

I stayed for a full year in Stuttgart, Baden-Württemberg while studying Communication Science at the University of Hohenheim. Upon arrival it was quite weird at first because I didn't know anybody. A helper from the university helped me get set up in my residence and get a bank account. At the time, my residence was empty, so the only people I got to know were the people from the German course. The course was really well constructed to get to see the city and get to know the other exchange students. In fact, the other exchange students become your best friends because you're together so often and the language skills are comparable. After the first month, my language skills had improved significantly to be able to speak with those in my residence when they arrived in October, when the semester began.

The course selection at Hohenheim was a lot smaller than that offered at Western. I took two media courses my first semester. At first, the German was really hard to follow because of how fast all the students would speak. It was also hard to follow at times because the German students will chit-chat during class while the teacher is speaking. That gets pretty annoying at times when you're trying to pay attention. The courses I took that semester had no tests, only presentations, which were pretty intimidating, and essays. By the end of the first semester, I was really starting to get a grasp of what the teacher was saying and could make comments in class when I felt. During my second semester, things seemed to go more smoothly, despite the German. I had a full course load, plus I took an extra course because I felt I had enough free time. In one class, I had to give a 60 minute presentation by myself, which was quite nerve-racking at first, but went really well. Although I haven't gotten all the marks back yet, I'm pleased with how much I learned, language aside, and hopefully my marks reflect that.

On campus there was a cafeteria that offered meals only at lunchtime Monday to Friday. Otherwise, I would have to make something myself at the residence. The Germans often complained that the cafeteria food wasn't good, but I enjoyed it a lot. There was a very good array of German meals to choose from from day to day. They were filling and not all that expensive in my opinion. You could eat outside on a patio as well, provided that it wasn't full. I ate there whenever I had the chance.

The housing was pretty good. I really lucked out by having tons of really cool neighbours. From my visits to other residents and talking with other students, they didn't really hang out with the people they lived with, but luckily that was not the case for me. I had a good size single-room with a huge window. Most of the rooms had balconies, but mine didn't cause I was in the basement (but that was no big deal). I shared a bathroom and shower room between 4 people and it was always clean and there was never a problem fighting for the shower in the morning when people woke up.... although I typically woke up at 11 every morning. The kitchen was a really good size, but there wasn't that much room to keep food. The fridge was the size of 2 of those mini-fridges, and that was shared between 11 people. You couldn't keep all that much stuff in there, so you'd have to go to the grocery store pretty often. There was also practically no freezer room. The cupboard space was a little larger, but still not by very much. Most people had to keep some foods in their own rooms due to lack of space. The kitchen had a mini-TV, which was cool for watching sports or something. German cable TV, however, is lacking in comparison with what there is here.

As far as travelling goes, Europe is awesome because it is so small. You can go to another country for the weekend. The other foreign students weren't as keen on travelling

as I was because they're all from Europe and had been around the continent already. I did a lot of travelling in small groups of 2 or 3 people, typically those who also travelled far to get to Germany. I went all over the place: Oktoberfest (4 days), Austria (a week), Slovakia, Switzerland (a week), Denmark (two weeks during Christmas), Paris (a week), Strasbourg, Berlin (twice for a week), and tons of other cities all over Germany. It was pretty quick and cheap with the train system, or, if one booked far enough in advance, plane tickets all over Europe were really cheap (less than 20 Euro).

The students at the university were hard to get to know at first. Since Communications is such a small faculty, the students already knew everybody and had their cliques. On top of that, my German wasn't strong enough at first to communicate with them. Outside of the classroom, it was a lot easier. The Germans in my residence were incredible people, and I spent most of my free time doing things with them. Aside from that, through playing sports I met a lot of people. I played a bit of basketball for fun my first month in Stuttgart (though I'm no basketball player) and met some cool people there. One guy even got me a job working for his economy professor, which was boring work (English corrector), but awesome experience and I got a wicked letter of reference. Aside from that, I played soccer for a team in the city, the university team, and pick-up soccer 2/3 times a week during the set times. If that sounds like a lot of soccer, it was. I was playing 6 times a week. It was not only cool to be playing that much soccer, but I also met tons of people that weren't in my faculty or weren't even students. From playing so much soccer together, I built a pretty good rapport with most of those whom I met on the soccer pitch.

After the first semester ended, most of the exchange students went back home. I think only 2 others stayed for the full year and I didn't hang out with them all that much. When the new students arrived, I didn't get to know them very well. They all got to get to know each other during the intensive German course in between semesters. I didn't take part seeing as my German was strong enough already for the course, and opted to travel instead. Although I did hang out with them from time to time, my group of friends consisted primarily of the others in my residence and those with whom I played soccer.

The German people were pretty easy to interact with. At first I had some people who really want to improve their English with me, and than others who refuse to speak a work of English because they found their English too embarrassing. For me it was simple dealing with those who insisted on speaking English with me. I'd either a) not respond to English, always asking them to repeat the sentence in German or (sometimes for fun) b) say that I'm actually a French-Canadian and my English isn't all that good. Apparently I had a french accent when speaking German, so this was easy. Eventually, everyone spoke to me in German, and the only time I'd speak in English was for the occasional telephone call home.

The people were really friendly and outgoing. We'd often cook together, go to restaurants, go to the movies or go to other school events with each other. Despite the fact that I had so much free time, they were never annoyed that I spent a lot of time just hanging out around them and talking with them. They were all extremely easy to get along with.

All-in-all going to Germany was an incredible experience that I enjoyed more than I thought I could. Ever aspect of my year there was wonderful: the people, the country, the travel, and the education. I would highly recommend it to anyone thinking about taking

this opportunity.