

**Exchange Report**  
**University of Mannheim**  
**Fall 2015 Exchange**

By Will

## **Part I: Activity Log**

**End of August & September:** Willkommen am Mannheim! Upon your arrival, the first things to do are get yourself a bed to sleep and register at school. German people are rule followers, follow the guidelines and finish your check-in procedures on your school, government, dormitory, bank, health insurance providers... and everything else. German people are also extremely helpful. The students' union there (called "Studentenweck") would take extra care on those international students who don't know things around there. School-sponsored student society named Visum would provide all kinds of orientation events, parties and city tours. Nearing one of the oldest city and university in Europe, the Heidelberg University (Basically the distance between Hang Hau and Causeway Bay), we took a day trip there at the end of September. Enjoying the last glimpse of golden sunlight over the smooth wave of River Neckar from the terrace of the old castle on the hill, was the perfect footnote of Autumn in Germany.

**October:** Even if you have never been to Germany before, you must have already heard of the name of "Octoberfest" (or Beer Festival). This greatest folk carnival event would last over a month, with its climax reached on Oct. 3<sup>rd</sup>, the Einheittag (Unification Day). I took the privilege to experience this great event in Berlin. Tasting delicious Bratwurst (BBQ sausage), good beer while enjoying a rock concert at Brandenburg Tor will make the night memorable for life. Another trip to Koln was made, the Cathedral was surely breath-taking, with its height at least.

**November:** Germany has a well-connected railway network domestically and to other parts of Europe. But in fact the most convenient and economic way of travel is car renting, provided you have 3 or 4 guys traveling together. We went on two driving trips to Prague, and Paris respectively. Departing on Friday (My day-off then) and returning on Monday morning allows us to spend the most time enjoying the cities and soaking up the classic European atmosphere. The Terrorism Attack on Paris happened the night we arrived, but luckily we were spending a good time in the Louvre so we weren't caught in. Our plan to visit the Versailles was interrupted, but Paris the city itself worth another day to feel around.

**December:** It was approaching the finals and some extra hours on preparation for them were spent. It was also the time to say good-bye. Packing up your belongings, checking out at all the services you checked in during September (and do remember to start early, some government procedures requires appointment made in advance), and have a few more dinners and parties with your friends there. After the exam I managed to organize a two weeks trip from Italy, southern France to Switzerland. Winter is the low season for tourism, but the advantage of traveling at that time also lies with it, there won't be that many people crowding everywhere.

## **Part II: General Information**

**Visa Procedures:** I applied my visa in Beijing, so the following description may differ from the experience in Hong Kong. Making long story short, the key things needed are (but not limited to. Please refer to and rely on the information provided by German embassy) Your invitation letter from hosting University, your certification for a sufficient deposit in a German Bank (This document can take a long time to proceed. I used the Deutsche Bank, and it took me 3 weeks to get that document), a proper health insurance (Buy it online from any provider will be fine, as long as the policy is marked with “suitable for European Visa application” and English translation with it), your proof as a full-time student in HKUST (transcript is preferred, but I simply used my student card and got away with it.) and a motivation letter written in GERMAN. The application will take AT LEAST a full month, so do remember to start early, start early, and start early.

**Orientation Activities:** One month before your arrival, the school will assign a local student as your exchange buddy. They will help you with problems you have before your arrival and guide you through your first days in University of Mannheim. The student society of Visum also provide you with all kinds of orientation activities, exchange fair, parties and city tours. With their help you would be able to make a bigger circle of friends who you will be hanging out with during your stay here.

**International Services:** The student union and Visum would help you with any difficulty you come across. The main goal of their effort is to help you merging into the student body of Mannheim as soon as possible. So except for an exchange fair (which I didn't attend due to a cold), other events are held together with local students.

**Accommodation:** During around late May, hall selection exercise would be performed and non-local students will be prioritized. Generally speaking, all exchange students would be able to secure a school dorm around 20 mins walk from school. If you missed the selection exercise like me, you can pay attention to available dorm information provided in your student portal (these are dorms emptied due to outbound exchange or defer of study, but don't give too much hope on this, because local student will rent them to their friends with priority). If you still can't get a bed, contact student union as early as possible. They have close cooperation with private land lords, so they would have many fresh first hand room source. I managed to get a 10-min-walk-distance studio AFTER my arrival in the city. So don't worry, but try to start early.

**Course Registration:** The University of Mannheim does not have strict course registration system. Some courses may require you to register in the portal to assign tutorial sessions, but for most courses, you just have to attend the lecture. So don't

worry for quota, enrollment shopping cart and stuff. Just take the courses you want to take, or drop them at any time before midterm. But do remember to register for exams for courses you want to obtain credits! This is very important! No registration, no exam, no credits!

**Teaching & Assessment:** University of Mannheim is a very internationalized university. Faculty comes from different parts of Europe and the world. So you may come across different accents and teaching preferences. The assessment is heavily based on final exam, usually 80% so do take them seriously if want credits transferred. The rest 20% normally goes to class participation or homework assignments.

**Sports & Recreation:** There is no Olympic-sized soccer pitch in town, but we do have a big lawn in front of school canteen. Students use it for football, Frisbee or just lie on it to spend an idle afternoon. There is a gym not far from the school, but unlike in UST, you have to pay for membership. Two Cinemas are located in city center, with more in other parts of the region.

**Social Clubs & Networking:** If you are really that night-club type of person, just stick to the emails from Visum! They hold night events almost every week. (In fact, I even felt a bit bored in the end, because these parties are just practically the same.)

**Expenses:** Germany is one of the easiest place in the world in terms of cost of living, cost you way less than in HK. My deposit was roughly less than 60k HKD equivalent Euros, and covered everything except the tuition fee paid to UST, with 1000 Euros left in balance.

**Health & Safety:** University clinic needs a 10 min stretrail to get there. Your health insurance brought with you should be enough to cover your expense. Mannheim is one of the richest and safest cities in Europe. But caution especially at night is still advised concerning the recent refugee crisis.

**Food:** Schweinhaxe, Bratwurst, Dunklebier... Try as much as you like. They won't disappoint you. If you miss home cuisine, there is also some good Chinese restaurants in town.

**Transportation:** Students can purchase a semester pass of regional transport (including bus, stretrail, conventional train, but exclude the high-speed ICE) at 150 Euros. It is strongly recommended. If you are up for a long distance trip, renting a car is the best option.

**Climate:** Mild, not as humid as in HK. But winters are really cold so do remember to bring coats, sweaters and umbrella.

**Communications:** Do NOT purchase those long term cellphone contracts! Go to a Supermarket named Aldi and ask for the pre-paid card called Aldi-talk.

### **Part III Items to Bring**

Passport with visa  
Invitation letter from University  
Insurance policy (Printed)  
Bank account activation letter (If applicable)  
Credit card  
Some Cash  
Sweaters  
Coat  
Shirts(You don't have to bring much. Buy them in Germany if you need. They're really cheap)  
Jeans and Trousers  
Sneakers  
Suits are not necessary  
Umbrella  
Blanket  
Pillow  
Bed sheets  
Laptop  
EU standard Adaptor  
Cellphone  
IPad (If applicable)  
Charger and lines for above four