

Exchange Report

University of Mannheim, Germany



Ted Qisi Li
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Table of contents

1. Monthly activity log
2. General exchange information
3. Items to bring
4. Useful links and contacts
5. Best practices of host university

Monthly activity log


January: University of Mannheim offers winter academy for exchange students to take an intensive German language class for about 4 weeks. I didn't participate since I was at home with families for about 1 month. If you are interested in the program, please do apply. I have heard some pretty good things from the people who have done it. You will be able to meet your earliest group of friends and started exploring Germany a little bit before the semester starts. Also be prepared and do some research about the courses you are gonna take. Different departments require different methods of registration. If you are going to take courses outside your home department (BSchool/ECON), you have to email different persons of contact.

February: Willkommen in Deutschland! This is the period when you start settling down in Mannheim, Germany. Germany is known for its notorious paperwork which some Germans don't even understand the process. There will be registration needed for your residency in Mannheim, enrollment for University of Mannheim, check-in student dorms, bank account setup and health insurance purchase/validation depending whether you have bought an insurance that's recognizable in Germany. (The insurance offered by SBM is not recognized by German universities. It's always the best to get a German insurance in case there are any incidents and it will make sure that you get your treatment timely). Classes started in mid-Feb. Course registration is very different from UST. Most business classes do not need registration yet for some other classes you have to write an email to register. I found the help sessions offered by the international office very useful.

I travelled a bit around Mannheim and went to some student parties to get to know people. Heidelberg is right next to Mannheim and it only takes 15 mins by the regional train or 45 mins by the S-Bahn.

March: Although it's supposed to be spring already, it's still very cold in Germany. Deutschland is not known for its beautiful architecture also because of the bombing in WWII many of its historical architectures have been destroyed and rebuilt. Not too much happened in Mannheim in March so I went to the Netherlands and Belgium for 4 days. At this point, it's generally cold and dark in Europe so don't expect too much.

April: University of Mannheim has a really good time schedule which is kind of synced up in a sense with the international B-schools. This gives students perfect timing for summer internships if you ever need to come back to Hong Kong. Given that, UniMa also has a long enough Easter holiday that lasts more than 2 weeks. For myself, I only have classes from Monday to Wednesday



so I travelled around Germany, Czech and Austria during my three weeks vacation. I went to Hamburg, Berlin, Dresden, Prague, Vienna and Munich. After the trip, I participated a startup pitch battle held by Q-SUMMIT, Mannheim. The university itself has been gaining some traction in entrepreneurship and innovation in the recent years. The good quality of the students have also attracted recruiter from Big 4, SAP and BASF (right next to Mannheim in Ludwigshafen). I definitely recommend to learn more the startup scene in Germany if you are interested and UniMa has had some pretty interesting startups in the recent years like Stocard.

May: The weather has become so much nicer in May and it's also very good for travelling. There's a student org in Mannheim called VISUM. They will hold a series of short trips to different places in Germany including Stuttgart, Frankfurt, Hamburg and Neuschwanstein castle etc. Take these opportunities to explore Germany and they are usually very affordable. They also have international food nights and countless parties of different themes. Great ways to meet people and have fun. I went to Paris and Strasbourg for 5 days with some friends.

June: This is the end of the semester and exams will start soon. Do remember to register for your exams in the middle of the semester. How things work here is a little bit different. You are not officially in a class and getting the credits unless you register for the exams and assessments you will take. This is flexible since it allows you to drop your class halfway through the semester in case you regret taking any classes. Almost all the grades depend on your final performance in the final exam. So make sure you study hard enough to get a 4.0 at least since this means Pass in German system. 1.0 means an A plus. Do start early since UniMa is probably the best business school in Germany and full-time students here study really really hard for exams and their grades.

General exchange information

1) Visa Procedures: German visa is extremely annoying to process. The previous exchange reports only tell people to start early. I definitely suggest so and hope to offer a little bit more insights here. You need to make an appointment every time you go to the German consulate in Hong Kong. As part of the visa requirement, you have to set up a bank account before you go to Germany. I think only Korean, Japanese and Singaporean citizens don't need this process. Otherwise, you have to open a DB account.

If you are from China, luckily you can go to the Deutsche Bank branch in Guangzhou. Please be prepared to do some online research and make sure you have the original saving statements. (The DB branch in Hong Kong is only investment-banking focused without any retail services.)

If you happen to be from Hong Kong, unfortunately you have to mail the materials to Germany which could take a long time for them to process let alone they actually reject applications if you don't have enough confirmation.

In addition, you have to buy a German insurance as well. I bought DAK online. I am not so familiar if you purchase other Hong Kong insurances. UniMa doesn't give you the offer letter until a very late stage, which barely leaves you much time to get the bank account and visa done. So do get this right in one time and be over-prepared. It is true that some people could not even participate in the end because of visa delay. The other documents should be relatively straightforward so I will save the space here.

2) Orientation Activities: International office will hold some activities for exchange students. You don't have to attend every one of them but it's recommended to meet with the PIC of different departments. ECON department is separate from the Business school so they will have a different orientation. Make sure you attend these to understand different registration processes.

3) International Services & Activities: Google "international office university of Mannheim" --- You will find the contact you need throughout the semester.

4) Accommodations: The school offers accommodations but you have to apply for it online through MyUniMa system. The rent will be around 300 euros per month.

5) Courses Registration: As mentioned above, be prepared to do research in advance. Different courses under different departments require different registration processes and periods. Send them an email to make sure.

6) Sports & Recreation Facilities: The university has a really good gym that only cost 15 euros per month for students. There's a sports center which is located a bit further away.

7) Social Clubs & Networking Opportunities: UniMa has many opportunities for exchange students to meet each other and German students. Just keep an eye for the emails from international office. There will be parties in the palace every Thursday. I heard it's really fun but I haven't been at all.

8) Food: If you are not a big fan of German food, which is fine, you will have access to high quality materials in ALDI/REWE/LIDL. You can get cheap pots and tools at Woolworth which is in the northern part of Mannheim city. There are Asian markets that sell basically anything. Doeners are everywhere. They taste awesome but you will get tired of them if you eat them too often. They are definitely good travel food.

9) Transportation: Transportation is so easy in Germany. Although people complain about Deutsche Bahn, I still think it's really good infrastructure and affordable in a highly developed country like Germany. A Bahnkarte will be useful if you are going to travel a lot.

A semester ticket will be convenient if you live outside the Quadrate. This will allow you to take any S-Bahn, regional trains and buses within 50km of Mannheim. Of course, you can ride your own bikes or simply walk to school if you live close enough.

10) Communication: Please don't assume that people in Germany speak English. It's so much easier to get things done if you already speak some German. In places like Supermarkt, English could very much confuse the cashiers.

Items to bring

I will just go ahead and list out all the special/important things you might need in this section.

1. **Medicine for emergency: prescription drugs are hard to get in Germany. Be prepared if you have special needs.**
2. **Cash: always good to have some cash at the beginning since you won't have a bank account.**
3. **There won't be need to blanket or pillows since the dorms will provide them. There's one IKEA near Mannheim if you wish to get your own.**
4. **Clothes for winter is needed for sure if you come to Germany in Feb-April. It could get really really cold.**
5. **Bring important documents issued by HKUST and UniMa for enrollment purposes and residency registration.**
6. **Other necessities can pretty much be bought at supermarkets.**

Useful links and contacts:

International office:

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

Course catalogue:

http://www.uni-mannheim.de/io/english/incoming_exchange_students/course_catalogues/course_catalogue_fall_semester_2017/index.html

Emergency number in Europe: 112

DB China Blocked account setup:

<https://china.db.com/china/cn/content/5777.html>

Best practices of UniMa:

1. The international office really takes care of students and please do reach out when you are in trouble or if you need help/information. They do a really good job of answering your questions.
2. The cafeteria offers affordable food sets with vegetarian everyday and the quality is not bad.
3. The school holds career fair which I encourage students to look them up. There are companies that do not require German as the working language.
4. Studying in a palace is already one of the most amazing things you can do when you study abroad :)
5. Short trips organized by the international offices are really well designed and affordable, which provides you insights into German culture.