

EXCHANGE REPORT



Germany

Universität Mannheim

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BSc RMBI, Year 4
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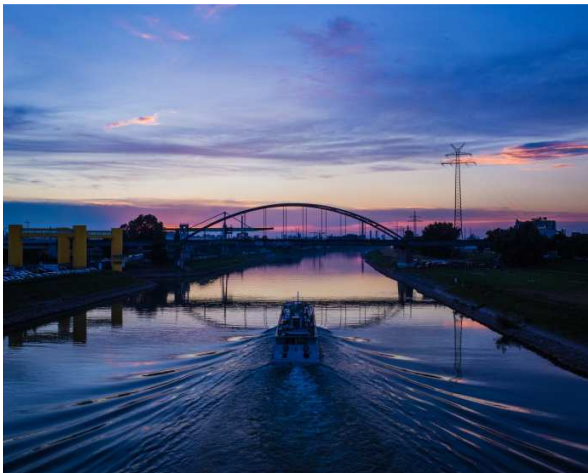
Monthly Activity Log

SEPTEMBER



Schloss Mannheim

The Fall semester started in early September similar to that of HKUST. The Mannheim Palace is one of the iconic buildings in Mannheim, apart from Wasserturm and Mannheim Hauptbahnhof. It was in Baroque style and originally the main residence of the Prince-electors of the Electorate of the Palatinate of the House of Wittelsbach. It is one of the reasons why I chose Mannheim. Part of the building is the campus of Universität Mannheim, including classrooms and a library. Yes, I can STUDY in a PALACE! Another part of the palace is a museum.



Der Neckar near Hafenstrasse

Monthly Activity Log

SEPTEMBER



Schlossfest

Apart from the welcome party, one of the unforgettable activities was the Schlossfest. I visited the museum of Mannheim palace for free, went to the roof of the palace and watched firework and music performance. Of course, I tried the Eichbaum beer produced in Mannheim and met some German friends.



Heidelberg

The way I spent my free time in September was to travel in places nearby. The semester ticket for students covered the places such as Heidelberg, Speyer, Schwetzingen and Wertheim. The S-bahn train S1 goes along the beautiful and meandering Neckar River from Heidelberg to Osterburken. I love these places due to the quiet environment and historical cathedrals and castles.



Speyer



Schwetzingen

Monthly Activity Log

OCTOBER



Stuttgart



München

“October” and “Beer” mean Oktoberfest in Germany. Actually, every place in Germany including Mannheim holds beer festival and they called them “Volksfest”, the people’s festival. I went to the beer festivals in Stuttgart and Munich. I met several German in Stuttgart, and Austrian and British people in Munich. It was a great time to meet people from different places during this huge festival.



München

As there are no midterm exams in Germany, I was free even though I attended all lectures and submitted all assignments during October. I also traveled to other places in Germany like Mercedes Benz Museum and Schloss Neuschwanstein and other countries nearby like France, Czech Republic and Austria.



Paris



Prague



Hallstatt

Monthly Activity Log

OCTOBER



Having dinner in a German family

I had dinner in a German family in October. My friend joined the Insight Mannheim which is an Christian organization of Universität Mannheim. They had church service every week, and held cultural exchange activities such as baking Christmas cookies in a German family and weekend activities like Lasertag game. They are friendly and willing to tell you anything about German culture. I spent a happy evening with the Schnabel family and their friends. They baked pizzas for us and taught us to play card games.



Eichbaum Factory Visit

Beer is one of the representative products of Germany. I joined the beer factory visit held by the international students' organization, Visum. Eichbaum is the beer produced in Mannheim and has brewed beer since 1679. After the visit, I knew about the traditional and modern ways of operation in a beer factory and tried several types of beer.

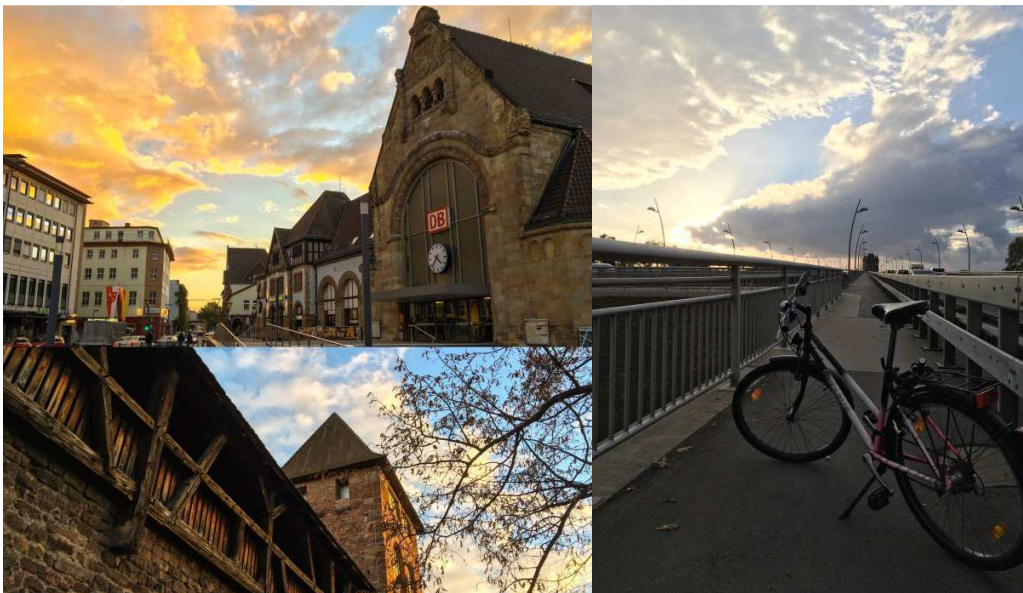
Monthly Activity Log

NOVEMBER



Hiking

In November, I tried hiking and cycling in Germany. Universität Mannheim provided a large range of sport activities, including hiking. I joined a Facebook group “Wandern in der Metropolregion” which is a hiking group of Universität Mannheim and held hiking events near Mannheim. Mr. Wandervogel led us to hike from Edenkoben to Neustadt passing through Vineyard and Hambacher Schloss. On another day, I cycled from Mannheim to Worms (about 22km). It was tiring and freezing but I enjoyed the countryside landscape of Germany.



Cycling

Monthly Activity Log

NOVEMBER



Soccer Match in Dortmund

Germany won the recent world cup and German love watching Soccer match so much. I watched a German Cup soccer match in Dortmund with other German people who are enthusiastic about the teams they support. I shouted the slogans and cheered the team up with other Borussia Dortmund's fans. I enjoyed an exciting match and the lively environment.



Berlin

I travelled to Berlin and Piran in Slovenia. I appreciate how German face and preserve the history and offense during Second World War and like the energetic side of Berlin. Piran is a small coastal town preserving medieval architecture, with narrow streets and compact houses. It was a relaxing town where European people go on vacation. I love the seafood restaurant there.



Piran in Slovenia

Monthly Activity Log

DECEMBER



Weihnachtsmarkt

The results of final examination in December accounted for a majority part of the final grade. Therefore, I spent most of the time studying in December. After the examination, I went to the Christmas markets in Mannheim and Nürnberg. It was crowded in the Christmas market Nürnberg like the Lunar New Year market in Hong Kong as it is the most famous one in Germany. There is an interesting hot drink in the Christmas market in Mannheim, a cup of hot wine with fire on it. I enjoyed the cuisine in Christmas market such as Gebrannte Mandeln and Langos.



Camping Van in Kirchzarten (Schwarzwald)

Before I moved out the residence hall, I went camping in the Black Forest. It is a campsite with rental of fixed camping vans. The camping vehicles are new, comfortable and well-built except absence of water supply inside the car due to frozen water pipes. It was a special experience to stay for two nights in countryside of Black Forest, the most beautiful natural forest in Germany. I wish I could live there. After this trip, I moved out the residence hall and de-registered my residence and student identity in Mannheim.

General Exchange Information

Visa Procedures

As for Visa application, take prompt action after receiving the Letter of Acceptance by Universität Mannheim. The procedures now are different from those when I applied but the German Consulate General Hong Kong and DAAD Information Centre provide clear guidance. Financial proof or whether opening a blocked account is needed may be a hindrance so pay special attention to any details and enquire German Consulate General Hong Kong about any misunderstanding.

Orientation Activities

International Office, Business School and Department of Economics held their own orientation session to describe the details about the exchange period, such as residence halls and course registration. VISUM held entertaining orientation events. Their first event is a "Raise Your Flag" International Welcome Party. Actually, there is another welcome party, which is worth going and has a larger scale, for local students.

International Services & Activities

Apart from Stammtisch with different topics every Monday night, VISUM held activities for international students over the whole exchange period until examination, such as trips to Wurstmarkt, Oktoberfest and Berlin, Pub Crawl, Brewery Tour, Running Dinner, Christmas Dinner and some parties. International Office held excursions to Bonn, Frankfurt (German Stock Exchange & European Central Bank) and Strasbourg (EU Parliament).

Accommodations

Studierendenwerk offered a range of student residence halls. I lived in Hafenstrasse 43, which is one of them offered by Studierendenwerk. It is near the Neckar River and there is a small river behind the building where lots of students had barbeque and drank with friends there during summer. "Hafen" means Harbour and Ludwigshafen is one of the largest harbours of Rhein River in Mannheim near where I lived. It is not the closest residence hall to the campus but it is in an acceptable distance and has a decent environment. Be reminded that quotas for popular residence halls are very limited.

General Exchange Information

Course Registration

Most of the courses offered by Department of Economics do not require registration for lessons. However, courses offered by other departments or schools may need a registration so be careful of the deadlines of registration. As for German Language or Cultural courses, I had registered already before I left Hong Kong and needed to pay for the registration fee with my student card before deadline. All the courses, including German language courses, need examination registration, and otherwise, no grading will be given to the course. Be careful to the exam registration dates.

Teaching & Assessment Methods

Different courses have different style of teaching. I attended finance and economics courses which were taught in a classroom and adopt an assessment method similar to HKUST (assignments, quizzes and exams). Humanities courses may be in a form of group discussion during lesson. They usually do not have midterm exams and may only have one final exam contributing to the whole course grade. I think that a normal HKUST student who studies course materials before exams is able to get a passing grade.

Sports & Recreation Facilities

When it was still summer and hot, I went swimming in a lake called Stollenwörthweiher. Universität Mannheim offers abundant of sports courses or training programmes. Some of them require prior registration and are not free. But I can attend most of the sports training such as table tennis, hiking, badminton and boxing without registration. Just show up and enjoy. Unfortunately, most of tutors of training spoke German only. There is no gym room in the campus and there is one operated by another organization at a reasonable price.

Finance and Banking

At least one banking account has to be opened for paying rent. It is also convenient to buy things and load money to student card with a debit card of German bank account. International Office usually recommend students to open an account in Deutsche Bank as they have ATMs and an online banking website in English language. However, not every student can open an account in Deutsche Bank so other German banks such as Santander Bank are alternatives.

General Exchange Information

Health and Safety

Although International Office recommended me to purchase German health insurance, travel insurance offered by HKUST is enough for application of visa and residence permit. But there should be backup cash available for unexpected medical expenses. Germany is one of the safest countries in Europe but do not walk alone in the dark, especially for girls. When travelling, be careful of personal belongings as pick-pocket is common in Europe.

Food

There are two canteens in the campus, Mensa am Schloss and EO Cafeteria. Mensa am Schloss offers cheaper cuisine than that of EO Cafeteria but EO Cafeteria provide a better food quality. Apart from student canteens, Café L3 serves good coffee daytime and alcoholic drinks at night. German bread like Brezel, Döner kebab and pizzas are also cheap alternatives. Normally, when I had a meal in a restaurant, I needed to spend about 8 to 15 Euros but the cuisine offered is in high quality.

Transportation

I bought the semester ticket for about 120 Euros which allowed me to travel inside Mannheim and to places near Mannheim, such as Heidelberg, by bus, tram or trains except first class seats and ICE train. I did not need to buy tickets from drivers and only showed my ticket printed on my student ID card. I went to campus from my residence hall by bus usually and sometimes by tram. The routes of tram and bus cover most of the area in Mannheim, including those areas outside the "chess board". It is convenient though the waiting time for tram and bus is usually long so I bought a secondhand bike later which allows me to travel at any time.

Climate

It was hot during late August and early September with temperature at about 25 to 30 degrees even at night. It became cooler and cooler after that but a wind breaker with sweater would be enough. It was freezing in December with temperature less than 10 degrees and extremely cold in January with temperature at about -5 degrees so a down jacket would be helpful. Mannheim rains more than I thought but the scale of raining is small so people usually do not bring an umbrella.

General Exchange Information

Communication

I bought the phone sim card from Vodafone after I reached Mannheim. Normally, it works in the whole European Union area and UK for about 10 Euros per month. Discount supermarkets offer phone sim cards at a slightly cheaper price but I am not sure if they can be used in other European countries. It is strange that there is no WiFi connection but LAN connection only in the residence halls so I needed to buy a WiFi router there.

Items to Bring

- ☐ WiFi router
- ☐ Mobile phone
- ☐ Adaptor for plugs in Europe
- ☐ Medication
- ☐ Credit card
- ☐ Backpack
- ☐ Sweater
- ☐ Down jacket
- ☐ Camera
- ☐ Charger
- ☐ Passport (visa)
- ☐ Letter of acceptance
- ☐ Air ticket
- ☐ EUROS
- ☐ Toothbrush, toothpaste
- ☐ Shampoo, shower gel
- ☐ Hand Cream
- ☐ Sun glasses
- ☐ Nail file
- ☐ Mobile phone sim card
- ☐ Notebook computer
- ☐ Hair Dryer
- ☐ Headphone
- ☐ Slippers
- ☐ Locks

Useful Links and Contacts

☐ Information for Incoming Exchange Students

http://www.uni-mannheim.de/io/english/incoming_exchange_students/

☐ Visum

<https://www.visum-mannheim.de/>

☐ Information about student visa

<http://www.hongkong.diplo.de/Vertretung/hongkong/en/03Info/Visum/national-visa.html#topic14>
<http://ic.daad.de/hongkong/en/24887/index.html>

☐ Campus Map

https://www.uni-mannheim.de/io/english/contact/address_and_campus_map/index.html

☐ Sports programme offered by Universität Mannheim

<http://www.uni-mannheim.de/sport/english/startpage/index.html>

☐ Tourist Information of Mannheim (useful website to search for entertainment)

<http://www.tourist-mannheim.de/en/Home>

☐ How to hire or buy a bicycle in Mannheim

<http://www.uni-mannheim.de/welcomecenter/english/living/bicycle/index.html>

☐ 世界各國電壓、插頭規格一覽表

<http://www.backpackers.com.tw/forum/attachment.php?attachmentid=428387&d=1316450705>

☐ European emergency number: **112**

If more information is needed, get my contact from SBM Exchange Team by emailing at bmugexch@ust.hk.

Willkommen in Deutschland!