

Overall Thoughts:

While looking back at my time in Mannheim I have to say that it has been a great time. However, it is easy to see from others that it is possible to not do so. Exchange, like any other university experience, has rewards that scale with your input. I personally took just about every opportunity to see other exchange students and took a number of classes that emphasised group work where I was the only non-German. It is by no means a guaranteed good time in Mannheim, but anyone I know who has come here with an open mind has been able to do so.

Arrival:

My personal traveling experience will likely be different from others going to Mannheim as I departed from Victoria, BC. This added three hours of plane travel, plus a few more for traveling to the airport and waiting for connections. Customs was not an issue as I showed my passport and letter from the University and was readily let through.

There was not a pick up service provided, though I'm sure it could have been arranged. I do know of other students who had problems at the airport or with their own ability to navigate in Germany and were picked up. While the distance between the University of Mannheim and Frankfurt International Airport is much greater than York to Pearson, the mass transit system is much better, so shortly after getting off the plane I was on my way.

Unfortunately the first train I was ended up being late, so I had the not so pleasurable experience of sitting on a train platform for two hours while waiting for the next train to Mannheim. I would highly recommend that when first coming to Germany taking the ICE from the airport to Mannheim, it costs a fair bit more, but it is direct and makes the trip half an hour long, better than my 3 hours by a large margin.

The AAA (Mannheim's International Office), is very close to Hauptbahnhof, so arriving there was not a problem. Because of my train issues I ended up going on a walking tour of the city before seeing my room. After paying cash for a number of fees, such as paying for the Summer Academy language course, when I arrived, I was precariously low on money, one of the students from VISUM (a student organization on which I will provide more detail later), loaned me money until I could get my bank situation sorted out the next day.

Orientation to the University took place throughout September and October. Though most of the October orientation was redundant as I had learned all of the material they covered beforehand. Of particular use was my VISUM buddy who taught me how to use the various libraries on campus so I could do some preparatory reading for my classes.

Summer Academy:

The University of Mannheim offers two "Language Academies" per year. Conveniently these take place in the month before the semester starts. So I spent September improving

my German with other international students. I remember Diana, who had spent the previous semester in Mannheim, that it the Academy was a must. She was entirely correct; the Summer Academy was an excellent time to meet students from around the world.

The Academy starts with a placement test determining your level of German. What follows is a month long intensive course. It is possible to get credit for the class, and there are additional optional non-credit seminars on Grammar, Politics, and German Culture. During the afternoons there are frequent activities from the University or VISUM. These are worthwhile activities to get to know the other exchange students better, as well as do some traveling around Mannheim. In the evenings there are tours of various attractions in Mannheim, and generally there is at least one outing to a club during the weekends.

Classes:

My circumstances allowed me to take courses from the Business, Economics, English Literature, Linguistics, and Political Science departments at Mannheim. Given the lack of pre-requisites, this allowed me to take high level courses without having the burden of not having sufficient pre-existing knowledge, at least in most cases. I would recommend against taking the high level economics courses unless pursuing an Economics specialization, as Mannheim is as well known for Economics as it is Business.

Registration for each department is somewhat different. For the vast majority of business courses, all I had to do was show up to the lectures (which some people don't even bother with), and register for the exam online before the deadline. The grades for these classes are later posted at the same website as registration (pruefung.uni-mannheim.de). Economics lectures were handled in the same manner, though I had to go into an office and have a secretary do the registration. The last week before the registration deadline has that office being particularly busy, so registration for non-business exams should be done as quickly as possible.

Economics seminars did not have registration, merely showing up to the planning sessions and asking the Professor for a Schein afterwards. The other classes had the grades delivered in the same manner, but required registration beforehand. If planning any non-business electives, any incoming student should email the professor at least a month before classes start, this step will likely inform the student on when to register, and as Mannheim is very supportive of international students, getting into the class would be easy.

Two of my courses this past semester were filled to capacity registration-wise. As an exchange student I was able to get into both of them without issue. Though there is an additional pressure on all exchange students in English-language courses. One friend had difficulties in a course that focused on "Moby Dick" because there were some words used that he did not know, but was constantly asked about the book's vocabulary.

As with York the teaching styles of the professors varies. There were classes that focused on group work, straight PowerPoint presentations, a Professor standing in front of the class writing on an overhead, etc. The only major difference is that Seminar courses are for the most part students teaching students. They will be composed of a number of planning sessions with Professors to guide a project, and student presentations. They are used as starting points for many of Mannheim's students Diplomarbeit, which is roughly the equivalent of a Master's Thesis.

It should also be noted that for most courses here you will not need to purchase textbooks, though you may need to photocopy a reader from the professor. This is similar to a coursekit, though with significantly less copyright protection and liability concerns.

Exams:

German business students generally start studying 4-6 weeks before exams begin. This is because there is a wide range of material that could be tested in the exam, but in all likelihood only a small portion will actually be tested. The exams for many business classes are a mere 45 minutes long. However, this means that you can have more than one exam per day. I have had friends who have had as many as four in one day. I personally only had two consecutive exams which were literally consecutive. I wrote one exam, got up, went outside for five minutes, and returned to a different seat for the second exam.

It should also be noted that there is assigned seating in Mannheim's exams. The seating plan is posted by student number outside the examination room.

I will not speak to the difficulty of the exams, as it will depend on the course and preparation. Personally, I had no issues with any of the exams and finished most of them before the time limit, but as I generally do so with Schulich exams, that should not be taken as any indicator of difficulty.

Bureaucracy:

Europe has a reputation for having a fair bit of red tape, and in my time in Germany I did find that this is relatively well earned. Despite knowing a number of items in advance, it still was a new experience.

Registering with the city is something that is not just required of visitors to Germany, but of German citizens themselves. When moving to a new city one must de-register from the city that they are leaving and register at the new one. Conveniently this is done just by dropping into the Bürgerbüro, filling out a form and sitting while a civil servant inputs the information into Germany's database.

The process of obtaining a residence permit is somewhat more complex. There are civil servants allotted to various portions of the alphabet, each having a different schedule.

Each civil servant has moderately different preferences for the required material, and appointment etiquette.

I was fortunate in that the one that I was allocated to was kind and efficient. Unlike many others I ended up not needing the pictures I had purchased. My appointment consisted of handing over the required information, sitting in the waiting room for fifteen minutes, and signing a form.

In late July I was hired as a Project Assistant to a research consortium based in the Mannheim Centre for Social Research. In order for my contract to be completed, they required a Lohnsteuerkarte. This is something that is received from the Bürgerbüro, thankfully merely by presenting identification and asking for it, after the obligatory 20 minute wait of course.

VISUM

VISUM is a student organization at the University of Mannheim, and it is impossible to understate the positive impact they have had on my experience here. From shortly after I arrived to weekdays throughout the year, VISUM has been a source of the best friends and memories that I will bring from Germany.

VISUM hosts a weekly party during the semester, though the last one is well before exams to allow everyone to study. This past year each year was themed with a different region each week. I was fortunate to have the North American night near my birthday, and the DJ was kind enough to play some of the music I brought with me.

There were two overnight trips I went on with VISUM. The first was Berlin, which was a three-day trip which covered a number of the highlights of Germany's capital. I highly recommend a trip to the holocaust monument between the Reichstag and Potsdamer Platz, the visitor's centre underneath is filled with family stories of Jews that were killed and is particularly heart-wrenching, but must be seen in my opinion.

The trip to Cologne would have been less interesting on the whole were it not for the start of the World Cup. We stayed a hostel a hundred meters from where the Portuguese team were staying, a number of students were very happy to watch the team disembark from their bus.

VISUM is not merely around for entertainment, though they do an excellent job with it, but also run a Buddy programme. This matches exchange students with a Mannheim student to help with adjusting to the city. My buddy went to China for a work term in March, but she was very helpful to me during the semester. There are also Buddy themed events such as an organized Pot-Luck dinner that has people going to different locations for appetizers, main course, and dessert with different people. Given the worldwide selection of international students, this does lead to an interesting culinary experience.

York vs. UM Campus:

York is one centralised campus with all buildings (with the exception of Glendon) being next to each other, uninterrupted by the rest of the city. The University of Mannheim is much more like U of T in that it exists as part of the downtown core, and facilities are spread throughout it. Some of the residences are actually outside the central *quadrat* but still close by bus or tram.

A majority of courses are held in the Schloss, which is at the base of the *quadrat*, though there are some that are held in A5 and L7. These are blocks in Mannheim's *quadrat* naming system. Blocks A-K are on one side of the street leading away from the Schloss, and L-U are on the other. The number in the alphanumeric system is larger the further away it is from the Schloss. L1 and A1 are the blocks that are closest, while K7 (where the Burgeramt is located) and U7 being the ones furthest away. I had consecutive classes in L7 and A5, these are the two furthest places to have non-language courses and I had no problem walking between them in the 15 minutes between lectures.

The AAA, and most other offices that I had to visit for the University were in L9. Though to register for fencing I had to go to an office in L14.

The opportunities for athletic activity are more difficult. The gym with exercise equipment is not open for long during the day, 4-10pm, and the other facilities are generally public facilities that can be accessed as a student.

There are two places to eat on the campus. The EO is a more pub styled facility that sells food based on weight. The Mensa is a cheap cafeteria open from 11-2pm each weekday. Both menus change daily, but are available ahead of time.

Wireless access is available throughout the campus, and there is also access available in the residences. Computer facilities are in most libraries, the business library is generally open until from 8am-10pm.

Summary Advice:

Healthcare:

The insurance provider costs 55 euro per month. This includes some coverage of prescription medication, all doctor visits, and all hospital costs outside a 10 euro per night charge for having a room. From the contrasting experiences of some of my friends I highly recommend it.

Housing:

The two biggest residences for International students are Hafenstrasse and Ulmenweg. I lived in Hafenstrasse and it is a short walk to most anything in the *quadrat* and the Schloss.

Dangerous Areas:

There is some thought that Jungbusch near Hafenstrasse is dangerous, however, no one experienced anything negative this year.

Social Events:

VISUM, VISUM, VISUM, they have a weekly email detailing the various things to do that week, organize trips, and generally are the best source of socializing in Mannheim. Though the weekly pub quizzes at any of Mannheim's four Irish bars are also enjoyable.

Banking:

Deutsche Bank has an agreement with Scotiabank so that their machines are treated as the same for their customers. This means that my international transfers consisted of putting in my Scotiacard, withdrawing money, then putting in my Deutsche Bank card and depositing it.

Coming from an Ontario school it is likely that a 200 euro monthly stipend will be allotted, it will be deposited directly into a German bank account. It is very easy to open an account here, just needing your passport and the letter from the University.

Things to Bring:

Passport: Your passport will be the ONLY accepted piece of identification while in Germany

Computer: German keyboards take a lot of getting used to

Power adaptor: Ensure that all electric devices can handle 220 VAC, plug adaptors are easier to find and cheaper than voltage transformers

Travelling suitcase: Likely a large suitcase with a majority of your belongings will be required, but a smaller one is useful for travelling

Personal Hygiene Products: I recommend checking with the manufacturer of any products that you are picky about before coming over as they may not be available here

A taste for beer: Beer is cheap, and the Germans are particular about which one is best, this opinion, like the German dialect, varies depending on region

Things not to bring:

Bed linen: There will be some provided to you if you live in residence, additionally beds are different sizes here

Small appliances: Most will not function with 220 VAC and therefore be useless here

Budget Expectations:

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| Rent | 220 | Month |
| Healthcare | 55 | Month |
| Food | 20-50 | Week |
| Entertainment | 15-40 | Week |

Additional fees would include a 49 euro student fee per semester, 75-90 euro a semester for the transit system pass (this is a must), and whatever travelling you do.

Travelling:

The student pass is the first step for doing any travelling, as it is good for a large part of Baden-Württemberg. Purchasing a BahnCard (100 euro) is also a good idea as it provides a steep discount on all trains in Germany, including the Intercity Expresses; it also allows you to purchase a ticket on the train at the same rate as you would if you did so in advance.

The VISUM trips are a good way to visit German cities with a large group cheaply. Otherwise, trains, and discount airlines such as Ryanair, make all of Europe easily available.