Spring 2014 Exchange Report

University of Mannheim, Germany

The University of Mannheim – Mannheim Palace

Mannheim Wasserturm Fountain (Watertower)

Mannheim Wasserturm (Watertower)
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Introduction:
I am a third year business student concentrating in Management Information Systems (MIS) and Operations Management (OM) at SFU and I went on exchange to the University of Mannheim, Germany in Spring 2014. I decided to go on exchange to fulfill my passions of travelling, meeting new people, getting to know different cultures, 'finding myself', and just exploring life in another part of the world. Pursuing an international exchange is one of the best opportunities to do all these, as well as further my studies at the same time.

Why University of Mannheim?
In high school, I studied German as my second language and I felt that Germany would be an excellent choice in order to improve my German to a conversational level. Germany offers a selection of many great universities but Mannheim stood out to me in particular as it is an SFU business preferred partner institution as well as the best business school in Germany. Since my major is Business, this university was a good match and offered a good selection of transferrable courses. The university also places a large emphasis on the international experience as every semester they welcome a large number of exchange students. Business students during their final year of university are required to do an exchange semester abroad, and many of their courses are geared to provide students with an international perspective on business.

Germany offers many internship opportunities for students and there are many large companies which have their headquarters here. Some companies are SAP, Beiersdorf, Siemens, BOSCH, and many more. It is advisable to couple an exchange degree with an international co-op or self-sought internship as you can gain a lot of experience through this. SFU offers an international experiential learning certificate (IELC) that can be partially gained through venturing on two international activities, one or even two of which can be international exchange.

Mannheim is located in a very central location with respect to Germany’s neighbouring countries. This means that it is very easy to travel to other countries via plane, train, or coach. Frankfurt Hahn and Frankfurt International Airport are two airports which are located only an hour or two away by coach. Many companies offer cheap deals for students or cheap deals in general. I will write more about the travel opportunities in detail later.
Preparing for Exchange:
There are a number of items to look over when preparing for your exchange semester. Two main things are course selection and housing options.

Course Selection:
Note that there is a large selection of courses, some of which may or may not be transferrable to your concentration. My business concentrations at SFU are Management Information Systems (MIS) and Operations Management (OM). The university offers a good selection of courses for Accounting and Finance but limited courses in some of the other areas. I took two Marketing, one Introductory Finance, one Operations Management, and one German course. Some courses are limited to exchange students only, and some are open to all students.

I would recommend taking a German course as it will really help to boost the experience in your stay in Germany. Although pretty much everyone speaks English, knowing some German will be a plus. Language courses cost 10 Euros for enrollment. You can sign up for language and cultural courses online, on the MyUniMA website and pay the fee before classes start. Note that these courses are very competitive and spaces often fill out fast.

Research courses ahead of time, make sure they fit into your timetable well and you give yourself a Friday or Monday off for travelling! Course enrollment in some cases is quite flexible. Most courses are graded via one final exam through which you have to register for a few weeks beforehand. This means that if the course does not specify, and does not ask you to register before, then you can attend the class without registering and just register for the final exam a few weeks before.

Accommodation:
Check the Studierendenwerk website for student housing options. Apply for housing about four months before you have to move in as places fill up fast. There are also a number of independent options available but with these you often have to apply a few months in advance.

Visa:
Make sure that you have the required visa to study in Germany and work visa if you wish to do so.
On Arrival:
I arrived in Mannheim by coach from London at 6:00am. Shops generally open at around 8:00-8:30am and I was not able to move into my accommodation until 9:30, so there was not much for me to do while waiting to move in. If you booked a residence with Studierendenwerk, make sure that, if you are arriving before 7AM or after 8PM or on a weekend, you make prior arrangements with your landlord to book an appointment to move in. If you arrive late or on a weekend, you may have to stay at a student hostel until you are allowed to move in.

One thing I noticed very soon was that shops are closed on Sunday. Make sure that you do any grocery shopping or errands ahead of time!

Registration:
A few pieces of paperwork need to be filled out before you can be enrolled at the university.

K7:
You must register at the Citizens office in K7 before enrolling in the university. To register, they require your address in Mannheim as well as other forms of ID. It is best to arrive as early as possibly at K7 as the lineups can be as long as three hours. The opening hours are located to the right.

Insurance:
A valid German health insurance is needed for individuals who live outside of the EU. You can purchase health insurance from the university or from an external organization. For Europeans, the EHIC card is valid health insurance.

University Enrollment:
After completion of the previous two steps, you should be able to enroll at the university.

Banking:
It is advisable to open a German bank account for the duration of your stay so that you do not need to pay a transaction fee every time you withdraw money from an ATM. Plus, using this account for university transactions such as paying for rent will be easier. There are a number of banks in the area such as Deutsche Bank, Commerzbank, and Sparkasse. I went with Deutsche Bank to open a student account. The process takes about 3 minutes in total (They know what they’re doing). Plus they all speak English!
Exchange Life:

VISUM:

VISUM is a student run organization which offers a number of events throughout the semester for exchange students. Please take advantage of this program and sign up for the Buddy Program on enrollment as it is an awesome way to meet local students as well as exchange students.

I was matched with a buddy before I arrived and Mannheim and they helped me settle in and find my way around the city. They are a great point of contact if you have any questions regarding university procedures and may even be in the same courses as you.

Every Monday, VISUM holds a gathering called "Stammtisch" where both exchange and local students can gather to meet other like minded individuals. It is located in L3, at the local bar. In addition, they organize trips to cities nearby at a subsidized price with accommodation and transport included. Do take advantage of these trips.

Extra-curricular Activities:

The university offers some sports free of charge, such as boxing, or pilates for students. In addition, an indoor swimming pool is located in U3 for 2€ per visit, and 1.50€ if there are 5 people. The gym is located in D2 and a "Fitness Card" can be purchased for 10€ to 15€ per month from the university. More information can be found on the university website.

Travels:

Travelling to other cities from Mannheim is extremely easy and one can do so cheaply. Some travel companies offer discounts for students or for those who purchase a discount card. There are many cities in the vicinity of Mannheim which you can travel to free with the Semester Ticket, purchasable from the University for 147 EUR. Such cities are Heidelberg, Schwetzingen, Worms, and Speyer.
By Train: If you are planning to travel around Germany often via train, it may well be beneficial to purchase a Bahn25 or Bahn50 card which provides discounts on train tickets. The German train service is called DB – www.bahn.com. Each country has their own train system and thus there are different ways of purchasing tickets. When travelling, make sure that you are familiar with the terms and conditions of purchasing different types of tickets and check that you are eligible to purchase them.

By Bus: Eurolines, Meinfernbus, Flixbus, ADAC Bus, and Public Express are some buses which offer services from Mannheim ZOB (Zentraler Omnibus Bahnhof) to many cities around Europe.

By Plane: There are two main airports nearby: Frankfurt Hahn and Frankfurt International Airport. You will need to take the Frankfurt Hahn bus from the Mannheim ZOB to Frankfurt Hahn, and you can take the MeinFernBus or the train to Frankfurt International Airport. When travelling within Europe, there are two main airlines: Easyjet and Ryanair. They have very cheap deals, and if you book in advance, tickets can cost between 25 to 50 EUR.

**Lessons Learned:**

Overall, my exchange semester was a great learning opportunity. My experiences as well as hearing different peoples' life experiences, has helped to shape my perspective on life. I can truly say that exchange has provided me with a global network of amazing friends who I will likely visit again one day.

Being able to have the opportunity to travel around Europe has opened my eyes to the beauty of the world and the countless wonders it holds; in the culture, people, and environment. Each city I visited was met with amazing people who helped to heighten my travel experience.
Photos:

Riomaggiore – Cinque Terre, Italy

Dilsberg – Baden Wuerttemberg, Germany

Sans Souci Palace – Potsdam, Germany

Harder Kulm – Interlaken, Switzerland

Cambridge University – Cambridge, UK

St. Mary's Square – Munich, Germany