

# EXCHANGE REPORT

University of  
Mannheim,  
Germany

Anson Luk (BBA OM)

An aerial photograph of the University of Mannheim courtyard. The courtyard is a large, open square paved with light-colored stone. It is surrounded by a grand, multi-story building with a classical facade, featuring numerous windows and a central entrance. The sky is filled with soft, white clouds. In the foreground, there is a fence and a few people walking. A large, semi-transparent brown circle is overlaid on the bottom left of the image, containing the text 'FALL 2017' in white.

FALL  
2017

Probably you haven't heard of Mannheim before, but since you are trying to apply for exchange, and you are browsing for a good institution in Germany, I can promise you that you are on the right page. Mannheim is a small city in Germany, the city itself is in grid pattern, which is quite special. Another special thing for Mannheim is its university. University of Mannheim is ranked no.1 business school in Germany (updated to Jan 2018). It has a diverse community as there are a lot of incoming exchange students, as well as elites from all over the world to be a full-time student here in Mannheim.

Let's not talking about ranking all day long, in terms of geographic location, Mannheim is located in the southern Germany, which is very close to Frankfurt, it takes half an hour to reach Frankfurt International Airport (FRA), which you can travel to almost every corner in Europe. Although Mannheim may not be the best city for travelers in Germany, but you can always reach Frankfurt, Heidelberg Stuttgart and more nice places in less than 1 hour by train.



## **August 2017**

I arrived in Mannheim on the 22nd, via train from Frankfurt International Airport (FRA). Since there is 7 hours difference between Germany (GMT+1) and Hong Kong (GMT+8), after settling down and checking in my dormitory, I took a rest and hang around my dormitory. The next day, I went to meet up my friends in Frankfurt, and started to travel around Frankfurt, Cologne up to Dortmund. We visited landmarks in Frankfurt, Cologne Cathedral and we watched the first home game of the season for BVB Dortmund.

After some travels, I backed in Mannheim to deal with my residency in K7 (residents' bureau), as well as exchange student enrollment in L1 in Mannheim (K7 and L1 are zones in the grid patterned areas in Mannheim). Since I have previously applied for a bank account with the aid of University of Mannheim's International Office, it is easier for me to finish the initial paperwork.

Timeline:

22nd: Mannheim

23rd to 27th: Frankfurt > Cologne > Dortmund

## **September 2017**

The commencement of semester is on 1st September, classes. Few days later, I went to Heidelberg, which locates very close to Mannheim. The Old Town of Heidelberg was an amazing place to go, it was so relaxing to stay there. If you are enrolled in Mannheim, it is the only best place for your weekend if you just want to chill out within Baden-Württemberg, instead of going far. Then, I went to Bad Durkheim for an international wine festival, with lots of nice wines including red wine, white wine, rose wine and more. It was one of the biggest wine festival in Germany.

The next week, I went to Munich for the Oktoberfest. Lots of people wearing traditional costumes, even more people sitting in the "tents", holding a beer, a huge glass of beer of 1L. Moreover, there are people standing on tables, battling with others trying to finish an entire Liter of beer, some of them even finished the whole glass in 30 secs. It was unbelievably crazy but that's what they did. For your references, the fastest among all of my friends coming with me, finished the 1L in 30 mins (and nearly get drunk), while there were some of us who cannot finish the whole glass. "Tent" is the setting of a temporary shelter, like an outdoor restaurant. Besides food and beers, there are some roller coasters, thrill rides, Ferris wheel and more for visitors. It feels like an amazing carnival, instead of a Beer Fe(a)st.

In Munich, I watched a UEFA Champions League game of Bayern Munich playing against Anderlecht, in Allianz Arena. It was so amazing as the crowds chanted a lot for the Bavaria Giant, the passionate fans turned the field into a red one. After that, I also did some travel in Munich, such as the Marienplatz. There were a couple of famous churches there as well. A regret for me is that I cannot reach Dachau concentration camp where the Nazis based due to time limit. But this does not matter the fact that Munich is a nice city. I also went to Worms, another small city close to Mannheim.

Timeline:

2nd: Heidelberg > Bad Durkheim

13th to 19th: Munich

23rd: Heidelberg

30th: Worms

## **October 2017**

October was an intense month for me, in terms of travelling. At the beginning of the month, I went to Stuttgart Beer Fest, which is the 2nd largest beer fest, ranked after the Oktoberfest. Coming back from Stuttgart, I went to Kaiserslautern for another football match. It was the Germany National Football Team playing against Azerbaijan for the World Cup Qualifying Round. There were 50,000 Germans chanted for their top footballers.

After two weeks of hard work in class, I left Germany for the very first time, going to UK. I stayed in London for a week, and then went to Manchester and Leeds. I visited the most of London's landmarks, including a night at Stamford Bridge, where Chelsea FC plays. In the UCL, they play against AS Roma. Followed by a trip to Manchester, I visited Old Trafford, the home ground for Manchester United, for a stadium tour. I took a day trip to Leeds as well as to visit my friends from UK and Malaysia. Leeds seems a bit boring as it is another college town, like Mannheim.

After UK, I went to Czech Republic, Hungary and Austria. It sounds like I have been to lots of countries, but it wasn't that long as I spent 6 days only to travel all the 3 countries. The styles and cultures really made a difference from what I was seeing in Germany and UK. The Eastern Europe have a sense of elegance, in a way different from Western Europe.

When it comes to academic, in October, we had to register for examinations. Unlike HKUST, and as I mentioned above, we can choose whether to take the exams or not in the middle of the semester, so if we are losing track to particular courses, we can choose not to take the exams at the end of the semester, as if we had not taken that particular course in that semester. After exam registrations, things will be getting serious because we have to focus more on our studies, in order to get well prepared for the examinations.

Timeline:

6th to 8th: Stuttgart > Kaiserslautern

17th to 1st Nov: London > Manchester > Prague > Budapest > Vienna > Salzburg

## **November 2017**

November was a month that I did not travel much, instead, I tried to keep my main focus on my academics. Though, I went to Amsterdam and Zaandam with my friends. Amsterdam did not amaze me as much as Zaandam was. I believe it is the most beautiful place.

There were lots of extra tutorials and homework practices for us to get well prepared for exams, attending lectures was tiring, while extra tutorials sessions made it torturing. Though it gave me a precious chance to review how much I had learnt and a chance to check if I were left behind or not. Also, all parties and gatherings held by the University ended, everyone was getting started to prepare for final exams. It was dull and boring.

I cycled to Hockenheimring and Heidelberg, again. A Formula 1 Racecourse was located in Hockenheim, I was so lucky to visit the venue and the exhibition before its closure in late November. Accompanied with my friend from Denmark, we spent a nice weekend staying away from school work.

3rd to 5th: Amsterdam > Zaandam

24th to 26th: Hockenheimring > Heidelberg

## **December 2017**

Here comes the most intense month throughout my exchange, in terms of academics. I had exams in early December, and I had to study to prepare for them. The library was very packed with lots of people, so I studied in my dormitory. It was snowing back in early December, unfortunately I had no free time to play with the snow, or to enjoy the amazing scenery. I spent half a week just to focus and studied very hard, right before the final examinations. Since the exams comes in consecutive days, I could not prepare for my exam one after one.

After the exams, I started to plan my post-exam travels. Since as I mentioned, I did not had enough in-semester travelling, so I would like to spend a long holiday, get to most places of Europe. I travelled to Belgium with my friends, it was not too fancy, and the price level is high. There was a lot of chocolate shops there, with a street full of chocolate. Though, I did not had a lot of them because of the soaring price.

I did not have chances to go to Berlin within the semester, so it was a great moment for me to reach there after exams, I went there with one of my friend. I would say, Berlin was the best city, in my opinion, in Germany. I had a really nice stay there, and I would definitely go there again if I have chance. After that, I started to move all my baggage to Lille, France, where I had a friend's place to accommodate my stuffs, before starting my travelling. After settling down, we went to Paris for travelling. It was amazing.

16th to 18th: Belgium

23rd to 2nd Jan 2018: Berlin > Lille > Paris

## **January 2018**

I was travelling around Europe, went to Spain, Portugal, Poland and Italy, spending nearly 3 weeks travelling around. It was amazing but a bit tiring as well. Having too much travels in a short period of time feels nothing better than splitting it down, going to different places from time to time. But it was a good time to meet new friends. I stayed in hostel in different places, got to know friends from all over the world. All of them are with different backgrounds, special stories, and a passionate heart to meet new friends. I was in Italy travelling on my own, since I met some friends there, we decided to travel together. It sounds crazy, but it was so enjoyable, we chatted a lot on every different bite, making a great cultural clash and it was a precious chance to have me knowing not only the German cultures, but all cultures from all over the world.

A remark would be I was so lucky that for my de-registration of residency in Mannheim and dis-enrollment as an exchange student in University of Mannheim can all be done by submitting documents online, so I did not have to go back to Mannheim and fix these paperwork. As long as you can provide all the documents needed, they can process with your application of de-registration in days. It is so convenient that you can start your travel early.

Here comes the very last bit of my time in Europe, going back to Lille, where my friend stayed, take my baggage and all my memories back home. I miss Hong Kong, and I will be missing Europe.

Timeline:

3rd to 21: Barcelona > Lisbon > Krakow > Pisa > Rome > Venice > Milan > Lille

## **1. Visa Procedures**

Obtaining a German Visa is nowhere easy, in fact, it is really complicated and fussy. You have to reserve online for your appointment, with ALL your documents ready. Until all documents are presented will you be entertained. Missing any of them will result in re-booking of your appointment, means few weeks later. Given the fact that you will need, expectedly, 6 weeks to process your visa application, you have NO rooms for mistakes. Since for most of you will be staying for 1 semester, the initial visa you applied would be enough for the duration of your stay. You don't need a resident permit in Germany.

## **2. Orientation Activities**

The school offers a brief session introducing the academics such as course registrations and dormitory policies. They also have a simple campus tour. You will be paired up with a local German student as your buddy, whenever you cannot obtain useful information in the orientation sessions, you can always go to them and they will be glad to help.

## **3. International Services & Activities**

VISUM is the student organization taking care of international students in University of Mannheim, they will hold parties inside the campus, partying in some bars in Mannheim. They will also arrange tours, like Oktoberfest tour to Munich or Bundesliga tour to watch football games. They charge a nice price for these activities. You can also get your ESNCard through VISUM.

## **4. Accommodations**

In Mannheim, all the dormitories are not too close to the campus, with the closest one a 20 min walk from main campus, and some farther ones with 20 min tram. Check your email regularly to know the dates for registering your own dormitory before fully booked. It will be troublesome if you cannot get one.

## **5. Courses Registration**

Like I mentioned earlier, since I was enrolled as an Economics Department student, I do not have to register for any Economics courses, though if you are interested to study courses outside of Economics department, you do need to register in a Portal called Portal2. Hearing from my Spanish mate, for some courses you can only register if you attend the first class. You may get more information when you are assigned a local buddy, they would be glad to help. For any German and Cultural classes, you have to register before your arrival, the International Office will send you more information once you are admitted.

## **6. Teaching & Assessment Methods**

Most of the courses I took only reflect your grade by final exam only. There was one course which gave several pieces of problem sets which account for 25%, meaning 75% will be from final exam performance. I did not have any lectures or seminars that requires presentations or group projects, neither case studies. Though, professors gave us relevant readings and news (in both English and German), so if any of us are interested in certain topics, they can make an appointment and discuss with the professor regarding the economic news and issues.

## **7. Climate**

Mannheim has a moderate continental climate, quite dry compared to Hong Kong. A summer not as hot as HK, with occasional snows in winter. A remark is that inside dormitory there must be heaters, but no air-conditioning.

## **8. Finance & Banking**

There are a lot of banks which set up branches in Mannheim. Commerzbank, Sparkasse are the major banks which provide ATMs with UnionPay. We can then withdraw money using local bank cards such as BOC, HSBC and more. Before my arrival, I have received emails from International Office, telling me that I can submit some required documents, so Santander Bank would help me to open a blocked account. A blocked account is very important when it comes to depositing big amount of cash and dormitory rental payments. You can also choose to do that manually after your residency validation in K7.

## **9. Social Clubs & Networking Opportunities**

There are a few social clubs inside universities, since they are German-speaking ones, it is not a good opportunity for me. VISUM will be a better option.

## **10. Health & Safety**

I never consulted a doctor in Germany, so I am not sure how it works. There is a "Universitat Klinikum" mainly for college students. For local Germans they are for free, while it charges you huge amount if you are outsider. I have a friend who was in hospital for 1 night, charging over 120 Euros. Get insurance plans if you would get sick easily. Germany is quite a safe country compared to other big names in EU, while Mannheim is a really small and safe city inside Germany. Jungbusch and Neckarstadt West would be relatively dangerous as I heard from German friends there are victims stabbed by gangsters once.

## **11. Food**

Cooking is always the best option for you if you are on budget, since eating in a decent restaurant would cost 12 euros at least. I didn't find any amazing eateries that would outweigh others, but Vapiano and L'Osteria are 2 chained restaurants which are reasonably priced. For the canteen inside campus, you can have a meal under 5 euros, if you pay more attention to price than quality. For cooking, on average 3 euros would get you decent ingredients for a nice meal (given that you know how to cook), and I bet there is no option cheaper than cooking.

## **12. Transportation**

I lived in a place which takes 1 hour if I choose to walk to school, but soon after your arrival, you can get yourself a VRN Semesterticket which cost you 165 euros, and you can do unlimited travels all around Mannheim and nearby cities such as Heidelberg. You can also choose to rent a bike (VRN Nextbike). Getting a Semesterticket is a good option to explore nearby cities (Heidelberg, Worms, Speyer, Hockenheim and more). While getting yourself a bike would be another considerable option too. Mannheim is close to Frankfurt International Airport (FRA), which you can travel to most of the corners of Europe. It takes 20 minutes by DB train or 40 mins by coaches to reach Frankfurt from Mannheim.

## **13. Sports & Recreation Facilities**

There are different sports facilities in University of Mannheim, as far as I know, it includes an indoor sports center for ball games and a gym center located in D2. There are student groups playing football regularly at night, I have been there to play football but I never tried to book the venue.

For recreational purpose, you can go to the canteen (MENSA) and there are billiard tables and table football for you to play. They charge a really nice price so you can have fun there.

## **14. Communication**

There are a lot of phone data plans in Germany, more famous ones are O2, Telekom and Vodafone. I chose to get 3UK and use it in Germany (as it is inside EU boundary). A considerable option would be Aldi's sims, they are relatively cheaper but the first-time setup is a bit complicated.

**Notes**

Mannheim is a small city but not a cosmopolitan, there are not a lot to play with. Most shops will be closed in the evening, with not a lot of street lights, unlike Hong Kong. In Sundays, all shops are closed except shops in train stations and restaurants. It is not too chill to stay here in Mannheim at weekends.

**items to bring**

- Passport and visa documents
- Admission letter and school documents
- Personal clothing (clothing for 2 weeks is recommended)
- Electric adaptors, Power strips
- Personal medications
- Notebook computer, personal electronics
- Credit cards
- Sufficient cash

**Useful Links and Contacts**

- University of Mannheim for incoming exchange students:  
[http://www.unimannheim.de/io/english/incoming\\_exchange\\_students/](http://www.unimannheim.de/io/english/incoming_exchange_students/)
- Things to do around Mannheim:  
<http://www.tourist-mannheim.de/en/Home>
- Deutsche Bahn:  
<https://www.bahn.com/en/view/index.shtml>
- Deutsche Bank for international students:  
<https://www.deutsche-bank.de/pk/konto-undkarte/konten-im-ueberblick/internationale-studenten1.html>
- Visa affairs on the German Consulate General, Hong Kong website:  
<http://www.hongkong.diplo.de/Vertretung/hongkong/en/03Info/Visum/visa.html>

If you like to ask for extra information that is not included in the report, feel free to obtain my contact via SBM Exchange Team ([bmugexch@ust.hk](mailto:bmugexch@ust.hk)).