**Partner University:** Ludwig Maximilians Universität München (LMU)

**Country:** Germany

**Major/Faculty:** Communications - SFU / Ifkw (Communications) - LMU

**Term:** Winter Semester

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**PREPARATION FOR EXCHANGE**

After nearly a year of planning and application processes for exchange the day finally came for me to set off to Germany. I was beyond excited and nervous for what lied ahead but couldn’t wait for this new chapter in my life.

When it comes to preparing for exchange, it is important to note that everyone is different and that perhaps how I prepared may differ from how you the reader may decide to but I hope that this report helps to give you an idea of what to expect and prepare for if you, like me chose to study in Munich, which is an amazing choice might I add.

My first piece of advice is to get ready to have quite a bit of patience and to adapt to the German registration processes. They differ quite a bit from Canada and can seem very long, rather inefficient and sometimes troublesome. However, if you are prepared for this, then unlike me you will be just fine.
The Necessities

Please note that this section is based off of my personal experience during my exchange in the winter 2018 semester and that the process may differ for each person and that the process itself may change over time.

If you are a Canadian citizen, you may only need your passport when going to Munich for exchange. This should allow you to live and study there for 90 days. Note that before your entry visa expires you must apply and obtain a German resident permit, this is absolutely necessary if you plan to stay your entire exchange which I assume you do. Before you can get your permit, other documentation and steps are required such as opening a regular student bank account, a blocked savings account, registering your German address, and having sufficient proof of healthcare to name a few. I was not aware of some of these necessary steps and found myself stressed and scrambling on certain occasions so make sure you have all required documents and procedures sorted as soon as possible to avoid unnecessary stress!

Highly Recommended

A personal recommendation I have that you should do prior to embarking on your exchange is to register for the intensive German language course offered by IUCM. It was the best decision I made as it not only helped me continue learning the German language but also was the main way I met other exchange students and made what have now become my very close friends and travel buddies. They offer every level of German and even organize events and trips for you and your classmates. The teachers are also able to help and answer other questions regarding housing, banking, etc. which was very helpful. You also get credits for this course!

Packing

When it comes to packing, if you plan to go for the fall/winter semester you will need a variety of clothing. From September to mid-October I was wearing summer clothes. It was very hot in Munich, perhaps warmer than usual this year. By early or mid-November until the end of the semester in February you should have packed plenty of cozy sweaters as it can get quite cold. By early January there is a lot of snow so rain or snow boots is definitely recommended. I would also recommend packing three types of jackets: a rain coat, a light jacket perhaps a denim jacket for example and a warm winter jacket.
**Travel and Transport**

When it comes to travel and transportation you will find that Munich has an amazing transport system that can take you nearly everywhere in and outside the city (including to the airport). You will also have the opportunity to get a discounted semester ticket through your school which I highly recommend as this will allow you to use the entire transport network without worrying about zones and etc. Not to mention that if you decided to simply pay for day tickets, they can become very expensive.

**Financial Customs and Cost of Living**

In terms of financial customs and cost of living, Munich in comparison to Vancouver is relatively similar when it comes to the cost of living. Munich is rather expensive. I highly suggest going for student housing as they are all quite nice and significantly cheaper than off-campus or private housing. Student accommodation is roughly 280-400 euros whereas an off-campus studio apartment can easily be minimum 1000 euros a month and it is difficult to find available places. A big difference between Munich and Vancouver is that Munich is a total cash-based society. You always need cash. Oftentimes card is not even accepted. Another little difference that I really liked is that the tax is already included in the prices so whatever the price tag says is the final price.
DURING EXCHANGE

Arrival and Orientation

Although the semester officially starts in October, I had chosen to partake in the September one-month intensive German course offered through the school. I highly recommend this as I made a majority of my now close friends during this course. There was an orientation on the first day of the German language course, this is when you get separated into your groups/classes and meet the people and teachers you will be in class with every day. As for the first day of the actual semester, there are different welcome days/orientation days for each faculty. These are also good to attend as it gives you an idea of what your classes and fellow classmates are going to be like.

Accommodation and Living

I had requested in my housing application to get a single, private dorm, preferably in Olympic Park. Luckily, my request was granted, and I ended up with what they call their “bungalows” in Olydorf (Olympia Park) student accommodations. My accommodation was a private two-story mini house with a bathroom and kitchen. This was perfect for me. I also met and made many friends also living in bungalows and visiting each other’s homes was always fun. Olympic Park is very large and beautiful and is also very well-located to the school and city centre. The student accommodation is also a 3-5 minute walk from the U-Bahn station. Munich is very expensive, but the student housing is very well-priced. My accommodation cost about 340 euros per month. This included heating, internet, and everything you may need. Note that there are no meal plans when studying in Munich; however, there are cafeterias on campus that are very cheap and good. Many of my friends and I found ourselves eating in and cooking our own food a majority of the time, as eating out can get pricey.
Academics

The education style is not too different than SFU; however, my class schedule was a little different than I was used to. Rather than having a class every Tuesday and Thursday for example, I had some classes where I had only 5 seminars randomly throughout the term – some weeks not having the class at all. I also found that at LMU they encourage more self-teaching, rather than lots of class time and instruction they give you a lot more freedom with assignments and less in-class time to work on things. Apart from these though, the style of assignments, tests, grading and more were very similar. The grading scale is much different but the way in which they grade or weigh assignments is the same.

Culture and Social Atmosphere

The weather is supposedly very similar to Vancouver in terms of temperature and rainfall; however, I found it to be much warmer (September-late October) and much colder (November-mid February) than Vancouver. I also experienced very little rain. There is also a lot of snow in the winter. Apart from all the beautiful local places to see, Munich is so well-located for travelling not only around Germany but other countries as well.

In terms of social opportunities, Munich does a great job on having festivities to participate in year-round. There are always festivals and events for the public going on and not to mention the exciting Oktoberfest. If you find yourself going to Munich for their winter semester, Oktoberfest will be in full-swing soon after your arrival and it is absolutely amazing – the whole city
participates. If you are into dancing and going to clubs Munich also has a pretty good nightlife; however, getting home via transit between 2:30am and 5am is difficult. Also, German techno is indeed a thing and it is very popular.

Reflection on my Exchange

Studying in Munich taught me so much more than I had anticipated. I learned so much both inside but especially outside the classroom. I always considered myself as rather independent, but this experience really made me stand on my own.

Some challenges I faced were the stress of registering to live there, dealing with a language barrier and being in a totally new environment away from my friends and family. However, the experience was so fun, and I met so many amazing people from around the world who were feeling the exact same as me.

My advice to those interested in exchange is to do it. You are so lucky to have an opportunity like this and you must take advantage of it. It will be one of the most amazing chapters of your life and you will not regret it. You will mature, learn, travel, and have so much fun abroad. This experience has honestly changed my life. I have gained new perspectives on things, feel way more confident and comfortable being on my own and have made countless memories with so many new friends.