Universität Mannheim
Mannheim, Germany
Business Major
Fall 2018
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Preparation for Exchange

Planning
Photocopy your passport, driver’s license, health card, or any other photo ID you may have. In the unlikely (and unfortunate) case something gets lost, having copies will speed up the process at the embassy or anywhere else you may have to go.

Email your healthcare provider (including studentcare, if that’s your provider), and get a full print out of your benefits and coverage while abroad. Your healthcare will need to know you need global coverage and the university healthcare provider will require the print out to excuse you from paying for the German healthcare.

Let your bank know you are traveling! Avoid getting your account locked while making a purchase abroad, or taking out money at an ATM, by letting your bank know ahead of time that you will be making purchases in Germany or other countries. Also, on the note of banks: bring Euros. You will need cash (Euros) while you are in Mannheim and traveling around Germany. Most places will take card but not all places. Be sure to always have Euros on you when you are expecting to make a payment in the chance that the business does not accept card.

The cost of living is similar to Vancouver. It seems much cheaper but be cognizant that you are paying in Euros. At the time of my trip (Fall 2018), the exchange was 1.6 CAD to 1 EUR. I constantly had to remind myself of the exchange rate to evaluate whether things were actually cheaper.

Academics
The Universität Mannheim website has very helpful and regularly updated information on courses. The type of syllabi we are used to in Canada does not exist in Mannheim, so be prepared for sub-par course information. For course evaluation, you can email the professor or the Business undergraduate coordinator for syllabi if the ones provided are not fully complete. Be sure to check the credit database to see if courses have already been evaluated to avoid filling out unnecessary course evaluation forms.

You will not have full access to information about course scheduling and availability until you gain access to your login information and Portal2. This will generally be after you arrive in Mannheim. As soon as you gain access, verify your courses and sign up. Be aware that you must sign up for the course and the exam separately. If you only sign up for the course and not the exam, the course will not appear on the transcript Universität Mannheim sends back to SFU.

Packing
Overall, try to only pack essentials. For clothes, pack the bare minimum for a variety of situations (active clothes, weather-appropriate clothes, formal clothes, etc.) and remember while you are packing that you will have souvenirs to bring home – so leave space for these!
Packing (continued)

You can easily find most things in Germany that I wouldn’t recommend bringing (shower supplies, for example), however, cold medication and pain medication is not available without a prescription in Germany. Especially if you’re going during the fall term, be sure to pack your own medication.

Sheets in Germany are differently sized, so bringing your own is not helpful. I would recommend bringing your own pillowcases (two should be enough) because the one provided is used. Also, pillowcases are very small and light to pack.

If you have a spare router, bring it. If you don’t have a spare router, buying one before you go or buying one there will be about the same price. Up to you.

There are many buy and sell pages (in English!) on Facebook once you get to Mannheim. Before buying furnishings, I would check those pages. You can also list things you bought that you cannot or will not bring home (for example, a router).

Traveling to Mannheim

Frankfurt International airport and Stuttgart airport are both close to Mannheim. Check flight prices to both before booking. You will be able to take a single Deutschebahn train from either airport to Mannheim Hauptbahnhof (Hauptbahnhof translates to main station).

For future trips, be sure you know whether you booked flights to/from Frankfurt International or Frankfurt Hahn. Both are fine, but Frankfurt International is closer to the Frankfurt Hauptbahnhof.

During Exchange

Arrival and Orientation

Be sure to plan your arrival to fit with the times you can pick up your keys and move in, or have a plan to stay in a hotel or another place before you move in. I would recommend attending all of the orientation events to make friends, connect with representatives from the university, and get your footing in Mannheim. Some of the sessions will overlap information but trust me they are all worth attending.

You will need to sign up with University at L1. Bring your passport, acceptance letter, proof of health insurance, and anything else they mention in the orientation session. Do this as soon as possible because the wait times can be extensive, and you need these documents to complete other bureaucratic requirements. Once you are signed up with university, you will need to go to the city building at K7 and complete your city registration (bring the documents the university gave you). Then, you will need to book an appointment for your residence permit (also at K7). When you book this appointment, they will provide you an extensive list of paperwork you will need to bring for it. K7 gets really busy after 11am, so go early in the morning. With your university documents, you will also be able to sign up for a tax ID (which allows you to open a bank account) and buy a semester ticket from Deutschebahn (170 € for five months). I highly recommend the semester ticket because you receive free transportation within Mannheim and the surrounding area (including Heidelberg!).
Accommodation and Living
Housing fills up very quickly! Be sure to sign up right when it opens and remember there is a time difference. I would recommend living in university housing because it’s cheaper (300-400 € a month with no deposit compared to 400-600 € a month with a deposit required). If you do not get into university housing, on the unimannheim housing site you can browse subletting posts from current students. Beware scams! Never wire transfer a deposit to anyone!

There are three main campus-provided housings: B7, and Hafenstraße, and Ulmenweg. B7 is closest to the university, Hafenstraße is very close to a popular bar and nightclub area, and Ulmenweg is farthest out but has the largest community-feel. When picking housing, check the mode of transportation and options for transportation to and from the University. For example, B7 you can easily walk to the university, Ulmenweg has busses and trams, and Hafenstraße only has one bus. Housing is shared between five universities, including Universität Mannheim, so you have the opportunity to make friends from other universities in Mannheim!

Academic Details
Lecture format drastically differs depending on the course, much like SFU. Some courses have one session for a prolonged period each week, some courses have one session and one tutorial each week, some courses have multiple sessions each week. The largest difference between SFU and Universität Mannheim is the intensive seminars. Intensive seminars can last anywhere from two days to one week. The instruction hours are much longer (four or more hours), because you only have a couple sessions. These seminars will also have their examination period immediately after the course instead of during the regular final period. Be sure to still register for these examinations, even if it is only in the form of an essay, otherwise they will not show up on your transcript.

Country Information
Speaking German is not at all required to enjoy your exchange term, but I would highly recommend using a language learning program (like Duolingo, Mango, etc) to learn basic phrases like hello, thank you, excuse me, and (most importantly) do you speak English.

The culture is very different from BC. Two interesting differences: Germans do not say thank you when exiting a bus (trust me, you will get weird looks if you do) and Germans knock on the desks after each class ends. Drinking is a large part of the culture, but it is not required to participate in social activities. Meat is also common in most dishes (especially popular ones like schnitzel) but there are many meat-free options including falafel (Bodhi in Jungbusch is delicious) and vegetarian restaurants (I recommend Kombüse, also in Jungbusch). Weather-wise, Mannheim is very similar to Vancouver. Mostly gray and rainy, but it can be very hot during the summer as well. Winters are mild, but there may be snow.
Country Information (continued)
Mannheim is very close to some very amazing places! Heidelberg is 20 – 30 minutes by train and has an incredible schloss (castle). You can get to Heidelberg, Speyer, and Worms with your semester ticket—all of which are beautiful. Outside of your semester ticket, you can travel to close-by popular cities Frankfurt and Stuttgart, or smaller quaint places like Esslingen am Rhein or Tübingen.

Further destinations include Paris and München (Munich), both of which are just a three-hour train ride away and absolutely beautiful. Mannheim is very central in Europe, which is nice for taking a train or flying places.

I would research places you want to go ahead of time and budget out trips but try to book once you get to Europe. The sooner you book, the cheaper your trip will be (most of the time). However, if you wait until you get to Mannheim you can book more trips with new exchange friends and local students.

There are many clubs at Universität Mannheim, similar to SFU, ranging from sports to academic to arts. Joining clubs will allow you to make friends with students who have similar interests but also allow you opportunities to meet more local students. Local students can help recommend places to visit, help you with translations, and teach you more about German culture! I highly recommend joining a club to make friends with both exchange students and local students.

Join VISUM before you go! VISUM is a club specifically for exchange students, organized by local students. You also can apply for a VISUM buddy, which is a local student who helps you transition to living abroad (I highly recommend this!).

Reflection After Exchange
Challenges and Learnings
Budget can go very quickly! A splurge here and a splurge there and suddenly you are booking Flixbus for a trip because the train is too expensive. Check in with finances often and develop a plan so you are able to go to all the places and do all the activities you want to without getting stressed about your financial situation.

What I Wish I knew
Before you go on exchange, many people will tell you about their exchange experiences. Exchange experiences can be vastly different, but the only thing that matters is that you enjoy it. You could travel every weekend or stay in your city and get to know it better. You can try all of the local food or stick to your favourite home-style dishes. Push yourself to get out of your comfort zone but remember at the end of the day exchange is for you to grow as a student and a person. Explore, pass your classes, stay safe, and enjoy your trip!

Advice and Tips
When you first get to your exchange university, you will not be the only new student. Do not be afraid to ask to sit with people at lunch, join a group of students on a tour, or start a conversation in a coffee shop on campus.
Advice and Tips (Continued)
It is definitely good to do your own research online or ask other students but be sure to reach out to Universität if you have questions. When it comes to academics or other specific questions, it is important to make sure you are getting a correct answer from an authoritative source.

Photos
Mannheim Wasserturm

The Mannheim Wasserturm (Watertower) is beautiful and only a 10-15 minute walk from the university.
The study abroad fair the university hosts for local students is a great opportunity to promote SFU, Vancouver, and Canada while getting to know other Canadian students (or German students who studied in Canada!).
Cannstatter Volksfest

Cannstatter Volksfest at Cannstatter Wasen in Stuttgart is a smaller Oktoberfest. Giant cookies are very common (and delicious!).
Heidelberg Schloss

Heidelberg is a short tram/ train ride away from Mannheim. It is included in your semester ticket and features a beautiful, historic Schloss (castle), town centre, and bridge. Definitely recommend visiting while you are in Mannheim!