
EXCHANGE REPORT

UNIVERSITY OF MANNHEIM
2017 FALL EXCHANGE REPORT

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Monthly Activity Log

August

Because of the orientation activities and registration procedures stated in email from University of Mannheim, I am two of my friends from HKUST arrived Mannheim on 22nd August for earlier settlement. There are many things you need to deal with after your arrival such as opening a local bank account for rental payment, getting the residence permit at local government office, buying the semester ticket for transportation and getting the student ID card. I have also joined the welcoming party held by the international student society called VISUM. It was really a great chance to meet some new friends from different countries.

September

September is the first month of school during my exchange in Mannheim. I was really impressed by the academic culture and studying attitude of students in Germany. They are all very punctual for the lesson no matter it is a 9am or 3pm class. I am quite sure you will be surprised by their punctuality. Apart from studying, I have also went to Munich for celebration of Oktoberfest, the world's largest beer festival. It was really a memorable experience to drink a 1L beer and have some fun fair games with German who dressed up in their traditional costumes.

October

After living a month in Germany, everything has already been settled down. I started getting used to the slow living style in Mannheim. The pace of living at there is very slow when comparing to Hong Kong. Moreover, most of the restaurants and all supermarkets are closed in Sunday and holidays. It is extremely crucial for us to get some food and drinks prepared in dorm before the holidays. I have also been to London for a week as I got some day offs in October. I have watched football matches of Chelsea and Liverpool. I wholeheartedly recommend you to watch if you are also a football fan.

November

Time flies and half of my exchange has passed already. The weather is really cold starting from November. Temperature of everyday is below 10 degree celsius. I need to wear 4 to 5 clothes when I hang out with my friends. I have been to Amsterdam with one of my friends from Hong Kong. The village of windmill is really historical and attractive. It was my first time to see such a big windmill which is still in use. French fries and pancakes are also highly recommended when you go there.

December

December is the month of studying and farewell. Everyone including me need to study hard for the exams so that means the party time has nearly come to an end. I cannot say the exam at there is difficult or not as it really depends on the course content. After finishing the exams, most of the students including the locals would go back to their home towns to celebrate Christmas. Therefore, we held some farewell parties for celebration of our half year relationship and end of the semester.

General Exchange Information

1. Visa procedure

You need to apply for a study visa in order to have your exchange in Germany. You may also need to ask for approval of financial support from your parents because of the visa requirement. The whole process takes around at least 1 month so you better prepare it as soon as possible.

2. Orientation activities

There are some welcoming events like walking tour and school parties for you to meet some new friends. I really recommend you to join if you are free because you can experience the cultural differences more by meeting people from different countries.

3. International services & activities

VISUM is the international student organisation who organises activities and provides different student services. Should you have any enquiries, you can also go to office in L1.

4. Accommodations

The student housing in Mannheim can be mainly divided into two types which are dorms near city centre and a dorm far from city centre called Ulmenweg. The largest difference is that most of the exchange students will live in Ulmenweg because it has more vacancies. I am also one of the students living in Ulmenweg. If you want to live closer with exchange students, I would highly suggest you to live in Ulmenweg.

5. Course registration

The course registration process is quite difficult when comparing to HKUST. They do not have a standardised procedure for registration of the courses of different schools. Some courses need to apply by sending email while some need to register through the system called ILIAS. You need to be aware of the deadlines and procedures of different courses. Moreover, you need to register for the exams before the exam period which means you are able to drop some courses if you do not want to continue the study of it.

6. Teaching & assessment methods

There are lectures, assignments and final exams for courses in the University of Mannheim. The teaching style is similar to Hong Kong but the professors at there focus more on theories and memorisation. For some courses, you may need to memorise a lot of theories and definition of concepts examination.

7. Sports & recreation facilities

The university has a gym room in somewhere near city center. Students can go there for running and weight training. The fare of gym room is not free but affordable.

8. Finance & Banking

The living cost in Mannheim is not high when comparing with other big cities in Germany. You can save a lot of money if you always cook by yourself as the price of restaurants are quite expensive like the average is 10 euro per meal. If you consider travelling around Europe, you should expect around 1000 euro per month.

9. Social clubs & networking opportunities

There are not many social clubs for international students. If you wanna go for networking with other students, you can consider the activities held by VISUM like International Welcome Party and city excursion within Germany.

10. Health & safety

If you really get sick in Mannheim, there are some clinics and a hospital for you to choose. However, the expense is quite expensive for international students without buying the health insurance recommended by the university. To me, I just use the insurance provided by HKUST.

For safety in Mannheim, I can say it is very safe when comparing with other cities or countries in Europe. The criminal rate is quite low because

Mannheim is a small town only. You should be safe as long as you walk in the big streets with many people walking around.

11. Food

There are not much restaurants for you to choose in Mannheim. They are mainly German local restaurants, Italian restaurants and döner kebab. It costs you at least 10 euro for having a meal at the restaurants.

12. Transportation

The transportation in Mannheim are mainly by tram and by bus. You can buy a student semester ticket for unlimited transportation within Mannheim. You just need to pay a one-off fee for the ticket and you can use it indefinitely.

13. Climate

The temperature is quite low starting from October. It is cool in October but very cold since November. The temperature is around 0-6°C in the winter.

14. Communication

For the Internet plan of your smartphones, you can buy a sim card in Hong Kong or in Germany. Most of them can be recharged after you bought the sim card. You can buy the sim card in supermarket or from Internet service providers like Vodafone and O2.

Items to Bring

1. Passport, Welcome letter, Housing contract, Letter of acceptance, Proof of insurance
2. Warm clothing (you can also buy some at there)
3. Laptop, laptop charger
4. Electrical adapters (For EU)
5. Small suitcase for hand carry (around 20 inches)
6. Business suits (for presentation or interview)
7. Medicine for emergence
8. Food from Hong Kong (if you are afraid of having homesick)

Useful Links and Contacts

1. International office: http://www.uni-mannheim.de/io/english/incoming_exchange_students/
2. Course catalogue: http://www2.uni-mannheim.de/io/english/incoming_exchange_students/course_catalogues/course_catalogue_spring_semester_2018/index.html
3. DB Train provider: <https://www.bahn.com/en/view/index.shtml>
4. Visa affairs on the German Consulate General, Hong Kong website: www.hongkong.diplo.de/Vertretung/hongkong/en/03Info/Visum/visa.html
5. Emergence contact: 112