to don flimsy surgical gowns and disposable ‘shower’ caps for our tour of the factory – a great way to get a group of strangers to know each other and have a giggle together!

The tour was very interesting: no matter how many times one has listened to lectures on the manufacture of various dental materials, a tour is worth much more than a thousand words. We were enlightened in the processes required to make glass particles fine enough to be the filler in composite restorative materials; and how pure the resin has to be in order to be accurate in shade matching, concocted in a yellow room to prevent it from curving while it is being processed. Equally enlightening were the processes to get the stuff into the dispensing tubes!

Dinner on the first night was at an excellent traditional German pub, the Brauhaus Joh. Albrecht. It was an ‘eat loads of meat, drink lots of beer’ kind of affair followed by a relatively early night (except for a few) after the 4:30am start.

Friday consisted of a series of lectures by Felix, the highly entertaining, slightly ‘mad professor’ expert chemist at the factory. He made, amongst other things, the chemistry of bonding reactions come alive and educated us in DMG’s exciting new product Icon which is designed to treat interproximal caries and remove white spot lesions in a non-invasive way. He interspersed his lectures with random quizzes for prizes. I got the wooden spoon for suggesting the tallest tree in the world would be 300m (what’s wrong with that? Only 200m out; can’t see the problem).

However, the highlight of the trip for me was the amazing Safari dinner laid on for us that evening, with a tour of Hamburg between each course to take in all the sights of the city.

We started on the roof top of the Atlantic Hotel Kempeniski, with a view over the lake and seven spires of Hamburg.
We did wonder what was happening when we were taken up in the lift of this beautiful colonial style hotel and found ourselves in the dusty attic amongst old pieces of furniture. However, all was revealed when a door flew open: behind were several waiters armed with champagne and canapés, and the route to the roof!

Next, after hopping on the bus for a bit more tour, was the pièce de résistance, the most exquisite meal in the most exclusive club, the Harbour Club, in Hamburg. The round building was called the Cupola and had been the ex-harbour masters office. It was complete with model of the docks and river under a glass floor. We had the building, with the impressive view of the river Elbe, all to ourselves for the deliciously, delicate main course of fish.

Dessert was at another delightful riverside venue after which we staggered back to our hotel and the bar on the 20th floor and drunk champagne until the early hours of the morning.

Saturday brought a coach trip to Lubeck, where we were marched round the sites of this city in the rain by the larger than life Manfred. He serenaded us with his sea shanties, told us stories of the war, and previously to that how the people of Lubeck cared for their own poor, and of the liaisons in trade with London. (Did you know the expression sterling silver comes from trading with Lubeck?)

We saw the impressive St Mary’s church which managed to avoid being completely destroyed in the war. Of note however, were the huge church bells lying on the ground in one corner, left as they had fallen (when Lubeck was under attack), broken and distorted from the heat of the flames as the city was burning. Also in that corner were two nails formed as a cross, sent by the people from Coventry a few years later from remnants of Coventry Cathedral which was raised to the ground earlier in the war, a poignant reminder of the war’s devastation.

Manfred also showed us the Schiffergesellschaft, the Seaman’s Mission, which is a very old building with beautiful carved furniture, models of all the old trading ships hanging from the ceiling, and also the Hellige Geist Stift (Ghost Hospital), behind which was a covered street of cabins, used until not long ago to house the needy.

Another amazing meal at the Rathauskeller under the City Hall and a visit to the Niederegger marzipan shop (for which Lubeck is famous) nicely rounded off our visit to Germany, and so we headed to the airport, sorry to say goodbye to our new found friends and colleagues.

I would like to express my thanks to Paul Willmer of DMG for organising this amazing visit to the DMG factory, and to his team here (Paul Vaughan and Nikki Ward) and our hosts in Germany: Felix, Claudia and Steffi, for giving us such a fantastic time, and making us feel so welcome.

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