

## GUIDE FOR STUDYING IN GERMANY



## **Germany in General**

Before you go

Getting to

Once you get to

University Life in

Administrative Work in



This brochure has been compiled from the experiences and knowledge of several European Studies students who went on exchange to Germany. It is written from the students point of view and is updated yearly. We hope you find its numerous hints and practical tips useful during your stay overseas. May it help you get past the “survival” stage quickly and contribute to your enjoyment of the German experience next year.

When you come back to Guelph, you will be expected to return this brochure (or a copy) to me, with appropriate corrections and additions, so that it can be updated for the benefit of the next group of outgoing students.

Bon voyage!

Margot Irvine

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(Responsible for ESP Students studying in France)

## **Documentation**

Assembling all of the necessary documentation for a year abroad takes a fair amount of time and money. Start collecting all of these documents *early*. It is not possible to get all this done in the last three weeks before you leave!!! Here is a rough idea of what you will need.

In order to live in Germany for the duration of the academic year you must have

- A passport; preferably valid for a few months after you expect to return from Europe
- Visa is not necessary. Germany has an agreement that allows Canadians to study and work (90 full days 180 half days) in Germany with a residence permit.
- Birth certificate (check specifications)
- A letter of permission from the University of Guelph
- A letter of acceptance by the German university of your choice (within the limits of ESP partnerships, of course)
- A statement of financial support from your parents – or from other source (OSAP, scholarships etc.) (Can be set up in Germany in the form of a blocked account)
- Proof of health insurance, which can be obtained from OHIP (235 King St., Kitchener) It is also possible to purchase German health insurance and the coverage is pretty good. I had to have a root canal redone in Germany. When I had it done in Canada it cost \$800 but it was covered under my German insurance

Just before you go make sure your credit card will be valid for your whole trip. Phone your credit card company so that they know that you are going abroad and won't think that your card has been stolen and cancel it on you! Take your wallet to a photocopier and make 3-4 copies of everything that will be going with you to Germany. Leave two copies at home with your family and take a couple with you. This way, if you happen to lose your wallet cancelling cards will be much easier.

## **Banking**

You might want to visit a lawyer and have power of attorney given to one of your parents so that they can access your financial matters. You may not necessarily have to go to a lawyer – I only had to go in to my bank branch and speak with an advisor in order to give power of attorney rights over my account. You could also consider opening a joint account with your parents. Make sure your Visa/Master Card pin number is not longer than 4 digits, or it won't work internationally. It might be a good idea to set up Internet banking. This is the easiest way to keep track – not only of your home bank, but also your German bank account. You can also use your debit card to withdraw money from European bank machines but your bank will charge you

a fee. TIP: Some Canadian banks have partnerships with international banks. Scotia Bank is partnered with Deutsche Bank and therefore there are no fees when you use your Scotia card at a Deutsche Bank. Get a bank-authorized letter of support (for apartment and for opening an account in Germany). Having a debit card with a chip makes paying much easier, because automatic machines (when paying for train tickets and other things) only accept cards with chips. Also tell your bank that you will be overseas so that they don't freeze your account because of irregular activity.

### **Things to take to Germany:**

#### *School Things*

10-15 passport size photos (to give to professors and attach to documents)

- You may not need to provide professors with photos, but photos need to be "biometric" for your resident permit)

BIC pens (ridiculously expensive! Everyone uses fountain pens.)

- Stores such as KIK and TEDI have office inexpensive office supplies amongst other things

German grammar reference

German/English dictionary

Day-timer or calendar

USB stick – many profs will gladly let exchange students copy the PPT slides onto their USB stick

#### *Clothing*

Bathing suit

Hiking boots and gear

Light robe

Sandals or slippers

Winter gear if you plan to ski! (There are also sporting equipment stores where equipment can be rented)

#### *Helpful Items*

Blank book to use as a journal

Calculator and ruler

Money belt (make sure to use it if you travel!)

Digital camera (invest in rechargeable batteries, makes life a lot easier... make sure to have a large SD card for the camera, you don't want to run out of space for photos)

Guidebooks

ISIC card, available free from our Travel Cuts (this was pretty useless for the most part).

Towels (Bring maybe one, they take up a lot of room in a suitcase and are relatively inexpensive in Germany)

Travel alarm clock

### *Health and Toiletry Supplies*

Contact lens solution (\$10 in Guelph, \$20-25 in Germany)

- Although it might be more expensive in Germany, liquids do factor into the strict weight restrictions for your baggage which could cost you more in the end!
- The price may not be outrageous – only there was basically only one brand to choose

Convertor/adaptor for hairdryer etc. (Very important! These are hard to find in Germany. Get a good one!)

Cough syrup, aspirin/Tylenol, Alka-Seltzer (I had to pay 6 euros for a box of what is the equivalent to alka-seltzer)

Prescription medicine, enough to last your stay. If your insurance doesn't cover this, take as much as possible, then have it sent as you can (birth control packs fit in Hallmark cards, from Mom...!)

You might want to take your own music with you, given the price of CDs in Germany. You may also want to invest in *German* music. That's the point! They are pretty much the same price anyway.

Cigarettes are much stronger than in Canada but somewhat cheaper too. Second-hand smoke will likely suffice and it's free!

Some popular imports: Kool-Aid, peanut butter, Kraft Dinner, vitamins)

- Surviving on foreign food alone is quite possible and even highly recommended from a cultural point of view. (Food in Germany is much cheaper than in Canada)

Memory cards for your camera. If possible invest in a laptop computer AND external hard drive. You will have wireless connections at school and in libraries. This way you have a CD and DVD player, word processor, dictionary, etc.

### **Suggested Reading**

*First Time Europe* (A Rough Guide Special), by Louis CasaBianca

This is a great guide for new travellers. I'd been to Europe many times before, but I still found tons of useful ideas here. At \$19, it's worth every penny. Routard Guides are good.

[www.lonelyplanet.com](http://www.lonelyplanet.com) is a great site to use when traveling.

You will need a good, thorough guide to Germany. Don't rely on the Germany section of a European guide; it will not be detailed enough for travel off the beaten path. All the travel guide companies will offer comprehensive guides; buy the one you like

best. READ the introductory sections BEFORE you go. They are often full of good tips. The sections on history, art, and architecture will also give your trip more meaning. Michelin's Green Guides are excellent in this respect, but they usually cover a small region only.

If you plan on travelling outside of your exchange country, buy another guide for all of Europe.

### **Airline Tickets**

I did a fair amount of shopping around for the best deal on airfares and found Travel Cuts was the most reasonable. For other options, visit [www.airtransat.ca](http://www.airtransat.ca), [www.kayak.fr](http://www.kayak.fr), [www.redtag.ca](http://www.redtag.ca). It is best to book your flight as early as possible so you have the most choice of when to leave. Discuss options with your travel agent about changing return dates. If you plan on coming home for Christmas, book your flight as soon as you know when classes and exams will end.

Consider how you will manage your luggage - from airport to bus/train to taxi to residence desk, to room etc. If you are taking a lot of things, some airlines will give you permission to bring more than the normal weight, check it out before you get to the airport and are ordered to re-pack or stay home!

### **When to Arrive**

Do not on arrive on a Sunday or holiday because you could have difficulties getting into residence, negotiating bus schedules, etc. Find out when classes will start and plan to arrive a few days early. Taking an intensive language course for foreigners before regular university classes begin is a good way to ease into European life and to meet other foreign students. You will get to know your surroundings and improve your language skills before the real school year starts. In the past, Guelph students have received Foreign-language course credits for this work upon presentation of the appropriate transcripts. The stage includes more than reading, writing, listening and speaking skills – you have tours of your town, the nearby towns/cities, and wine/cheese tasting outings, with 50 other exchange students in the same boat as you. This is available in some exchange countries and universities but not all of them.

You will be very sorry if you do not have at least \$200 (CDN) worth of Euros in small bills when you arrive. Order this from your bank or currency exchange a couple of weeks before leaving Canada. The best rates are at Global Currency (Gordon and Kortright; Home Hardware plaza). This money will pay for your bus, cab, phone card (to let Mom know that you arrived safely), and perhaps a meal or two. Do not take travellers' cheques. They are not accepted anywhere.

## Culture Shock

You may have done lots of travelling before but you will find that moving to a foreign country for a year is entirely different. You will feel tired and frustrated quite often during the first few weeks in your new environment. The mind tires quickly when trying to struggle with a new language and taking in a new environment. Things that are automatic for you in Canada, such as taking the bus to school or going grocery shopping, will be challenging at first in a new country. Relax. In time, everything will become more natural and you will begin to find some more energy as your language improves. Talking with other foreign students can be therapeutic, but be careful to keep an open mind and positive spirits. Things *will* improve by Christmas and the second half of the year will fly by.

## Meeting People

- Socializing: German people can be a little reserved when it comes to socializing with new people so do not be afraid to be the first to strike up a conversation –otherwise you might not have one!
- Men: still trying to figure them out
- Getting involved

## Problems

If you lose documents, contact the police immediately and fill out the necessary forms. **Under German law, all citizens AND tourists must carry some identification in case they are stopped and questioned by police.** Don't forget that you will be hanging around bus and train stations in a country where police searches are not uncommon. Bring photocopies.

## Banking

Opening a bank account is the most practical way to deal with daily life in Germany. You will need cheques to pay your rent and a European bank card is really convenient. Rent may be automatically withdrawn from your German bank account. **Get a bank-authorized letter of support for your apartment and for opening an account in Germany.** Choose a bank that is near your daily route to school so that you do not have to go out of your way. You will likely need your passport to open an account but the requirements will change with each different company. Some banks may offer you insurance on your bank card and cheque book or even money when you open an account. **This is done because the Germans do not check for identification before cashing a cheque.** In other words, if you lose your cheque book someone could steal the balance of your account. You also need to show your banking information to get a cell phone (I had to show my passport to buy a cell phone as I was only buying a pay as you go.)

Do put away any large withdrawals in your money belt before leaving the bank, cash machine, or exchange booth. Thieves love to hang around waiting for tourists to fiddle with their money near a currency exchange. Expect business to take *longer*.

You can also have money sent from Canada but the service charge is expensive at both ends (a wire costs \$15.00, plus the exchange). My trick to avoid this was to contact my Canadian Bank and asked them to max my daily withdrawal limit. I had a Scotia Bank account in Canada and opened a Deutsche Bank account in Germany – therefore my withdrawals were free. Ask your home bank before you leave to find out how much this will cost. Your Canadian bank card *will not* work on all European machines (especially in England) in spite of what your bank will tell you, though it may work on most (with a charge each time). Bringing a cheque or cash will cost you the least. Global currency services, on Gordon south of campus, will help you out. If you plan on withdrawing from a Canadian account, take out a lump sum so that you get charged all at once.

### **Telephones**

Getting a cell phone with “pay as you go” credit is recommended. Download SKYPE on your computer, one of the best ways to talk... once you have struggled through the internet issue. Do not buy into a plan – they are usually 2 year terms and difficult/impossible to get out of.

The easiest and cheapest way to call home is Canada Direct. This service provides toll-free lines that give you direct access to a Canadian operator and then you are billed on your calling card at Canadian rates. A 'Call-Me' card is also a good idea. Call or write to Canada Direct for the listing of numbers or ask your travel agent (available at Travel Cuts). Keep this card with you when you are travelling to make phone calls easier.

### **Internet**

There are a handful of cafes/fast food places in town where you can use wireless on your own laptop/iPhone).

The best advice I can give is to wait until the other students move in and post an ad looking for someone to share with; however this may take a little while.

### **Electricity**

Germany has 220V electricity

Buy a converter at home there are some that are available at Future Shop and Best Buy.

Have at least 2/3 adapters, since you will probably blow-out one for your hairdryer/straightener, and you can then use several electrical plugs at the same time. Make sure you also have an adapter for the UK if you plan on travelling, since it's different from continental Europe.



## **Libraries**

Libraries are generally difficult but different in each school and city. Worthwhile books are usually in storage; fill out a request card and wait half an hour to an hour to get them. University libraries look more like high school ones at home due to lack of funding. Short hours, limited computers/seating, strict no-food/drink rules are common, plus checking out books corresponds with your university level... you will miss the UOG library! The best advice is to be patient and try using the Internet as an alternative. It's worth-while to get a membership at municipal libraries as well, as they have a varied collection of local/national music etc. and guide books, so that you don't have to bring them!

The public library and University library in Konstanz are much like those in North America – find the books yourself and take them to the counter

## **Restaurants**

- Cost (generally)
- Sample local food

## **Train Travel**

Discounts: Train travel has many options. For travel with in the different regions there are regional tickets that allow 5 people to travel on one ticket. For travel on weekends there is a Schones Wochenende ticket which also allows 5 people to travel on one ticket but is valid for all of Germany. Another travel option is <http://www.mitfahrgelegenheit.de/>. On this site people offer to give rides for a few Euros or spots on the train tickets mentioned above.

- Where to buy
- How to check in
- Penalties

## **Biking**

Helmets

Riding on sidewalks or streets

Bike rental

## **Staying in Touch**

School of Languages and Literatures main office at the U. of G. (519) 824-4120, ext 3883. Fax: (519) 763-9572 (Prof. Margot Irvine: ext 53182 E-mail: [mirvine@uoguelph.ca](mailto:mirvine@uoguelph.ca) )

Please send Dr. Paola Mayer ([pmayer@uoguelph.ca](mailto:pmayer@uoguelph.ca)) a list of the courses you would like to take once you've chosen them, and let her know how you are doing! Your European Studies profs in Guelph love hear about your adventures in Europe and are always available for consultation.

Centre for International Programs: [goabroad@uoguelph.ca](mailto:goabroad@uoguelph.ca)  
**The German University System**

- Ways that degrees and university programs are organized
- Any useful terms

### **A Few Words of Advice**

- Words of advice concerning the university system and some details about it

### **Marks**

What the marking system is out of and what is a good or bad mark:

Germany has a grading scale of 1 to 5. 1 is the highest and 5 is lowest

Don't convert your marks into percentages, you'll just get depressed. Remember that everything is supposed to be different.

### **Class Etiquette**

Don't eat or drink in lectures, it's considered very rude. Although having an entire conversation about your ski weekend doesn't seem to be frowned upon at all! Let the prof be your guide, if the prof has a coffee or water, it may be OK for you to have one too.

German students, especially girls, dress for class a little more than we do at home. Don't plan on wearing sweat pants, sweatshirts, shorts, etc unless you want to stand out. Don't wear baseball caps, or any hats at all, especially for girls – they'll think you're an American. In lectures, questions aren't asked.

Books can often be borrowed second hand. Finding an advanced German student to lend you notes is great! Some students bring laptops to lectures, but most hand write their notes. They are very particular about underlining!

- Are extra readings and book provided to you or do you have to purchase them?

Make 5 photocopies of every important piece of paper you own; everyone will want one! Another possibility would be to scan your documents and keep electronic copies. Do not *expect* anyone to know anything. Keep asking until you receive an answer that you are satisfied with. And last but not least....the rules can change! Bring

*every* document you think you may possibly need (you can easily find photocopies there, and save carrying all that paper). Write down your questions so you don't get frazzled and forget!

Residence permit is required

- Medical exam required?

### **Residence registration**

Within a week of finding permanent accommodation (i.e. not a hotel), you have to register your address at the local Residence Registration Office (*Einwohnermeldeamt*), usually located in the town or city hall. Each subsequent change of address must also be registered with the relevant local authority. This rule applies to everyone, including German nationals.

To register you need to present your passport and visa (if you have one), a copy of the lease or rental agreement and a completed registration form, which is usually available at the *Einwohnermeldeamt*. Offices and agencies have varying opening times, particularly in the afternoons, so check before you go.

### **Residency Permit**

Residency permits are handled by your local immigration office (Ausländeramt). In order to apply for a residency permit, first register your residence at the local *Einwohnermeldeamt*, where you can also get the application forms for a residency permit.

Citizens of the EU, United States of America, Australia, Canada, Israel, Japan, New Zealand, Switzerland may apply for a residency permit after entering Germany without a visa.

When applying for a residence permit, you must produce some or all of the following documents:

- A valid identity card or passport
- Two passport photographs
- Proof of health insurance
- Your residence registration (Anmeldebestätigung)
- Proof of means of support (usually a letter from your employer) or, in case of students or non-employed, of adequate financial resources (Finanzierungsnachweis - around €700/month). The self-employed do not have to prove their financial situation.
- A Certificate of Health for Residence Permit (Gesundheitszeugnis für Aufenthaltserlaubnis), which can be obtained from any German doctor or local

health office (Gesundheitsamt). Certificates cost around €150 from a doctor or around €75 from the Gesundheitsamt.

- A Certificate of good conduct (Führungszeugnis), which can be obtained from your home country's embassy or consulate
- You will also need a copy of your registration at your German University

Foreign nationals can be issued with a residence permit for the purpose of studying or for applying for a university place. A study applicant may stay for a maximum of nine months. Those who obtain university admission can obtain a residence permit for two years, which is normally extended until the end of the study. During the period of study, students may work up to 90 days or 180 half-days. It is also possible to carry out part-time work made available to students at the universities.

On successfully completing the studies, the residence permit can be extended up to one year for the purpose of seeking employment. In order to receive a residence permit for taking up employment, however, the job must accord with the university qualification and it must be permissible for the job position to be filled by foreign workers. This generally presupposes that the job cannot be carried out by Germans or other foreign nationals given precedence, in particular, EU citizens.

(The above information is from

<http://www.justlanded.com/english/Germany/Germany-Guide/Visas-Permits/Residency-permits>)

This list should give you an idea what German officials will require:

- Your passport and a photocopy of its main page, and the page with the student visa from Toronto
- Photo booth size identity photos or a smaller size (the same size you need for your visa).
- Photocopy of your German student card, inscription receipt and/or letter of admission
- Certificate of residence - -a photocopy of your long form birth certificate
- Proof of financial means (bank balance in France, etc).
- Always bring some cash in case there are taxes or fees you have to pay on the spot

Is there something similar to the “Aide Personnalisé de Logement” in Germany?

**Region:**

**Department:**

**Location:**

**What the guide books say:**

## **STUDYING IN**

- General information about each host university
- Library information and information about campus

### **Courses**

- What courses the university focuses on
- Suggested and not suggested professor and other university staff
- Choosing courses

### **Marks**

- What marks are graded out of
- Required to pass and/ or options to redo exams

### **Arrival in .....**

- Arrival where to fly in and what trains/buses to get to the location
- Suggested companies

### **Living in .....**

- General info about the town or city
- How it compares to Guelph if applicable
- Good shops and places to go

### **Accommodation**

- Residence information
- Living off campus information
- General cost of flats and what to look for.

## In Private Lodgings

Some useful accommodation addresses:

### **Transportation**

- Buses and trains,
- Other types of commuting

### **Shopping**

#### Groceries-

- Suggested shops and hours

#### Markets-

- When they are open
- Is trying to bargain okay or not

For clothes shopping:

### **Food and Drink**

- Local specialties and suggested places
- Costs

#### Restaurants-

#### Alcohol-

### **Entertainment**

#### Night Life

#### Cultural Life

- Art
- Music and theatre
- Historical sites

**Additional remarks:**

Useful contacts:

(if you would like to add your name and email it will be placed on the document and future students may contact you)