

5 months abroad at the



As any exchange student will tell you, there is no experience like your exchange experience! Despite many challenges and differences from other partnered schools, I still had the time of my life at the University of Mannheim. Looking back, I wish I had applied for a full-year exchange to Germany.

Section 1: Mannheim – the city and the school

Situated approximately halfway between Frankfurt and Stuttgart, Mannheim is a fairly industrial city which is often used as a connection hub to other major German cities. Although not among the most attractive of cities, the surrounding areas like Heidelberg showcase some of the most scenic views in Germany. The city itself is structured like the game Battleship: where the city centre is mapped like a grid, going from A-V (north to south) and numbered outwards from the centre (east and west). Stores in the city (aside from restaurants) close after 8 pm and are closed on Sundays (as like the rest of Germany). The tram (streetcar) system is relatively straightforward and reliable, although you may find the occasional “intoxicated local” on it. They usually run from 5 am to 2 am. Consider this a warning to check schedules prior to any outing.

The University of Mannheim is one large structure and is often referred to as “the castle” or Schloss. Although some classes may take place outside of the building, the majority of business classes are in the Schneckenhof wing. Each wing and faculty is equipped with its own library. Ranked number one in Germany, you will find that the studies and work ethic reflect this ranking. Fall/Spring Academie is a class offered to international and exchange students prior to the beginning of the semester and essentially is a German language course used to help prepare you for your upcoming studies. By not signing up for this (300 Euro) opportunity, we consequently missed out on getting to know many of the other exchange students and finding good traveling partners.

Because there is no actual “campus” for the university, the residences are spread throughout the city and usually require a 5-10 minute tram ride. You will be allowed to select your residence building prior to arrival. Here is a brief review of my recommended choices:

1. *Steubenstrasse*: Here you will find many international and European students. The only draw back is its distance from the other residences and the school.
2. *Hafenstrasse*: Known to exchange students as the “party residence”, this residence is also one of the closest to the school. Many students choose to purchase a bike and ride it daily to class. However, a warning to the female student to avoid traveling alone at night in its surrounding area.

3. *Ulmenweg*: Host of the largest residence party of the year, this is also the farthest residence. Here you will find a sleuth of international and exchange students.

Section 2: Getting to Mannheim and making it through your first week.

Flying to Germany requires your standard documentation that other European countries require. I highly recommend reviewing your German 101 book prior to departure, as many of the train and flight attendants initially speak German. To my recollection, the university of Mannheim website provides very clear and specific instructions on how to get from the Frankfurt airport to the International Office. If you are lucky enough to be matched with a buddy, try to arrange for him/her to meet you at the Mannheim train station. It will make your registration process A LOT easier.

When you first get to the city, you will have to report to the AAA office to pick up your keys. The whole registration process is somewhat of a blur, as I was jetlagged and was forced to complete the whole process in the 3 hours after I had arrived. This was due to some the German offices closing by 11:30 am and on special holidays. The registration process consisted of enrolment at the Studienbüro, payment of registration fee, applying for health insurance and validating/printing your student card.

Once you get back to your residence, you will want to set-up your internet. In most cases, you will have to talk to the Internet Tutor from your building. They are almost impossible to find initially, but are a godsend when you have computer problems. Think of them as your live-in ITS personnel. Washing machine coins can also be purchased from your Hausmeister "caretaker" but be aware of his office hours – they are often only 2 hours a week.

Section 3: The Ausländerbehörde

German is definitely an asset when it comes time for you to go to the Ausländerbehörde, located at K7. Registering with the Mannheim police is painless and straightforward. However, you will have to go upstairs in order to obtain your Residence Permit. To meet with them you will be required to make an appointment, provide proof of a steady income while on exchange, show your enrolment papers, all the while explaining it all to her in German. The German Bureaucratic system was quite possibly my worst experience on exchange.

Section 4: Selecting Courses and Registering for Exams

When you arrive for your orientation, you will be given a list of courses offered in English. Most classes do not require you to register for them. However, you will have to register for the exams you would like to take about halfway into the semester. Although many of the 100% exams may seem attractive to an

exchange student, they neglect to warn you that these exams have a high fail rate! While at Mannheim I took Brand and Brand Relationship Management (3 credits), International Marketing (6 credits – highly recommended, as Professor Kuester is great professor), Cross-Cultural Comparisons (7.5 credits), International Management (6 credits) and Supply Chain Management (8 credits – which I used to substitute for my 361 requirement). You will find many of your course related materials at the following website: <http://www.fsbwl.de/>.

Section 4: Student Life

An exchange committee, VISUM, does a great job of showing you the vibrant student life offered at the University of Mannheim. Throughout the term they plan trips to Berlin, Cologne and etc. One of my fondest memories was the Pub Crawl they organized during the first week of school: 5 beers, 5 shots, 5 bars and a Döner, all for the price of 15 euros! This committee will also be your best bet to meet some German students and polish up your language skills. The University will have sent your contact information to them– so keep an eye out and sign up for their weekly newsletter.

Conclusion:

There are probably a million details that I have omitted from this exchange essay. If you would like more information about Mannheim or my travel destinations please do not hesitate to contact me at (email address available on request: exchange_info@dekanat.bwl.uni-mannheim.de) or read about more on my Europe Blog at <http://lufest.spaces.live.com/>.