

Destination Germany

A Pocket Guide for International Students



DAAD

Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst
German Academic Exchange Service

"In touch with real life, leading in research: I'm doing my PhD in Germany."

Parul Tomar from India is doing her PhD at the Max Planck Institute of Immunobiology and Epigenetics in Freiburg.



Parul was photographed
at Münstermarkt in Freiburg.



www.study-in.de

Study in
Germany



Land of Ideas

Destination Germany A Pocket Guide for International Students

7th Edition

DAAD

Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst
German Academic Exchange Service

Publisher DAAD

Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst
German Academic Exchange Service
Kennedyallee 50, 53175 Bonn (Germany)
www.daad.de

Section: Information on Studying in Germany – K23

Project Coordination Dr. Ursula Egyptien Gad, Esther Kirk,
Julia Enke, Angela Faust, Katharina Kohm

Text Dr. Dagmar Giersberg, Bonn

Translation Robert Brambeer, Titisee-Neustadt

Layout and Typesetting LPG Loewenstern Padberg GbR, Bonn

Photo Credits Jan von Allwörden, Hannover

Printed by W. Kohlhammer Druckerei GmbH + Co. KG, Stuttgart



Print-run July 2017 – 70,000

© DAAD

This publication was funded by the Federal Foreign Office
and is also available in German.



Federal Foreign Office

Contents

5	Almost there
6	We'd like to help you!
8	What is the DAAD?
9	Studying in Germany
10	Planning and preparation
12	Types of universities, academic programmes and degrees
17	Admission requirements
22	Costs and financing
27	Applications
34	Visas and residence permits
37	Academic structures and requirements
46	Checklist: What can I do from home?
48	Checklist: What should I pack?
51	Student life in Germany
52	Tour of Germany
60	First bureaucratic steps
67	Help and advisers on location
76	Accommodation
84	Medical treatment
90	Money and banking
95	Internships
99	Jobs
103	Language
111	Telephone, internet, post

118	Festivals and public holidays
122	Recreation
133	Going out
141	Weather and clothing
146	Eating and drinking
153	Shopping
156	Environmental protection
162	Equal rights and tolerance
165	Safety
168	Mobility and travel
179	Typical German?
182	University towns in Germany



You're interested in studying in Germany? I think that's a great idea! Every year more and more people around the world are choosing to study abroad in Germany. There are over 350,000 international students at German universities – so you're not alone!

You probably have a lot of questions about life in Germany. That's exactly what this brochure is for. Inside you'll find a wide variety of information on the most important topics.

*Of course, there are many other good sources of information out there, such as **www.study-in.de** which includes a series of videos about living and studying in Germany. You can also contact the “study-in” team directly on www.facebook.com/Study.in.Germany.*

I hope you enjoy preparing for your trip and I wish you a good start in Germany!

Jan

We'd like to help you!

Hello, my name is Anas.

I'm from Malaysia. When I first came to Germany, I had so many things to think about. But now I've been here for almost two years and everything's going well. After my bachelor's degree, I'd like to get my master's at a German university. I hope you like it here just as much as I do.

Hi, my name is Amanuel.

I'm from Ethiopia. I came to Germany about two years ago. I can clearly remember my first weeks here. Man, I was so insecure! But it's not as complicated as I thought. If you ask for help, you can be sure to get it wherever you go.



My name is Leonie.

I grew up out in a small town in eastern Germany. After I finished secondary school, I moved to a bigger city to study. Even though I only changed locations in Germany, it was a huge step for me. In the beginning, everything seemed strange to me, so I can imagine how you feel and would be happy to tell you what helped me.

Hello! I'm Jan.

I'm almost finished with my master's programme – and I'd like to get my doctorate. I can remember very well how I felt when I began at university. It wasn't easy. Everything was new. I had lots of questions – especially in the first few days. But luckily, there were many nice people around who gave me good advice.

And I'm Miley.

I come from Bulgaria. I've been studying in Germany for a couple of months and I already feel very much at home. My degree programme is super and everything else is going smoothly.

Obviously when you first get here, there's a lot to take care of. Getting started can be pretty stressful. But don't worry, it'll work out. I'd be happy to give you some advice.



What is the DAAD?

The DAAD is a joint organisation of German universities and student bodies. Its task is to promote academic cooperation around the world, especially by supporting the exchange of students and researchers.

You can find many other helpful hints, advice and links on our websites **www.daad.de** and **www.study-in.de**. We also encourage you to view our online videos on **www.study-in.de/student-life**. On **www.daad.de/blog** international students report on their experiences in Germany.

And please don't hesitate to contact us at the DAAD headquarters in Bonn or any of our branch offices and information centres around the world (**www.daad.de/local**). There you'll find many brochures with more detailed information, for example, "Studying in Germany – A Practical Guide for International Students". Or simply submit your questions to us at **www.facebook.com/Study.in.Germany**.

Studying in Germany

Planning and preparation

I'm getting ready for my trip and I'm worried I'm going to forget something important. Do you have any advice?



Amanuel: *When I was preparing for my stay in Germany, I made a timeline. On a big piece of paper, I wrote down exactly what I had to do and when. Because after all, there is a lot to take care of. With my timeline, I was able to stay on top of things.*

In the following you will find useful information about studying in Germany. For more detailed information, please refer to our brochure “Studying in Germany – A Practical Guide for International Students”, available free of charge at all DAAD offices (for addresses, visit www.daad.de/local).

Timeline

► About 15 months before you travel to Germany

- Start gathering information about study opportunities in Germany
- Find out whether you meet the requirements for admission to university in Germany
 - Is your secondary school leaving certificate sufficient?
 - Do you have to pass a language test?
- Find out how you can finance your study visit

► About 9 months before you arrive in Germany

- Decide on a degree programme and university
- Contact the International Office at the university of your choice

► Four to five months before you begin your studies

- Submit your application for university admission (please note the application deadlines)
- Apply for a room now if you would like to live in a student hall of residence (some Studentenwerk organisations require applicants to provide confirmation of admission from their university, while others accept applications without it)

► When you receive notification of university admission

- Submit your visa application now, should you require one
- Get confirmation of health insurance coverage, if your policy is recognised in Germany

► About one month before you arrive in Germany

- Make sure you have all the necessary documents
- Arrange accommodation for your first nights in Germany
- Make appointments by e-mail to see flats or rooms to let

► Your trip to Germany!

Types of universities, academic programmes and degrees

I didn't realize that there were so many different universities and degree programmes in Germany. How am I supposed to decide?



Mileya: *I couldn't have decided either without help. But after talking with the DAAD Lektor at my university in Sofia, my choices were much clearer.*

Types of universities

There are three types of universities in Germany:

- **Universities** with scientifically-oriented programmes
- **Universities of applied sciences** (*Fachhochschulen*) with practically-oriented programmes
- **Colleges of art, film and music** with artistic / design-oriented programmes.

Almost two-thirds of Germany's 2.8 million students are enrolled at a university.

Most universities in Germany are publicly funded. In addition to these, there are just under 120 private universities, most of which are universities of applied sciences. The quality of instruction at public and private universities is comparably high. An overwhelming majority of students choose to enrol at a public university in Germany.

And which university city is the best?

Amanuel: *That's hard to say. When I was first thinking about studying in Germany, I wanted to go to Munich. Okay, I didn't know many other German cities back then. But now I'm glad I ended up in a smaller city. It's less expensive here – and little homier.*

Only seven percent attend private universities which tend to charge high tuition fees.

More than 18,650 degree programmes are offered at 426 nationally accredited universities (among them 129 universities, 215 universities of applied sciences, 52 colleges of art and music) in about 170 towns and cities in Germany (see map on pp. 182/183).

Degree programmes

German universities offer degree programmes in all shapes and sizes. For instance, you can

- begin studying at a university after graduating from secondary school, or
- participate in an exchange programme offered by your home university to gain foreign experience for one or two semesters, or
- enter a master's or doctoral degree programme after completing your undergraduate studies.

There are also about 1,500 international bachelor's, master's and doctoral programmes in Germany. These structured degree programmes are generally taught in English and provide students with intensive academic advising.

More information:

► **www.daad.de/international-programmes**

Choosing a degree programme is not only a matter of deciding what subject you would like to study, but also which degree you wish to attain. You can pursue the following degrees in Germany:

■ **Bachelor's degree** (BA, BSc, BEng, etc.)

First academic degree

6 to 8-semester basic course of study

■ **Master's degree** (MA, MSc, MEng, etc.)

Second academic degree

2 to 4-semester advanced course of study

■ **State examination**

State-conferred degree to students of law, medicine, veterinary medicine, dentistry, pharmaceuticals and some teacher certification programmes

■ **Doctoral degree**

Post-graduate degree to students who have completed their master's degree or state examinations

Approx. 2 to 5-year programme with research work (dissertation), concludes with doctorate



Where did you get your information?

Only from the internet?

Anas: *There's a lot of good information on studying in Germany on the internet. In my case, I attended an international education fair that was being held in Malaysia. Actually, that was where I first realised that applying to a German university could be the right path for me.*

Need help making a decision?

The following contacts and organisations are able to answer all your questions about studying in Germany:

- DAAD information centres (ICs) and DAAD branch offices (**www.daad.de/local**)
- DAAD-affiliated instructors and lecturers at universities around the world
- Goethe Institutes
- German embassies and consulates

More information:

► **www.study-in.de/events**

Upcoming education fairs around the world

Admission requirements

My school-leaving certificate doesn't meet the admission requirements to a German university. What should I do?



Anas: *The same thing happened to me. That's why I had to attend a foundation course (Studienkolleg) in Germany so that I could prepare for the Feststellungsprüfung – an assessment test. The time I spent in the course totally paid off. Not only did it really improve my German, but I also met a lot of nice people who were all in the same boat like me.*

Secondary school-leaving certificate

Those who wish to study at a German university require a certificate called a *Hochschulzugangsberechtigung*. This is a school-leaving certificate which qualifies a student for university admission.

Not all secondary school-leaving certificates qualify students for university study in Germany. The universities are solely responsible for deciding whether you can enrol. But as a rule, students who have received their school-leaving certificate in an EU country, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway or Switzerland, or at a German School abroad, need not take an additional examination to study in Germany. Different rules apply for artistic disciplines. To gain admission to an art / design programme, candidates usually have to pass an aptitude test and / or submit samples of their work for evaluation.

To find out whether your secondary school-leaving certificate meets German university admission requirements, visit

► www.daad.de/admission

► www.anabin.kmk.org

I've heard that universities in Germany offer a high-quality education. But now I wonder whether I'm good enough to complete a degree programme at a German university ...

Jan: *In that case, I suggest you take the TestAS. It's a test that assesses whether you're ready for the challenges of university study in Germany. Check it out online at www.testas.de.*

The university you apply to is solely responsible for deciding whether you can enrol. Therefore, ask the International Office about the specific admission requirements before you apply.

If your school-leaving certificate is insufficient, you will have to take a qualification assessment examination in Germany called a *Feststellungsprüfung*. You can prepare for this exam by participating in a *Studienkolleg* (foundation course), offered by German universities. These foundation courses usually run for two semesters. One part of the examination assesses the student's language skills. However, to even take part in a foundation course, students require a basic understanding of German.

More information:

► www.studienkollegs.de

Language skills

Most degree programmes in Germany are taught in German, except of the international degree programmes, which are taught in English (**www.daad.de/international-programmes**).

Those who wish to enrol in a German-language degree programme usually have to provide proof of German proficiency. You can meet this requirement by passing one of two language examinations – the DSH Test (“Deutsche Sprachprüfung für den Hochschulzugang”) or the “TestDaF” (**www.testdaf.de**).

You need not take a German language test if:

- you have received an *Abitur* from a German-language secondary school, or
- you have passed the German Language Diploma (Level II) from the German Standing Conference of Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs, the “Goethe Zertifikat C2: Großes Deutsches Sprachdiplom” or the “telc Deutsch C1 Hochschule” examination.

Some universities do not require applicants to prove their German skills if they only intend to study there for one or two semesters.

At **www.sprachnachweis.de** you can find out what language certificates are required for admission to specific degree programmes at various universities in Germany.

More information:

► **www.study-in.de/student-life**

Film: “How much German do I need in Germany?”

Did you also have to take a language test?

Mileya: *Yes, luckily, it was easy to do in Sofia. I took the TestDaF there – and the results were good enough to gain admission to my degree programme.*





Costs and financing

Isn't studying in Germany expensive?



Amanuel: *Sure, money always plays a role when you're planning to study abroad. The big advantage of studying in Germany is that you get a high-quality education at a relatively low price. Some universities don't even charge tuition fees! That's how I convinced my parents.*

When you study in Germany, you can expect the following costs:

- Semester contribution
- Tuition fees (if applicable)
- Health insurance
- Living expenses (accommodation, food, clothing, books, copies, telephone, etc.)

Semester contribution

All students in Germany are required to pay what is called a *Semesterbeitrag* (semester contribution). This helps finance a number of student services, including the dining halls, student halls of residence, university sports facilities and administration.

The semester contribution frequently includes a semester ticket. This ticket allows students to use all modes of public transportation in and around the city free of charge for six months. The cost of

Expenses – From Application to Enrolment	
Mileya had to pay the following application and enrolment fees in Germany:	
copies and translations	35 €
application processing fee (via uni-assist)	75 €
semester contribution (including a semester ticket)	290 €
Total	400 €

the semester contribution varies from university to university, but usually ranges from 150 to 350 euros per semester.

Tuition fees

Most students in Germany are enrolled at publicly funded universities. Such public universities do not charge tuition fees for undergraduate and most master's degree programmes – and if they do, tuition is relatively low. However, fees are charged for certain master's degree programmes – sometimes more than 10,000 euros per semester (1/2 year). Some private universities also charge relatively high tuition fees.

The cost of tuition says nothing about the quality of education in Germany. Tuition-free degree programmes offer very high quality.

More information:

► www.studis-online.de/StudInfo/Gebuehren

Health insurance

All students must have health insurance coverage. If your health insurance policy from home is not recognised in Germany (see pp. 84–87) you will have to get insurance here. Insurance coverage is available to students for about 80 euros per month.

Cost of living

Compared to most of Europe, the cost of living in Germany is not very expensive. For example, the cost of food, accommodation, clothing, cultural activities, etc., is equivalent to the EU average. It's difficult to predict exactly how much money you will need in Germany. Generally speaking, life in smaller towns costs less than life in large metropolitan cities. Most students in Germany need an average of 900 euros per month.

Proof of financial resources

All international students must verify they have about 9,000 euros at their disposal for one year. There are several forms of proof of financial resources that you may submit, such as your parents' income statement or proof of assets, a security payment in a blocked account (see p. 25), a bank guarantee, a scholarship or a guarantee issued by someone you know who lives in Germany. The German embassy in your home country can tell you which types of proof it recognises.

! Proof of financial resources is extremely important. The authorities normally ask for it when you apply for an entry visa, or at the latest, when you submit your application for a residence permit. Without it, you won't be allowed to study in Germany!

Setting up a blocked account

Many international students use a blocked account as proof of financial resources. You can set up a blocked account, for example, at the Deutsche Bank (www.deutsche-bank.de) or at "Fintiba" (www.fintiba.com). It's a good idea to start the process early. When opening an account with the Deutsche Bank, you will be asked to send documents by mail (various forms and a copy of your passport) which have to be officially certified by the German embassy or consulate in your home country. At "Fintiba" everything is processed online. The fee can range between 89 euros plus an additional monthly fee of 4.90 euros ("Fintiba") and 150 euros (Deutsche Bank).

Once you have set up the account, you must deposit about 9,000 euros into it. When you arrive in Germany, you will have to go to a bank branch and activate the account. There you will be issued an EC card (debit card) and receive login data for online banking. You are allowed to withdraw up to 735 euros per month from your blocked account.

Scholarships

Many institutions offer scholarships to international students. The DAAD scholarship database is the easiest way to look into funding opportunities (www.funding-guide.de).

European students are also eligible for other funding programmes, such as the programme Erasmus+ (www.eu.daad.de).

► www.study-in.de/student-life

Films: "How much does it cost to study in Germany?" and
"How much does it cost to live in Germany?"

Monthly expenses	
Mileya pays the following expenses every month:	
a room in a flat-share (including cost of utilities)	325€
food	170€
clothing	45€
photocopies, office supplies and books	20€
health insurance and medicine	80€
telephone, internet, television and radio	30€
transportation and travel expenses	90€
recreation, culture and sports	60€
Total	820€
Plus the semester contribution twice a year.	

Applications

How do you apply for a study place?



Leonie: *There are different ways to apply depending on which subject you want to study and where you come from. The best thing to do is speak with the International Office at the university of your choice. They'll be able to tell you the exact application requirements for your specific degree programme.*

There are two types of subjects at German universities:

- Subjects, for which **admission is centrally restricted** (*numerus clausus* or *NC*), because there are more applicants than available places at the university. These currently include Medicine, Veterinary Medicine, Dentistry and Pharmacy.
- Subjects, for which admission is **unrestricted or only locally restricted** (university-imposed *numerus clausus*).



Subjects with a centrally restricted admissions policy

A nationally imposed *numerus clausus* applies to subjects for which there are far more applicants than available places at German universities. Candidates must meet special admission requirements to gain admission to degree programmes in these subjects.

Depending on your country of origin and type of university entrance qualification, you must submit your application to one of two possible processing centres.

The Foundation for University Admissions (*Stiftung für Hochschulzulassung*, **www.hochschulstart.de**) processes applications from candidates who either:

- come from an EU member country, Iceland, Liechtenstein or Norway, or
- have received university entrance qualification in Germany or at a German School abroad.

All other candidates should send their applications to uni-assist if the desired university is a member of the uni-assist organisation.

What is uni-assist?

uni-assist represents 180 member universities and supports international students who apply for admission to university in Germany. uni-assist checks whether your application is complete and informs you in advance if something is missing. If all requirements are met, uni-assist forwards your application to the universities of your choice. The university you apply to is solely responsible for deciding whether you can enrol. The advantage of using uni-assist is that you can apply to several universities at one time by submitting just one application.

More information:

► **www.uni-assist.de**

Do you have any other good advice about applying?

Anas: *I had some trouble with my application because I wasn't thinking about all the other documents I needed. I had to have some translated and certified very quickly. That won't happen to you if you start collecting your documents early enough.*

Otherwise, applications should be sent directly to the university's admissions office.

All other subjects

For subjects with no admissions restriction, international applicants should submit their applications to either:

- the International Office or Registrar's Office at the university, or
- uni-assist.

Application materials

You can get an application form from the university of your choice, uni-assist, the DAAD website or the "Stiftung für Hochschulzulassung" (University Admissions Foundation).

! Your application will only be processed if all the necessary documents are included and the processing fees have been paid!

Certified copies

Certified copies are copies of original documents whose authenticity has been certified by a German authority. German diplomatic missions abroad, for example, can authenticate your copies.

Processing fees

uni-assist: The cost for one or the first of several applications is 75 euros. Every additional application will cost 15 euros.

Universities: Applicants may be charged processing fees depending on the university.

Foundation for University Admissions: No processing fees

Submission deadlines

The deadline for submitting applications is usually several months before the next semester begins:

- Degree programmes beginning in the winter semester:
end of May to 15 July
- Degree programmes beginning in the summer semester:
beginning of December to 15 January

Submission deadlines may vary at some universities. Therefore, be sure to ask about the exact dates in advance.

! Your application will not be processed if you submit it too late!





Visas and residence permits

Do I need a visa?



Jan: *That depends on what country you come from and how long you intend to stay in Germany. My advice is to ask the staff at the German embassy or consulate in your home country. They can answer all your questions concerning visa regulations. And they'll also be able to tell you exactly what documents you'll need.*

Visa or no visa?

The most important regulations at a glance:

- Citizens of an EU member country, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway or Switzerland only require a valid personal identification card to enter Germany.
- Citizens from other countries require a visa if they wish to remain in Germany longer than 90 days:
- Citizens from Australia, Canada, Israel, Japan, New Zealand, South Korea and the United States may enter the country without a visa regardless of the length of their stay. However, they are required to apply for a residence permit within three months of arriving in Germany. The same applies for citizens of Andorra, Brazil, El Salvador, Honduras, Monaco and San Marino – on the condition that they do not intend to work in Germany.
- Citizens from all other countries must apply for a visa **before travelling to Germany**.

Special conditions apply if your stay does not exceed 90 days and you have no intention of seeking employment. In such cases, citizens from the following countries may enter Germany without a visa: Antigua and Barbuda, Argentina, Bahamas, Barbados, Brunei Darussalam, Chile, Costa Rica, Dominica, Grenada, Guatemala, Kiribati, Colombia, Malaysia, Marshall Islands, Mauritius, Mexico, Micronesia, Nicaragua, Palau, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Solomon Islands, Samoa, Seychelles, Singapore, Saint Kitts & Nevis, St. Lucia, St. Vincent & the Grenadines, Timor-Leste, Tonga, Trinidad & Tobago, Tuvalu, Uruguay, Vanuatu, Vatican City, Venezuela and the United Arab Emirates. These conditions also apply to citizens of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia, Moldavia and Montenegro as long as you hold a biometric passport.

These rules also apply to citizens of Hong Kong, Macau, Serbia and Taiwan if they hold passports with special features.

For current information and visa requirements for citizens worldwide, visit the German Federal Foreign Office at: www.auswaertiges-amt.de/DE/EinreiseUndAufenthalt/StaatenlisteVisumpflicht_node.html

More information:

► www.diplo.de/visa

Types of visas

The visa you need primarily depends on whether you have already received your notification of admission from a German university.

- If you have not yet been admitted to a university or university foundation programme (*Studienkolleg*), you should apply for a **study applicant visa** (*Visum zum Zweck der Studienbewerbung*).
- If you have been admitted to a university or university foundation programme, you should apply for a **student visa** (*Visum für den Aufenthalt zu Studienzwecken*). Student visas are generally valid for three months, after which time you will have to apply for a residence permit at the Alien Registration Office in your city of residence in Germany (see p. 66).

! Do **not** enter the country as a tourist! Tourist visas cannot be automatically converted to study applicant visas or student visas. If you enter with a tourist visa, you will have to return to your home country and re-apply for a student visa!

Documents for visa application

When you apply for a visa, you will have to provide the authorities with a number of additional documents, for example:

- Proof of health insurance coverage (see pp. 84–87)
- Proof of financial resources (see pp. 24/25)
- Certificates of prior academic achievement, i.e. transcripts (if applicable)
- Certificate of German language knowledge or letter confirming planned participation in a language course in Germany
- For student visas: Notification of admission from your German university (or if not available, a letter of confirmation from the university that your chances of gaining admission are good)
- For study applicant visas: University entrance qualification which is recognised in Germany

Academic structures and requirements

How are university programmes structured in Germany?



Leonie: *Well, for every subject and every university, it's a little different. But many things are similar. And that can give you some basic orientation. You'll definitely figure out the rest quickly once you get here.*

Institutes, seminars – schools, faculties

Every course of study is supervised by an institute or seminar at the university. Depending on the university, the institute or seminar may be located on one or more floors of a building or could be housed in a separate building. This is where you will find the teaching staff in your course of study (professors, research assistants, etc.). The institutes often have their own subject-specific libraries, as well.

Every subject has a departmental committee (*Fachschaft*) comprised of students who represent the interests of all the students in their department (see p. 73).

Larger universities often bundle several disciplines into schools or faculties. For example, you might find the German Studies department in the “Faculty of Philosophy” or Dentistry in the “School of Medicine”.

1

Studentensekretariat
für
Bildungsausländer

A - F

Montag bis Freitag:
10.00 - 12.00 Uhr

Donnerstag:
13.30 - 15.00 Uhr



Also keep in mind that only a few German universities have centralised campuses with facilities all in one place. In Germany, university buildings are dispersed throughout the city.

Two semesters per year

The academic year at German universities is divided into two semesters called the summer and winter semesters (also called spring and autumn semesters at some universities).

A semester consists of two parts:

- the lecture period, during which all courses are held, and
- the non-lecture period (the semester breaks).

The beginning of the lecture period depends on the type of university you attend.

■ Universities:

Summer semester (SS) – April to September

Winter semester (WS) – October to March

■ Universities of applied sciences:

Summer semester – March to August

Winter semester – September to February

! There are some degree programmes that only begin in the winter semester.

Course timetable

University students in Germany rarely receive a fixed course timetable. There is a certain amount of flexibility in most degree programmes which allows students to select courses that personally interest them.

Did you really have to put together your own course timetable?

Mileya: *Yes - that's often the case! But to tell you the truth, that's what I especially like about studying in Germany. You have more freedom here, but you also have to take care of things yourself, like registering for classes and exams. I found it quite stressful at first. But the advisors in my department helped me figure out which and how many courses I should take.*

So-called “study regulations” describe the content of each degree programme and the academic achievement required for a degree. The study regulations are posted on the homepage of each department or institute.

Study regulations only stipulate the general framework of the degree programme. For example, it specifies which modules (see p. 41) students must complete. Within a module, however, students may choose from several courses which focus on various topics.

You can find out which courses are offered by which professors in the annotated course programme, called the *Kommentiertes Vorlesungsverzeichnis* (KVV). The KVV is posted on your institute's webpage.

With the study regulations for your degree programme and the KVV, you will be able to plan your own course timetable. If you need help, your departmental committee will be happy to assist you. Universities also offer a number of introductory and orientation events for new students, mentor programmes and much more to help you get started (see pp. 67–75).

Once you've chosen the courses for your timetable, you generally have to register for them online.

Modules and credit points

The bachelor's and master's degree programmes are made up of various modules. Modules are academic units comprised of several thematically related courses. Modules can take up to two semesters to complete.

Students receive credit points for every module they complete. In order to receive an academic degree, students must receive a certain amount of points. Depending on the study regulations, students require 180 to 240 credit points for a bachelor's degree and 60 to 120 credit points for a master's degree.

What if these credit points aren't recognised by my university at home?

Jan: *That's true, the credit points you receive in Germany are not automatically recognised everywhere. The best thing to do is to ask your advisor at your home university about how to receive credit for your academic achievement in Germany. Sometimes they need a certificate from a professor.*

Credit points are a measure of academic achievement. One credit point is equivalent to 25 to 30 hours of work. These points are awarded according to the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS). Thanks to ECTS credit points, universities can more easily recognise academic achievement across national boundaries.

Courses

There are several types of academic courses at German universities. Their relevance depends on your degree programme and university.

The most important types of courses are lectures, seminars / courses, tutorials / practical sessions, revision courses and colloquiums.

- **Lectures** (*Vorlesungen*) are given by a professor on a particular topic
- **Seminars** (*Seminare*) and **courses** (*Kurse*) allow students to study and discuss topics in detail together and with their professors
- **Tutorials** (*Tutorien*) and **practical sessions** (*Übungen*) allow students to review topics discussed in a lecture or seminar in more detail
- **Revision courses** (*Repetitorien*) provide a revision of past academic work to help students prepare for an examination, for example
- **Colloquiums** (*Kolloquien*) are discussion forums moderated by a professor for students who are almost finished with their degree programme

Some degree programmes also offer working or learning groups where students can revise the material discussed in class and prepare for examinations.

Some universities offer additional online teaching modules. These modules supplement the other courses in the degree programmes.

University preparatory courses

Some German universities offer special courses at the beginning of each semester to prepare students for university study. Sometimes called propaedeutic or preliminary courses, their purpose is to help





first-time students prepare for the challenges of their degree programme. They normally last three weeks at most, but in some cases, only a few days. Some universities even offer pre-courses online.

Types of examinations

In some cases, credit points are awarded if students attend class on a regular basis. But usually students have to fulfil additional requirements for their credit points. There is a wide variety of course requirements, which include:

- Class minutes (written summary of the results of the past lesson)
- Written examinations
- In-class presentations on a particular subject
- Term papers on a particular subject
- Oral examinations

Checklist: What can I do from home?

I can't make many arrangements until I get to Germany, am I right?



Anas: *Yes, that's right to a certain extent, but you can do a lot of things from home via the internet nowadays. For example, I was really curious about where I was going to live. Even before I departed, I did tons of research online and had a pretty good feel of the city when I arrived.*

Accommodation

Where will I live? (see pp.76–83)

- ☐ Apply for a room in a student hall of residence
- ☐ Answer flat adverts and arrange appointments to view possible flats via e-mail
- ☐ Organise accommodation for your first nights in Germany (with help from the International Office)

Advising

Where can I get help quickly? (see pp. 67–75)

- ☐ Ask at the International Office at the university whether there are orientation events or mentor programmes available
- ☐ Ask us your questions on **www.facebook.com/Study.in.Germany**

General orientation

Where is what?

- ☐ Find out how to get from the airport or train station to your accommodation
- ☐ Find out where the International Office is, what the office hours are and how to get there

Checklist: What should I pack?

I hate packing. I'm always afraid I'm going to forget something ...



Amanuel: Yeah, I'm the same way. What I do is make a list and check things off as I go. And don't worry if you forget something – aside from your personal documents, you can buy almost everything in Germany.

Personal documents

- ☐ Passport, valid for the entire duration of your stay in Germany (or personal identification card for students from the EU, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway or Switzerland)
- ☐ Visa (if applicable, see pp. 34–36)
- ☐ Notification of admission or confirmation of application from your German university
- ☐ Proof of financial resources (see pp. 24/25)
- ☐ Originals with translations and certified copies (see p. 30):
 - ☐ Birth certificate
 - ☐ Secondary school-leaving certificate
 - ☐ University diplomas (if applicable)
 - ☐ Language test certificates (if applicable)
 - ☐ Confirmation of health insurance coverage if recognised in Germany (if applicable, see pp. 84–87)

- ☐ Vaccination card (if applicable)
- ☐ International driving licence or certified translation of your national driving licence
- ☐ Other travel documents (plane ticket, etc.)

Other useful items

- ☐ Prescription medicine
- ☐ Credit card or traveller's cheques
- ☐ Some cash in euros for your arrival
- ☐ Passport photos
- ☐ Telephone number and address of the International Office
- ☐ Address of your accommodation
- ☐ Electrical adapter (if necessary – line voltage in Germany is 220 V)



Student life in Germany

Tour of Germany

Why did you decide to study in Germany?
Just because the universities have a good
reputation?



Mileya: *No, not only that! I've always been fascinated by Germany. I think it's amazing that so many important inventions came from Germany. And what's more, the landscapes are gorgeous – I just love the sea and mountains!*

Germany lies at the centre of Europe. Its population is the largest in the European Union with approximately 82 million inhabitants. It shares a border with nine neighbours: Denmark to the north, the Netherlands and Belgium to the northwest, France and Luxembourg to the west, Austria and Switzerland to the south, and the Czech Republic and Poland to the east.

Germany is one of the European Union's founding members and works to promote integration among the countries of Europe.

Landscapes and cities

The landscapes of Germany are diverse. On the North and Baltic Seas, there are island chains with long sand dune beaches, swaths of heath and moorland. In the low mountains of central Germany – a region praised for its beauty by the English and German Romanticists – medieval castles are situated along forested valleys. And in the south, the Alps with their sparkling lakes rise above the lowlands. This is where the *Zugspitze*, the highest peak in Germany, towers at almost 3,000 metres above sea level.

More than half of Germany's inhabitants lives in cities. Just under 80 German cities have populations over 100,000. The largest cities are Berlin (3.5 million), Hamburg (1.8 million), Munich (1.4 million) and Cologne (1.1 million).

UNESCO World Heritage Sites

41 landmarks and historic sites in Germany have been distinguished as UNESCO World Heritage Sites. These include:

- The cathedrals in Aachen, Cologne, Speyer and Trier
- Roman-period buildings, e.g. the limes
- Historic city centres, e.g. Bamberg, Lübeck, Regensburg, Stralsund and Wismar
- Castles and parks, e.g. Brühl, Dessau, Potsdam and Würzburg
- Former industrial complexes, e.g. the Zeche Zollverein in Essen and the Völklingen Ironworks
- The Bauhaus sites in Weimar and Dessau, the Luther memorial sites in Eisleben and Wittenberg, and the classical Weimar of Goethe and Schiller
- Entire landscapes, e.g. the Upper Middle Rhine Valley and the Wadden Sea along the North Sea

For a complete list of UNESCO sites in Germany see www.unesco.de/welterbe-deutschland.



Metropolitan cities are not the only places worth visiting. Regardless of size, university towns throughout Germany possess a rich history which is often reflected in their architecture. Historic city centres and ancient city walls date back to the Middle Ages. Many towns have well-preserved half-timbered houses and long boulevards lined with spacious villas built during the Gründerzeit, the 19th-century period of German industrial expansion.

No matter where you end up studying, you will find an abundance of cultural highlights in your town – exhibitions, concerts, festivals, performances, trade fairs, sporting events, etc. (see pp. 120–130).

City portraits

The German cities where most international students choose to live and study are presented in detail at www.study-in.de/towns.

Politics

The Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) was founded in 1949 as a parliamentary democracy. Its constitution guarantees basic rights to all people, such as freedom of religion, freedom of expression and equality before the law (see pp. 162–164). Following the reunification of East Germany (GDR) and West Germany (FRG) in October 1990, Berlin became the capital.

Germany is comprised of 16 states (see map on pp. 182/183). Each state has its own political sphere of jurisdiction, for example, in matters of culture and education.

Consequently, the education system in Germany is not centrally organised. All 16 states have their own university regulations and guidelines. The universities themselves are largely independent which explains why study regulations vary so often. Consequently, students should always ask about the specific study regulations at their university.

Economic strength

Germany's economy is the largest in Europe and the fifth largest in the world. In 2016 German companies exported goods valued at 1.2 trillion euros.

Germany's main exports are electro-technology, mechatronics, heavy machinery, automobiles, environmental technology, pharmaceuticals and chemicals. Consumers around the world regard the label "Made in Germany" as a seal of quality. Germany is home to many trusted and renowned market leaders, such as Mercedes-Benz, BMW, Porsche, Audi and Volkswagen, Bayer and Beiersdorf, Siemens, SAP, Allianz, Adidas and Puma and many others.

In the same way Germany fosters trade relations with partners around the world, German companies also work hard to promote international exchange of qualified professionals.

Innovation and creativity

Innovative ideas have strongly shaped Germany's past and will surely continue to do so in the future. Germany has produced a long list of revolutionary inventions, such as the automobile, the airbag, X-ray technology, Aspirin, the computer, the chip card and the MP3 data compression format.

Science and research have a long tradition in Germany and are still highly valued today. The oldest German university was founded in Heidelberg in 1386.

The list of German Nobel Prize recipients is quite impressive. There are almost 70 German laureates in the natural sciences and medicine alone. They include Wilhelm Conrad Röntgen, Robert Koch, Max Planck, Albert Einstein, Christiane Nüsslein-Volhard and Harald zur Hausen.



And Germany isn't called the "land of poets and thinkers" for nothing. In addition to such illustrious figures as Kant, Hegel, Adorno, Goethe, Heine, Brecht, Bach, Beethoven and Brahms, many contemporary German designers, artists, actors, musicians and athletes are famous around the world.

Cosmopolitan

Millions of immigrants have chosen to settle in Germany since the 1960s. Today Germany is home to 8.7 million people of immigrant descent, over 10 percent of the total population. Most of them have come from Turkey, Poland and Italy. People from all nations, cultures and religions live together in peaceful coexistence. Germany is a tolerant and cosmopolitan country.

Land of Ideas

"Germany – Land of Ideas" is a programme initiated by the federal government that promotes the creative and innovative advancements by German institutions in the fields of science, business, art and culture. Visit the Land of Ideas at www.land-of-ideas.org.

More information:

► www.facts-about-germany.de

Famous Germans



Alexander Gerst

David Garrett

Angelique Kerber

Anne-Sophie Mutter

Til Schweiger

Manuel Neuer

Angela Merkel

Herta Müller

Heidi Klum

Diane Kruger Martin Walser

Gottfried Böhm

Dirk Nowitzki

Sebastian Vettel

Armin Müller-Stahl

Gerhard Richter

Cornelia Funke

Karl Lagerfeld

Roland Emmerich

Peter Sloterdijk

First bureaucratic steps

I've heard the German authorities are sticklers for details. Should I be worried?



Anas: *I have to admit paperwork has always stressed me out. That's why I wasn't looking forward to those first bureaucratic steps in Germany. But the staff at the International Office explained everything to me. Together we wrote down what I had to do, when I had to do it by, and what documents I should take along. And the people at the agencies were actually very friendly!*

After you arrive in Germany, there are several important things you have to take care of. The International Office can tell you exactly what to do. The most important tasks are:

- Find accommodation
- Get health insurance (if necessary)
- Enrol at university (matriculate)
- Register at the Resident Registration Office
- Apply for a residence permit (if necessary)

It could save you time and effort if you dealt with these tasks in a certain order. For example, it would be ideal if you found accommodation in Germany **before** you arrived. If that's not possible, the first item on your to-do list is to find a place to stay (see pp. 76–83).

For all the tasks that follow, you will need a fixed address.

It is also important to clarify your health insurance situation (see pp. 84–87). Without confirmation of health insurance coverage, you won't be able to enrol at university.

Enrolment

Before you can begin studying, you first have to enrol. This procedure is called enrolment or “matriculation”. Once you're officially enrolled, you are allowed to attend courses at university, take examinations and obtain an academic degree. You have to be enrolled to gain access to all the facilities at the university, such as the library, computer rooms, etc.

Students are generally required to have to enrol in person at the Office of Student Affairs (*Studentensekretariat*) at the university.

International students may only enrol if they have received notification of admission from their German university. All accepted applicants receive a letter from the university confirming admission. The letter also includes information concerning the enrolment period.

! The enrolment period is often quite short!

You will need to provide a number of documents to enrol. The staff at the International Office and the Office of Student Affairs can tell you exactly what you need to bring along. The documents you usually need include:

- Personal identification card or passport
- Notification of admission
- University entrance qualification (i.e. secondary school-leaving certificate): original or certified copy with a certified translation in German (see p. 30)
- One passport photo



- Confirmation of health insurance coverage by a public health insurance provider in Germany, or proof that your health insurance policy from your country of origin is recognised in Germany (see pp. 84–87)
- Certificate confirming that you have passed your German language tests (if applicable, see pp. 18/19)

Once you have enrolled, you will either receive your student ID immediately or a written confirmation of enrolment which also serves as your provisional student ID. With this confirmation of enrolment, you can now apply for a residence permit with the Alien Registration Office (see p. 66).

You will also receive an electronic transfer slip with which you must pay the semester contribution and possible tuition fees. As soon as the university has received your payment, it will send you your official student ID card by post.

For information about how to open a bank account, see pp. 91–94.

Along with the student ID card, every newly enrolled student receives an account on the university server, e-mail address and password. You will need this information to take advantage of your university's internet services, such as the electronic course prospectus, online registration for courses and exams, learning platforms, downloadable course material provided by your instructors, online library services, wireless network access, and much more.

Student ID card

Every student at university is issued a student ID card which allows the holder to use the library, dining hall, computer rooms, sports facilities, etc.

You can frequently use your student ID as a ticket for public transportation in the university town (see pp.171/172). Because students receive special discounts, card holders are eligible for concessions at cultural events, swimming pools, museums and trade fairs.

Some universities offer student IDs with an integrated chip. You can top up your card at special ATMs and use it to make copies or pay for meals at the dining halls.

! Enrolment at German universities is only valid for one semester. For every additional semester, students are required to re-register and pay the semester contribution. The re-registration period for the upcoming semester is always at the end of the current semester. Whoever misses the deadline must pay additional administrative fees, and in the worst case, may be removed from the register altogether. The exact dates for re-registration are posted on the university's website.

Registering at the Resident Registration Office

As soon as you have found accommodation, you should register with the local Resident Registration Office. In larger cities you can find it at the Municipal Office in the area of the city where you live. The staff at the International Office can give you the address.

To register with the Resident Registration Office, you will need your:

- Passport (and visa, if you have one) or your personal identification card (see pp. 34–36)
- Tenancy agreement (if you have one) or confirmation of residence from your landlord

After filling out the registration form, you will be issued a print-out confirming that you have registered. Citizens from EU member countries, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland automatically receive a residence permit at the Resident Registration Office. In some cases, they may ask to see proof of financial resources (see pp. 24/25) and confirmation of health insurance coverage (see pp. 84–87).

Why is it important to go to the Resident Registration Office?

Leonie: *Everyone who moves to Germany or changes their address in Germany is required to notify their local Resident Registration Office within one week of moving. That's the law. And it doesn't only apply to foreigners, but everyone living in Germany. Also take good care of your confirmation of registration – you'll need it, for example, if you want to open a bank account.*

Applying for a residence permit at the Alien Registration Office

All international students who are NOT citizens of an EU member country or Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway or Switzerland have to register with the Alien Registration Office after registering with the Resident Registration Office. The International Office can give you the address.

In order to live in Germany legally, you require a residence permit issued by the Alien Registration Office. The permit is not free, however. The staff at the International Office can tell you what the current processing fee is.

To apply for a residence permit, you will need the following documents:

- Confirmation of registration from the Resident Registration Office (see pp. 64/65)
- Confirmation of health insurance coverage (see pp. 84–87)
- Confirmation of enrolment from your German university, or your student ID card (see pp. 61–64)
- Proof of financial resources (if applicable, see pp. 24/25)
- Biometric passport photo
- Passport (and visa, if you have one) (see pp. 34–36)
- Health certificate (if required)

If your documents are in order, you will receive a residence permit for one year (in some cases, a maximum of two years), which can be extended if necessary.

More information:

► **www.study-in.de/student-life**

Films: “German bureaucracy – a nightmare?” and
“What, where and who at the university?”

Help and advisers on location

Don't you feel funny asking so many questions?



Amanuel: *No, not a bit! In the first few days at university, I had the feeling I was the only one who didn't have a clue. But then I realised that other beginning students had lots of questions too. How else could you know how life at university works? I must have gone to the International Office ten times to ask about things I didn't quite understand. I like the German saying "Fragen kostet nichts" – asking doesn't cost a thing!*

New students arrive at university every semester – from Germany and abroad. They all have questions. Nobody comes to university for the first time knowing exactly what to do.

That's why there are contact partners and advising services everywhere. There are centres and offices at every university where students can go to ask questions or receive help with problems.



International Office – *Akademisches Auslandsamt*

The most important contact for international students is the International Office, also called the *Akademisches Auslandsamt* (AAA) or *Internationales Büro* at many universities.

Every German university has such an office for international affairs. In addition to promoting international university relations, the staff at the International Office help students plan their study visit in Germany and support international students already studying at their German university.

The International Office can give you all the information you require for your first days in Germany. For example, they can assist you with those initial bureaucratic steps like enrolment (see pp. 61–64) and finding accommodation (see pp. 76–83).

Furthermore, the International Office organises an orientation event for new international students. They also offer advice on how to plan your degree programme. The invitation to the orientation event is usually included in the package along with the notification of admission to the university.

You can find the address and office hours of the International Office on your university's website.

I'm nervous about my first days in Germany.
Got any tips?

Leonie: *Ask whether they have a mentor programme for international students at your university. I work as one of the student mentors at my university. I pick up the students at the airport and accompany them to all of their important appointments in the first days.*

Mentor programmes

A number of German universities have launched “mentor programmes” which pair up new international students with more experienced students. The mentors accompany their foreign guests to register with the German authorities, deal with practical problems of daily life and answer questions about studying at university. Mentors frequently contact their partners even before they arrive in Germany.

Ask at the International Office whether your university has a mentor programme.

Studentenwerk

Another important contact is your university's *Studentenwerk*. The *Studentenwerk* organisation provides a number of services and assistance to students at German universities. They allocate rooms in student halls of residence and operate the university dining halls.

The *Studentenwerk* provides special support to international students, as well. At many universities, the *Studentenwerk* offers special service packages to international students to help them get settled in faster.

The number and types of services depend on the university you attend, but generally include:

- A room in a student hall of residence (see pp. 77/78)
- Semester contribution and free semester ticket (see pp. 22/23)
- Cultural events and excursions
- Meal coupons for the dining hall
- Assistance with registering with a health insurance provider (see pp. 84–87)

At some universities, the *Studentenwerk* offers sport and language courses and rents out bicycles, computers, crockery and bedding.



They can also arrange to have international students picked up from the airport on arrival.

Depending on the services it provides, the package can cost between 158 and 358 euros per month. International students may receive the package for one or two semesters at most. Currently 29 out of 58 German *Studentenwerk* organisations offer service packages. There are only a limited number of service packages available. If you're interested in one, contact the *Studentenwerk* at your university in Germany as soon as possible.

More information:

► www.international-students.de

Student council

Like in other countries around the world, every German university has a group of elected students who represent the interests of the student body. Depending on the university, the student council is called AStA, UStA or StuRa.

Now I'm confused. There are so many places that offer advice. Which one is the best?

Jan: *At the International Office and Studentenwerk, you'll find university staff who are competent and helpful. But sometimes you might want to hear the opinion of other students. In that case, you can speak to your student council representatives, the delegates in the departmental committees or members of various university groups.*

The student council ensures that the university offers a diverse selection of athletic, cultural and recreational programmes. It offers counselling in all matters of student life, such as finding accommodation or jobs. Sometimes it organises car-sharing opportunities for students travelling to other cities.

The student council at some universities offers German courses to international students and helps arrange language partnerships (see pp. 107–109). Whenever you need help with anything related to university life, it's always a good idea to pay a visit to your student council!

Departmental committees

The departmental committee (*Fachschaft*) is a group of students who study a particular subject. They represent the interests and express the wishes of their fellow students to the faculty and administration. The departmental committee can answer all questions concerning the specific degree programme and helps new students gain orientation at the university.

At the beginning of the semester, the departmental committee usually organises information events for new students. Here you can learn how to plan your degree programme, create a course timetable, and much more. Professors and lecturers who work in the department often come to these meetings to introduce themselves. Not only are these meetings informative, but also ideal for getting to know new students who are also in your degree programme.

International university groups

There are student-run university groups at many universities which cater to the needs of international students.

In addition to providing orientation for new arrivals, they organise parties, excursions and pub evenings – even more opportunities to meet other students.

Coordinators and teaching staff

There is a person in every department who offers academic advising to students. You can go to this faculty adviser (also called a degree programme manager, coordinator or supervisor) with questions regarding the requirements of your degree programme, recognition of academic achievement, etc.

There is also an Erasmus representative for each department, responsible for matters concerning the department's Erasmus partnerships. If you are an Erasmus student, do not hesitate to contact your Erasmus representative if you have problems or questions.

How do you approach the professors at the university?

Leonie: *I didn't know how to do that either at first! But actually, it's quite simple. If you've got a quick question for your professor or research assistant, you can ask them via e-mail or speak with them after class. If your question is a little more involved, it's best to make an appointment or sign up for a time slot during consultation hours.*

And last but not least, professors, lecturers, and teaching assistants hold office hours to answer concrete questions concerning courses. Every university instructor holds office hours just for this purpose once a week. If you wish to speak with your instructor, be sure to make an appointment (by e-mail usually).

Learning how to help yourself

Students at German universities are expected to demonstrate a certain amount of self-reliance. Students must realise that they themselves are responsible for organising their studies and meeting the learning goals. In other words, although there are many places where students can receive help and advice, universities expect their students to make an effort to obtain information and ask questions if something is unclear.

More information:

► **www.study-in.de/student-life**

Film: "Who can help me at the university?"

Accommodation

Do you recommend living in a student hall of residence?



Anas: Yes, absolutely! I like the fact that we all meet and hang out in the common kitchen. And I constantly meet people who are studying different subjects. I find it fascinating.

In contrast to other countries, students at German universities do not automatically receive rooms on campus. In fact, only a handful of German universities have a central campus. In most cases, student accommodation is not located on the university grounds.

This means that students have to find accommodation by themselves. In some university towns, finding an affordable place to live is not always easy. That's why it's best to start looking for accommodation as soon as possible. It would be ideal if you could find your accommodation even before you arrive in Germany.

The biggest share of a student's monthly budget goes towards paying the rent. However, rental prices vary greatly and can range from 290 to 520 euros per month for a 30-sq.m flat depending on the university town. Rental prices in cities like Munich, Cologne, Frankfurt am Main, Hamburg and Berlin are higher than the average.

There are basically two types of accommodation for students – a room in a student hall of residence or private accommodation.

Monthly expenditure for rent and utilities (average)

Room in a student hall of residence	270 €
Room in a flat-share	310 €
One-person flat	390 €

Student halls of residence

There are several student halls of residence in every university town. These are usually located throughout the city. The *Studentenwerk* organisation provides more than 189,500 rooms in student halls of residence every year.

Each hall of residence is unique in terms of location, size and furnishings. This also applies to the rooms which include singles, doubles and even small apartments.

Rooms in student halls of residence are the most economical forms of accommodation. Because they're so popular among students, it's a good idea to apply for one well in advance. About 40 percent of all international students live in a student hall of residence.

DAAD Halls of Residence

The DAAD website **www.daad.de/wohnen** contains an interactive residence hall database. It can help you find a student hall of residence and provides extensive information about specific residence halls and instructions on how to apply for a room.

There's a very good chance your university's *Studentwerk* will allocate you a room if you submit your application early. It's best to apply for a room as soon as you receive notification of admission from your university. At some universities the International Office is responsible for allocating rooms at student halls of residence to international students.

More information:

► www.daad.de/wohnen

Residence hall student mentors

Around two-thirds of all Studentenwerk organisations in Germany employ student mentors in the residence halls. These mentors support international students, pick them up from the train station or airport, accompany them to various agencies and organise cultural events. There are currently over 600 student mentors in German residence halls, and more than half of them are study-abroad students themselves.

Private accommodation

Like elsewhere in the world, the price and quality of private accommodation can vary enormously. In Germany you will find everything from empty rooms to fully furnished flats on the market.

You can rent a room, for example in a flat-share. A flat-share (*Wohngemeinschaft*, or WG for short) is a living arrangement in which several people share the cost of living together in one flat. Each person has his or her own bedroom, but shares the kitchen, bathroom, possibly a living room and sometimes the cost of telephone and internet (see pp. 111–115). Flat-shares are very popular among students; almost 30 percent live in flat-shares.

ENTENWOHNHEIM
NER-KLETT-HAUS



What are the advantages of living in a flat-share?

Mileya: *A flat-share is frequently less expensive than renting your own apartment. And usually you have closer contact with your flatmates than in a student hall of residence. There are four people in my flat-share. We all get along great – we're like a small family. Of course, we argue once in a while, like when someone doesn't wash the dishes or forgets to clean the bathroom ...*

Looking for rooms on the private market

Landlords usually like to meet their future tenants before signing the contract. In other words, you probably won't be able to rent a private room until you arrive in Germany and show up in person. Nevertheless, you can start looking for a room or flat from your home country.

Listings of free rooms and flats can be found in a variety of places. The International Office is one of the best places to start looking. The staff there can provide you with useful advice for your accommodation search – to help you scout for possibilities from your home country and later, once you've arrived in your German university town. They sometimes keep a list of addresses of landlords who let rooms and flats to international students.

The *Studentenwerk* and the student council are also helpful contacts for flat hunters. They frequently organise accommodation finding services for students, i.e. they collect addresses of free accommodation.

There are usually large notice boards near the student dining halls where students can seek and advertise places to live.

Local newspapers also print flat advertisements once or twice a week, usually on Wednesdays and Saturdays. If they have a website, you can also view these adverts online. City magazines and student newspapers also publish flat advertisements.

When you read the flat advertisements, you will come across several frequently used abbreviations. Here is a short key to help you decipher them.

Abbreviations used in flat advertisements

2-Zi.-Whg	two-room flat
2 ZKDB	two rooms, kitchen, hall, bathroom
KT	deposit
+ NK	plus additional charges (costs for water, rubbish disposal, lift, house cleaning, ... sometimes includes the costs of heating, gas and electricity)
NR	non-smoker
WBS	income support certificate required (official document certifying a tenant's financial hardship)

Most free apartments and flat-share rooms in German cities are advertised online. For every city there is a Facebook page for accommodation where you can post your own flat-wanted ads. Some apartment-finding websites specialise in student accommodation. You can find them online by entering the search terms "*Studenten-WG*" or "*Studentenwohnung*". There's also an apartment-finding service on the Higher Education Compass website:

► www.hochschulkompass.de/studium/studienvorbereitung-studieneinstieg/wg-gesucht.html

I recently came across the word “Kaltmiete” – cold rent. What does that mean?

Jan: *It doesn't mean you have to freeze! All it means is that the cost for heating and warm water is not included in the rental price.*

“Wohnen für Hilfe”

“Wohnen für Hilfe” is a programme which exists in over 30 university towns in Germany. The idea behind it is that people who require assistance offer a room to students free of charge. In return, the students help their landlords with various chores and errands. The specific responsibilities are agreed upon in the rental contract. These could include household chores, gardening, taking walks together and much more. The student is required to invest one hour of service per square metre of living space per month - and the cost of utilities is extra. For more information about the programme in your university town, visit **www.wohnenfuerhilfe.info**.

And the first nights?

If you don't have any luck finding accommodation in Germany before you arrive, then you'll need a place to stay for your first nights here. The International Office can help you with this as well.

At some universities, the *Studentenwerk* and student organisations offer international students temporary housing for their first nights in Germany. If this is not the case, then you always have the option of staying at a hotel, guest house (*Pension*), a hostel or a youth hostel. The tourist information office in your university town can arrange a room for you at a local hotel or guest house. In most cases, you can reserve a room online.

A youth hostel is usually less expensive than taking a room at a hotel or guest house. However, to stay at a youth hostel, you have to be a member in a national association of the International Youth Hostel Federation. If you're not already, you can become a member (for a small fee) at any youth hostel in Germany.

Some people advertise private rooms for rent on the internet. You can find a listing of these by entering the search terms "*Privatzimmer*" + your location.

More information:

- ▶ www.jugendherberge.de
- ▶ www.germany-tourism.de

Medical treatment

How important is it to have proof of health insurance coverage?



Jan: *Very important! Without proof that you're insured, no German university will accept you. You'll need to show it at enrolment! I suggest you ask your health insurance provider at home about your situation before you leave to Germany. The International Office can help you further.*

Anyone who wishes to study in Germany must have health insurance. It's possible that your health insurance policy at home will also cover costs of medical treatment in Germany. This is the case for public health insurance providers in the EU member states, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Iceland, Israel, Liechtenstein, Morocco, Macedonia, Montenegro, Norway, Switzerland, Serbia, Tunisia and Turkey. These are the countries with which Germany has signed a social security agreement. Those who hold a European Health Insurance Card (EHIC) are covered by their health insurance provider in Germany.

Foreign private health insurance policies are occasionally recognised in Germany as well. If you are privately insured, ask your provider whether you'll also be covered in Germany.

If your health insurance policy is recognised in Germany, you will need confirmation of health insurance coverage to enrol at uni-

versity (see pp. 61–64). For your information, if you are privately insured when you begin studying in Germany, you may not seek coverage with a public German health insurance provider for the entire duration of your studies.

Insuring yourself in Germany

If your insurance policy from home is not recognised here, you will have to insure yourself in Germany. The public health insurance providers are generally the least expensive and offer students especially affordable policies. Students pay the lowest monthly rate of about 80 euros per month at present.

However, this rate is not available to those who have studied longer than 14 semesters or are older than 30 years. Some public health insurance companies offer an interim policy at a reduced rate (so-called 'Absolvententarif' or 'graduate rate'). After that, the premium increases to about 170 euros per month.

In order to enrol at university, I need proof of health insurance coverage. But to be eligible for an inexpensive policy, I need to be enrolled first. How is that supposed to work?

Leonie: Yes, it sounds impossible at first. When you get to Germany, go to a health insurance company and register as a prospective student. When you show them your letter of admission, they will sign you up for a provisional policy at the student rate. Once you have officially enrolled, you then present (or send) your enrolment certificate to the insurance company, confirming your student status.



There are a number of public health insurance providers in Germany which offer coverage to international students. Ask the International Office about which provider you should choose.

Public health insurance companies usually operate branch offices near the university which helps simplify the application process.

At the doctor

Medical treatment in Germany is very good. With its dense network of well-trained doctors, the German health care system is considered one of the best in the world. If you happen to need medical treatment, there's probably no better place to receive it than in Germany.

If you have a toothache, you go to the dentist. If you have other problems or pains, it's best to go to a general practitioner (GP), called a *Hausarzt*.

A GP can assess whether an illness or injury ought to be treated by a specialist, in which case he or she writes a referral. With this referral slip in hand, the patient can go to a specialist.

If the doctor writes a prescription for medication, the patient has to go to a pharmacy to obtain it (see p. 89). The patient is required to pay 10 percent of the total price of the medication, and the health insurance provider covers the rest. The minimum fee is 5 euros and the maximum 10 euros. If your medication costs less than 5 euros, you have to pay it all yourself.

But remember, this only applies to medication prescribed by a doctor. If you wish to purchase discretionary medication, you will have to pay for it yourself.

You can find a listing of all the GPs, dentists and medical specialists in your local Yellow Pages (the telephone book with branch listings).

Doctors hold office hours at various times. Many offices are closed on Wednesday afternoons. It's best to call before you visit and make an appointment. In urgent cases, you can go directly to the doctor's office without an appointment. However, you might have to wait a while before the doctor can see you.

Emergencies

You can go to the hospital if you require urgent medical assistance in the middle of the night or at the weekend. If you are unable to get there yourself, you can dial the free-phone emergency number **112** and request an ambulance.

If it's not terribly urgent, but you cannot wait until the doctor's office opens, you can take advantage of the *Ärztlicher Bereitschafts-notdienst* (Medical Emergency Service). This is a GP who is on call to handle emergencies after normal office hours. You can call the emergency service from anywhere in Germany by dialing **116 117**.

When you're travelling on the *Autobahn* (motorway), keep an eye out for orange emergency telephones boxes at the roadside. You can use these to call for help if you have an accident or breakdown. To reach the nearest emergency telephone, follow the arrows on the kilometre markers or the black and white street posts.

How expensive is it to go to the hospital?

Jan: *I certainly hope you stay healthy! But, if worse comes to worse, your health insurance provider will cover most hospital expenses. Generally, you only have to pay 10 euros for each day you spend at the hospital.*

Medication

You can only purchase medication in Germany at pharmacies. There are two categories of medication – over-the-counter and prescription medicine. You can only receive prescription medicine if your doctor has written a prescription for it.

The Medical Preparations Act in Germany is quite strict. Medication sold over the counter in some countries may require a prescription from a doctor in Germany. Furthermore, some countries may allow the sale of certain medication which might not be approved for use in Germany.

Most pharmacies in Germany are open Mondays to Fridays from 8:30 am to 6:30 pm, and frequently on Saturday mornings as well. Pharmacies are closed on Sundays.

There are pharmacies in every city which offer emergency service after business hours and at weekends. You can find the addresses on the internet (search for: “*Apothekennotdienst*” + your location) and at every pharmacy.

More information:

- www.daad.de/health
- www.study-in.de/health

Is it true they don't sell medicine in German supermarkets?

Mileya: *Yes! Pain relievers and other over-the-counter medicines are only available at pharmacies in Germany. And many medications can only be obtained with a prescription from the doctor.*

Money and banking

Do I need a bank account in Germany?



Leonie: *Yes, definitely. It's the easiest way to pay the semester fee after you enrol, along with your rent every month. Some banks offer free current accounts to students. With a German account, you can transfer and withdraw money without paying bank fees. That'll save you money! Just ask the International Office for more information.*

Germans pay in euros – the common currency used by 19 European countries at present.

One euro is equivalent to 100 cents. You can pay in the following denominations:

In coins: 1, 2, 5, 10, 20 and 50 cents, 1 and 2 euros

In notes: 5, 10, 20, 50, 100, 200 and 500 euros

Some smaller-sized shops and petrol stations might not accept large banknotes (100-, 200- or 500-euro notes). And at some stores the cashier might ask to see official identification (e.g. passport or personal identification card) if you choose to pay with very large notes.

Exchanging money and cashing in traveller's cheques

You can exchange your foreign currency for euros at currency exchange offices. These are usually located at airports and near railway stations.

You can also change money at banks and savings banks. Although some may not exchange foreign currency into euros in cash, they do offer this service to their customers, i.e. for those who have an account at the bank.

You can usually cash in traveller's cheques at most banks, savings banks and currency exchange offices in Germany.

There are numerous cash machines located throughout cities all over Germany. At any time or day of the week, you can withdraw money from a cash machine with your credit card or debit card.

Opening a bank account

If you're planning on staying longer than a couple of weeks in Germany, you should open a current account here. Most banks offer reduced fees for students. And the process involved is not too complicated.

There are far more advantages than disadvantages to having an account here. You can withdraw money free of charge from cash machines in Germany. You can set up a standing order for regular payments, for example your rent, which ensures that the money is transferred automatically and on time every month. For your health insurance, telephone bills and electric bills you can take advantage of direct debiting which allows the supplier to deduct the correct amount from your current account directly. This is also possible when you purchase items online.

Bank hours

Banks in Germany are generally open Mondays to Fridays from 9 am to 4 pm and are closed on weekends and public holidays (see p. 120).

! Many German funding organisations do not transfer scholarship money to foreign accounts! And those who wish to take a part-time job definitely require a current account in Germany.

You will find numerous bank branches in cities throughout Germany. There are also a number of online banks which offer the entire range of services via the internet – from setting up the account to all necessary transactions.

The International Office can help you select a bank which offers especially attractive conditions to students.

You will require the following documents to open a current account:

- Passport or personal identification card
- Student ID or confirmation of enrolment or notification of admission from your university
- Confirmation of registration from the Resident Registration Office or Alien Registration Office

The bank employee will also help you.

Is it true that Germans don't use credit cards so often in shops and restaurants?

Jan: *Yes, that's right. Compared with other countries, many Germans prefer to pay cash. If they use any kind of card in a restaurant or supermarket, then it's usually a debit card, called an 'EC card'. As for myself, I only use my credit card to pay for things online or book trips.*

Geldautomat



Bank transactions – such as transfers and setting up standing orders – can be done online, or at specially marked bank machines in the bank or over the counter.

Debit cards and credit cards

Once you've opened a current account, you will be issued a debit card (EC card, sometimes called a Girocard or Maestro card) with which you can withdraw money from cash machines and print out your bank statements yourself.

You can use EC cards to pay at shops and restaurants. The shop or restaurant will either ask you to authorise payment with a PIN (personal identification number) or sign the receipt.

All commonly used credit cards, i.e. MasterCard, Visa and American Express, are accepted in Germany. With a credit card, you can also withdraw money from cash machines, but credit card companies usually charge high fees for this service.

More information:

► www.study-in.de/money

How much do they charge if I use my credit card from my home country?

Mileya: *You're normally charged extra fees if you use your credit card in Germany – that is, unless your card was issued in an EU country. The same goes for withdrawing money from cash machines with your credit card.*

Internships

Have you had any experience with internships?



Anas: *Yes, during my summer holidays I completed a six-week internship at an IT company - and I learned a lot. I found it fascinating to see what professional life was like at a German firm.*

Many students in Germany take advantage of internships to gain professional experience and establish contacts during their education.

A large number of degree programmes include mandatory internships. They are supervised by university professors or lecturers. For some degree programmes, applicants have to complete an internship before they can gain admission.

An internship can last a couple of weeks to several months. As a rule, students normally receive no payment for mandatory internships. Even voluntary internships are rarely paid. Employers are only required to pay the minimum wage (= 8.84 Euro per hour) if the internship lasts longer than three months.

Finding an internship

You can complete an internship at a company or institution.

If you would like to complete an internship in Germany, you can obtain more information from the following:

- The Internship Office or Career Centre at your university
- The International Office
- International student organisations

There are three major international student organisations which specialise in helping students find internships:

- AIESEC: World's largest international organisation for students in economics and business administration – **www.aiesec.de**
- ELSA: European Law Students' Association – **www.elsa-germany.org**
- IAESTE: International Association for the Exchange of Students for Technical Experience (for students in engineering, natural sciences, agriculture and forestry) – **www.iaeste.de**

Internships are also offered at internship exchanges on the internet. (search word: "*Praktikumsbörse*"). Student job exchanges on the internet frequently list internships, as well (see pp. 100/101). Of course, you can also send a blind application to the company or institution of your choice.



Legal provisions

Legally speaking, internships are considered regular employment – even if they are unpaid.

Depending on one's country of origin, international students are only allowed to work in Germany for a certain length of time and only under specific conditions.

For students, to whom the “120-day rule” applies (see pp. 101/102), each day of an internship is subtracted from their 120-day credit. Those who want to complete an internship but have already worked the full 120 days in one year must apply for permission at the Alien Registration Office or Federal Employment Agency.

There is, however, an important exception to this rule. It does not apply if the study regulations require the student to complete an internship. Mandatory internships require no prior permission and are not counted toward the 120-day employment credit allotted to students. For more information, visit www.daad.de/internship.

Did you get any money for your internship?

Anas: *No, it was an unpaid internship. But I think I made a good impression on the company. And maybe I'll soon be working there a few hours a week.*

Jobs

What kind of jobs can you do as a student?



Leonie: *Practically anything! I know lots of students who take part-time jobs during their studies. I've had quite a few jobs myself – at a copy shop, waiting on tables at a café, giving private lessons to school kids, and now I'm a bike courier. But you'll need good German skills for most jobs.*

Many students in Germany work part-time during their studies to earn money and gain some experience on the labour market.

! A part-time job can supplement your budget, but it certainly won't finance all of your living expenses.

University jobs are a good way to earn money and gain academic experience. So-called “Hiwis” (pronounced HEE-VEES) are students who assist professors at their institute or seminar. “Hiwis” are student aids or academic assistants. Tutorial positions are frequently offered in many departments as well. Tutors help other students revise the material taught in lectures or seminars. Student jobs are also available at other university facilities – such as libraries, dining halls and cafeterias.

There are many job opportunities outside the university. A popular student job is waiting tables at cafés or pubs. Other students assist guests at trade fairs, work as delivery drivers or cycle couriers,

clean buildings, babysit, deliver newspapers, work at copy shops, offices, supermarkets, moving companies, etc.

The amount you can earn from a part-time job depends on the job and the city where you live. The minimum wage in Germany is 8.84 euros per hour. By law, employers must pay you at least that amount.

Job search

If you're interested in a job at the university, you should ask about jobs as a student aid or academic assistant at the administrative office of your institute, or speak with your professors.

One of the first places you should go is the job-finding service. This special service for students is offered at many universities by the *Studentenwerk* in cooperation with the Federal Employment Agency. You can find the address of the local branch of the Federal Employment Agency at **www.arbeitsagentur.de**.

Do you have any tips on looking for a part-time job?



Jan: Obviously, it's important that your job doesn't conflict with your courses at university. When looking for a job, use every option available to you: job-finding services for students, the message boards (*Schwarze Bretter*), job exchanges on the internet, and naturally, all your contacts. Tell everyone you know that you're looking for a job. Maybe someone knows somebody else who can help you.

Many job openings are advertised on the notice boards at the university, in libraries, supermarkets, etc.

Job advertisements are also placed in regional daily newspapers. They are published on Wednesdays and more extensively on Saturdays. You can also view these listings online via the newspapers' websites.

There are also a number of job exchanges on the internet. Several of these are specialised in student jobs. You can find listings online by searching for "*Studentenjob*" + your location. There are always local Facebook groups which list job openings and where you can post job-wanted ads.

Legal provisions

There are rules regarding how much students may work. These regulations vary according to one's country of origin.

Group 1

Students of an EU member country, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway or Switzerland are permitted to work as much as they would like without prior permission. They are subject to the same rules which apply to German students. However, they should not work longer than 20 hours per week and per semester. Otherwise they are required to pay into the social security system.

Group 2

Students from all other countries are only permitted to work 120 full days or 240 half days per year (voluntary internships included). Those who wish to work longer require permission from the Federal Employment Agency and the Alien Registration Office. Obtaining permission depends on the labour market in one's place of residence. The chance of receiving permission is less in regions with higher unemployment.

Students who belong to this group are generally not allowed to be self-employed or work freelance.

Students in Group 2 may work longer than 120 days as a student aid or academic assistant. However, the Alien Registration Office must be notified in such cases nonetheless.

Participants of language or foundation courses, may only take a part-time job with prior permission from the Alien Registration Office and the Federal Employment Agency – and only during semester breaks.

! The labour laws pertaining to international students are very restrictive. Those who break them risk being expelled from the country.

Important: A part-time job won't be sufficient to cover all of your living expenses! And depending on where you live, finding a part-time job may not be easy.

More information:

► **www.study-in.de/student-life**

Film: "How do I find a job?"

► **www.daad.de/job**

► **www.daad.de/deutschland/download**

Information on the Statutory Frameworks applicable to the Pursuit of Gainful Employment by Foreign Students, Academics and Scientists

► **www.international-students.de**

During your studies > Jobbing

Language

Can you get by in Germany with English alone?



Mileya: *Many people in Germany speak English well. Yet, you shouldn't take it for granted that everyone will understand you if you speak to them in English. I'm happy I can speak German. You simply get a much better impression of your host country if you can understand the language.*

German at university and in daily life

The language level you need to qualify for admission to university depends on your degree programme and the university itself (see p. 19).

Students usually require no German language skills if they enrol in English-language degree programmes. However, to gain admission to such programmes, students need very good English skills. As for German-language degree programmes, students usually require better language proficiency – especially speaking and writing skills – for the humanities than for scientific subjects.

In any case, your language level must be sufficient to understand lectures and participate in discussions in seminars. You have to be able to understand scientific texts. You should also be able to discuss scientific topics and explain and analyse them in written form.

But it's not all about studying. Even if you hardly need German at university – like students in English-language degree programmes – it's definitely worth learning the language of your host country. To feel at home in a foreign country, you need strong language skills. Knowing German can help you get settled into daily life faster, participate more intensively in German life and make friends much easier.

Dialects

Residents of the Rhineland speak differently than those in Bavaria. People in Berlin speak differently than people in Hamburg. Even villages in the same region sometimes have a different pronunciation and intonation.

As a rule, courses at German universities are held in *Hochdeutsch* (High German). But even there, you might come across professors or fellow students who speak a dialect. Many people consciously cultivate their dialects because they are proud of the region where they grew up.

Indeed most people make an honest effort to speak *Hochdeutsch* to foreigners. However, there are many native speakers who are unaware that their German sounds different than the German on the

Does everyone speak High German?

Amanuel: *No. But most people will try to speak High German as soon as they notice you're not a native speaker. In the beginning, I had some problems understanding Germans when they spoke dialect. But that's absolutely normal. You get used to it after a while – and then it gets easier.*



CDs in the language books. There's no reason to panic – you will become familiar with the German spoken in your region. Don't feel bad if you don't understand something right away or can't make yourself understood on the first attempt.

Language courses

There are many ways of learning or improving your German in Germany.

Universities offer language courses parallel to their degree programmes. Students are frequently charged an additional fee to participate in such courses.

There are numerous summer courses at universities throughout Germany which can help students improve their language skills for university study. They usually take place between June and September and offer German language courses at various levels. Students are required to pay a participation fee for summer courses as well.

For more information on summer courses, visit:

► **www.summerschools.de**

What should I do if I don't understand anything?

Anas: *Stay cool and just ask them to repeat what they said. "Könnten Sie das bitte langsam wiederholen?" – Some people simply talk very quickly. If you don't understand them at first, it doesn't mean your German is horrible.*

Many German language courses are offered outside the university, for example, at the Goethe-Institut (www.goethe-institut.de), at adult education centres (www.volkshochschule.de) and private language schools. Fees are charged for these courses.

A good place to look for German courses and language schools is the database operated by the German as a Foreign Language Association FaDaF (www.fadaf.de/de/daf_angebote/sprachkursangebote).

Learning German online

If you don't want to attend a course in person, you can learn German online. The Goethe-Institut offers various online courses at levels A1 to B2. You can also improve your German skills at no charge by participating in the online courses offered by Deutsche Welle (www.dw.com – „Deutsch lernen“) or www.deutsch.info.

Online language course DUO

Online language courses are a good alternative to conventional courses. Those offered by DUO (www.deutsch-uni.com), for example, prepare students especially for studying in Germany at various language levels. There you will also find special language courses tailored to specific subjects.

Language partnerships

Language partnerships can be a good alternative or supplement to on-site language classes and online courses. In a language partnership, two people get together who want to learn the other's native language. They meet on a regular basis and practice speaking one language for a while, and then the other.



At some universities, the International Office, international student organisations or the student council keep a list of names of people who are interested in starting language partnerships. In some university towns, there are Facebook groups for people interested in finding language partners.

Have you ever been in a language partnership?

Mileya: *Yes, I've tried a few out. I think it's a great thing. In fact, I prefer learning German in personal conversation than sitting in a classroom. I've found my language partners through ads posted on the Schwarzes Brett at the dining hall.*

Testing your language level

The levels of language courses in Germany follow the levels of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. There are six levels of proficiency – from basic user (A1) to proficient user (C2).

If you wish to assess how good your language ability is, you can test it yourself. The Goethe-Institut offers a short, free test on its website **www.goethe.de/einstufungstest**. After completing the test, the assessment recommends which course is right for you.

If you wish to obtain a more accurate assessment and prove your ability with a certificate, you can take the online language placement test onSET (**www.onset.de**) for a fee. This test can also tell you whether your language ability is sufficient for passing the TestDaF.

More information:

► www.learn-german.net

► www.study-in.de/student-life

Film: "How much German do I need to know?"

Are you up for a fast course on the important words and sentences in German?

► www.study-in.de/student-life

Film: "German for beginners"

Telephone, internet, post

Is it difficult to stay in contact with family and friends back home?



Amanuel: *I don't find it so difficult. I Skype on a regular basis with my family, and I stay in contact with my friends via WhatsApp and Facebook. Of course, I still miss them nonetheless.*

Global telecommunication has rapidly advanced in recent years. At the same time, the cost of telephone and internet usage has decreased significantly. Therefore, it's not a problem to stay in contact with friends and family from home anymore.

Smartphones

Almost every student in Germany has a smartphone. Many use their mobiles from home instead of getting a landline.

In most cases, international students are well advised to purchase a mobile phone card (*SIM-Karte*) from a German provider. Keeping in contact with friends and acquaintances in Germany is easier and more economical that way.

There are basically two ways to obtain a smartphone – either you can sign up for a contract or you can purchase a prepaid card.

With a contract, you agree to pay a monthly base fee for a certain period of time. We urge you to check exactly how long the minimum term of contract is. If you sign a contract, you usually receive the latest smartphone on the market at a low price. And if you decide to prolong your contract, you can pick out a new model. If you decide to sign a mobile phone contract, make sure you understand the conditions and rates – and don't forget to read the fine print. Also remember to ask about special rates for students.

You can purchase a prepaid card with or without a mobile. The advantage of prepaid cards is that you have no contractual obligations and have much more flexibility. With prepaid cards, you buy a certain amount of credit which is debited every time you surf the internet, phone or send a text message. When your card is empty, you can purchase more credit – either online, by phone or by purchasing a card from a supermarket, drugstore or kiosk.

If you're someone who phones or surfs the web a lot, it would be cheaper to pay a fixed monthly fee (flat-rate contract) than paying for each service separately.

There are several websites which help you compare offers. You can find them by entering the search words “Telefontarife vergleichen” (compare phone rates).

And what mobile provider do you recommend?

Jan: *It's hard to say because the offers and rates keep changing so quickly. Another thing to consider is how you plan on using your smartphone. Do you phone a lot? Do you always want to be online? I suggest asking a representative in your department or student council. They usually have a good idea of the best offers at the moment.*

Landlines

If you don't want to rely solely on your smartphone, you can also get a landline at home. Similar to mobiles, home telephone service is offered by numerous phone companies at various prices. In contrast, when you get a landline you have no choice but to sign a contract with the phone company.

Nowadays landline service usually includes an internet connection and a fixed rate. However, international calls are usually not included in this standard fixed rate. There are special fixed-rate offers which cover international calling to specific countries and world regions.

You should definitely compare prices and offers – also for landline rates. It might also be worth asking whether students are eligible for a special rate.

A simple way to save money on international calls is to use call-by-call numbers. These are dialling codes which allow you to take advantage of especially inexpensive providers even when you have a telephone contract with another company. Before making a call, you simply choose the least expensive provider (search for “Call-by-call”) and dial its code. However, not every telephone company recognises call-by-call numbers.

There are hardly any public telephones in Germany anymore.

To make longer international calls, it might be worth your while to go to an internet café or “call shop”. There are a number of such shops in every German city. There you can buy phone cards or take advantage of special rates when making international calls.

Internet

Most student halls of residence and flat-shares have internet connection and WLAN. If your room does not have an internet connection, you have two options. Either you can register for an internet connection or get mobile internet access.

In most cases, you need a landline for a standing internet connection. Therefore, select the best bargain that includes internet access and sign a contract with a telephone company (see pp. 111–113).

There are several ways to obtain mobile internet access, e.g. using a SIM card or “Surf Stick” – either with or without a contract.

However, students in Germany can get by just fine without their own internet connection. Most universities provide their students with campus-wide WLAN access. All students receive their personal login data when they enrol.

And if you don't have your own laptop or tablet, don't worry. All universities provide computer workstations for students to use.

Do you have an internet connection in your flat-share?

Mileya: *Yes, we have internet and divide the cost between ourselves. A friend of mine doesn't have internet access, but she gets by just fine. She uses the WLAN connection at the university and the library.*

Post

In addition to these electronic modes of communication, the good old-fashioned postal delivery still exists in Germany. Deutsche Post is Germany's largest postal delivery company and sends letters and parcels from Germany to every corner of the world.

You can take your letters and parcels to any post office, designated by a black postal horn on a yellow background. You can also drop your post into the yellow letter boxes situated at frequented areas throughout the town. There is a timetable attached to every letter box, stating when the next pickup is scheduled. You can send small and large parcels from specially designated "parcel stations" (*Packstationen*).

You can ask about postal fees for letters and parcels directly at the counter in the post office or online (search term: "*Porto berechnen*" (calculate postage)). The price depends on the size and weight of the item and the country of destination. Letters (up to 20 g) in Germany cost 70 cents and postcards cost 45 cents. You can purchase stamps at the post office, at the stamp vending machines outside, and on the internet.

More information:

► www.study-in.de/mobile-internet





Festivals and public holidays

Do Germans know how to party and celebrate?



Amanuel: *To be honest, I used to think that Germans were serious and hard-working. And then I was surprised. There are always parties happening at my university. It's really nice!*

Germans like to celebrate. That's why there are festivals and public holidays all year round.

They begin with the New Year's festivities. On New Year's Eve, friends usually get together at parties which have been planned months in advance. No matter how you celebrate New Year's Eve – eating a nice meal with friends or having a party – Germans set off fireworks on the streets at midnight to greet the New Year.

Many public holidays in Germany have a religious (Christian) tradition. Of course, even non-believers like to celebrate them.

The most important holiday of the year is Christmas when Christians celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ. Germans traditionally spend Christmas with their families. On Christmas Eve (24 December), German families gather together, eat dinner and exchange presents around a decorated Christmas tree.

Friends frequently exchange presents at Christmas time – even if they don't get to see each other at Christmas. Christmas is arguably the one public holiday of the year, for which people prepare the longest. Supermarkets and shops begin selling chocolate Santas and Christmas biscuits at the beginning of autumn. And during the four weeks before Christmas – called Advent – everything revolves around Christmas. For example, Germans display Advent wreaths and Advent calendars to shorten the wait until Christmas Eve. Many people bake their own biscuits or make Christmas ornaments, go Christmas shopping and send each other Christmas cards.

Christmas markets are set up in most cities during the Advent season. There you can buy gifts, drink delicious, hot *Glühwein* (mulled wine) and much more.

The second most important public holiday of the year is Easter, at which time Christians mark the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Like Christmas, this public holiday is strongly anchored in family life – but with a little less extravagance. In many families, Easter is mostly a holiday for children. Parents and grandparents hide Easter eggs in the garden or around the house for the children – and the children have a great time finding them.

In addition to these traditional, family-oriented public holidays, there are also celebrations shared by people of the same age – for example, birthdays and the evening of May 1st when dance parties are held in towns and cities everywhere.

Public holidays

There are a number of public holidays that are observed throughout Germany. Most businesses, agencies and public authorities, schools and universities are closed on these days – like on Sundays. Some of these public holidays are observed on a certain day every year and others vary.

- New Year's Day (1 January)
- Good Friday (Friday before Easter)
- Easter Monday (following the first full-moon in spring)
- May Day (1 May)
- Ascension of Jesus (on a Thursday in May or June, forty days after Easter)
- Whitsun (about 50 days after Easter)
- German Unity Day (3 October)
- 1st and 2nd Christmas Day (25 and 26 December)

There are also several holidays observed in only some German states. These include:

- Epiphany (6 January)
- Corpus Christi (on a Thursday in May or June)
- Ascension of Mary (15 August)
- Reformation Day (31 October)
- All Saints' Day (1 November)
- Day of Prayer and Repentance (on a Wednesday in November)

Regional holidays

Every region in Germany has its own festivals. For example, in the wine producing regions like the Pfalz, Rhinegau, Baden and Mosel, numerous wine festivals are held from May to October every year.

And what's the coolest holiday?

Anas: *Lots of people would say Oktoberfest in Munich is the best. Others travel all the way to Cologne to celebrate Carnival. Or to Erlangen for the Bergkirchweih. But I don't really care for huge celebrations. I feel most comfortable at small street festivals.*

In other regions – especially in Bavaria and Franconia – beer festivals are highly popular. The most famous beer festival in the world is the *Oktoberfest* in Munich.

Many towns and cities hold fairs and festivals which feature parades of people wearing traditional costumes, theatre performances, historic arts and crafts markets, medieval tournaments, concerts and much more.

Carnival is a very special festival celebrated in many regions of Germany. Depending on the region, it may also be called *Fasching* or *Fastnacht*. People celebrate Carnival in February or March every year.

During the course of several days, the world goes crazy in the Rhineland (between the cities of Mainz and Düsseldorf). People dress up in costumes and party in the streets and pubs. Many towns and villages hold their own parades during Carnival with brightly decorated floats, music and dance groups.

In southwest Germany, people celebrate *Fastnacht* according to another age-old tradition. Frightening characters wearing wooden masks and fantastic costumes roam through the towns and villages and make a terrible ruckus to drive away winter.

Recreation

What do you do in your free time?



Mileya: *I'm in two university sports courses – badminton and free climbing. I like watching TV series, and sometimes I invite some friends over to watch with me. That's always fun. And of course, there's always something going on every night in town. But I like going to the karaoke bar!*

In both small and large towns, you'll find plenty of recreational activities where you live – film, literature, art, music, sports, theatre, etc. Upcoming events are regularly advertised in the daily newspaper, city magazines and, of course, in the event calendar on your city's website.

Universities also organise diverse event programmes for their students. To learn more, ask your student council or check for event announcements on the university notice board.

Film

Many students enjoy watching new films at their local cinemas. Practically every German city has large cinemas. These feature several auditoriums and very large screens where the latest blockbusters are shown – often in 3D. There are also smaller art-house cinemas which feature older or independent films.

German audiences are used to watching foreign language films dubbed in German. However, some multiplexes and art-house cinemas show films in their original version. If you check the programme, you might notice the abbreviation “OV” or “OF” following the film title. This means the film is shown in its “original version”. The abbreviation “OmU” (*Original mit Untertiteln*) signifies that the film is not dubbed, but is shown with German subtitles.

In the summertime, people enjoy going to outdoor or open-air film showings. It can be lots of fun watching a film on top of a car park, in the city park or in a castle courtyard on a warm summer evening.

If you’d like to meet a German or international film star, you should travel to Berlin in February. That’s where everybody who is anybody in the film business gathers to attend the Berlinale (Berlin International Film Festival, **www.berlinale.de**). There are other exciting film festivals in Germany, the most famous of which being the International Short Film Days in Oberhausen and the Hof International Film Festival.

Ticket prices

The admission fees at cinemas range between 4 and 12 euros.

Many cinemas offer special concessions to students on certain days of the week. You just have to show your student ID card at the ticket counter.

Television

Germany offers a broad range of TV programming by both public and private broadcasters. Some shows have attained cult status, e.g. the crime series “*Tatort*” (Crime Scene) on Sunday nights.

You can watch TV via cable, satellite or antenna. In addition to a TV set, you'll also need the necessary receivers and connections. Sometimes TV service is offered together with Internet access.

Every homeowner and tenant in Germany is required to pay a public broadcasting fee (even if they don't own a television). The fee of 17.50 euros per month goes toward financing the public radio and television broadcasters in Germany (and their internet services). In a flat-share, only one person per flat pays the fee; in a student hall of residence, the fee is charged to every single room.

Literature

Literature has always played an important role in Germany. German and internationally renowned writers go on tour to book stores and libraries. They read from their newest works, speak with fans and sign books.

Many pubs have small stages where poetry slams take place. At these events, amateur and professional poets have the chance to "perform" their poems to a live audience.

The lit.COLOGNE is a major international literature festival which takes place in Cologne every spring (www.litcologne.de). And every summer, Europe's largest poetry festival takes place in Berlin (www.literaturwerkstatt.org).

Germany is also a book-lover's paradise with two major book trade fairs – in Leipzig in March (www.leipziger-buchmesse.de) and Frankfurt am Main in October (www.buchmesse.de). Publishing houses showcase their newest products at the book fairs, which include lecture series, discussions and public readings.





Sports

There are a vast number of sports in Germany.

Every university offers sports training courses in many disciplines, e.g. yoga, jogging, fencing, karate, volleyball, climbing and football. A majority of the courses are free. Visit your university's website to view the current sports training programme.

Inexpensive courses are offered by adult education centres (*Volks-hochschulen* or VHS) in every larger-sized town and city. Another option is to join a sport club in your town. By paying a small monthly fee, you can join sport courses and train with a team – and experience what it's like to play in a German sports club. In addition, there are a large number of fitness studios in every city which offer special deals to students.

Between spring and autumn, many cities offer free athletic activities in public meadows and parks. You can find these online by searching for “*Sport im Park*” or “*Fit im Park*”. Activities include gymnastics, yoga, Zumba and much more.

If you enjoy skiing or snowboarding, then the Alps are a great place to go. But there are also good skiing conditions in the Bavarian Forest, the Harz Mountains, the Black Forest, and the Thuringian Forest. You can rent your own skis, snowboard and shoes at the

Are Germans really so crazy about football?

Anas: *Yes, I would say so. Sometimes the trains at the week-ends are full of singing football fans wearing brightly coloured scarves. The most important games (during the World Cup, for example) are shown on huge screens on outdoor plazas and at pubs – and the streets are eerily empty.*

ski lodges. And for those who want to hit the slopes all year round, there are numerous indoor ski facilities throughout Germany.

Water sports are also quite popular. There are numerous rowing and canoeing clubs. Most cities operate outdoor and indoor public swimming facilities, and in some cities, you can have fun at “water resorts” with water slides, wave machines and saunas. On hot days, Germans cool off at open-air public swimming pools, in lakes and at the sea.

There is an enormous range of spectator sports in Germany, as well. For example, you can join thousands of football fans on their pilgrimage to the national football league (*Bundesliga*) games every weekend.

Football isn't the only professional sport that gets people's adrenaline pumping. Formula 1 fans travel to the two famous race tracks in Germany – the Hockenheimring and the Nürburgring. Others go to basketball, handball and ice hockey national league games, attend table tennis tournaments, cheer on the runners in city marathons or watch the international ski-jumping competitions in Oberstdorf and Garmisch-Partenkirchen.

Theatre, opera, musicals

In contrast to other countries, theatre is not centred in one particular city or region of Germany. Plays are produced everywhere from major cities like Berlin to small towns like Passau. The reason for this dates back to the 18th and 19th century when Germany was little more than a loose collection of principalities. Every prince and lord wanted to build his own royal theatre.

Today there are around 800 state, municipal and independent theatres in Germany. These include numerous opera houses, dance theatre companies, touring groups, improvisation theatres, puppet

theatres and musical theatres. Their programmes feature a wide array of modern productions of the classics and world premieres.

Germany is home to a host of small-scaled productions that require less space, money and artistic personnel, such as political satire, comedy, chansons, puppet shows, pantomime and magic shows.

Music

If you live in a large university town, you could probably attend a concert every day of the week if you wanted to – in small and large concert halls, in pubs and bars, in churches and also at the market-place. The selection of musical genres is enormous – everything from house to blues, jazz to hip-hop, heavy metal to classical and pop to soul. And if you keep your eyes open, you'll find concerts which charge no admission fees.

If you like to sing, then Germany is the perfect place for you. There are over 2 million active singers and some 60,000 choirs – church choirs, university choirs, chamber choirs, jazz and pop groups, barbershop quartets, etc. – and all of them are constantly looking for new talent.

Festivals

A countless number of festivals are held in Germany every year, including theatre, opera, chamber music, jazz, pop and rock festivals. Many open-air festivals are held during the summer.

Museums and galleries

There are museums of every size and kind in Germany – art museums, science and technology museums, archaeological museums and so on. There are also smaller museums based on specific themes, e.g. Beethoven, Brecht, wine, musical instruments, dolls, potato dumplings, beer coasters, etc. For an overview of German museums, visit **www.germany.travel** (Explore our Towns & cities > Museums).

Every large city in Germany organises a *Museumsnacht* (long museum night) once a year. This is a perfect and inexpensive opportunity for you to become acquainted with the variety of museums in your city. Shuttle buses transport visitors to and from the museums, all of which are open until late into the night and feature special cultural programmes.

If you are interested in modern art, you can visit the art galleries in larger-sized cities or take a trip to Kassel. That's where the documenta, the world's largest exhibition of contemporary art, takes place every five years for 100 days in the summer.

Meeting people

All recreational activities provide opportunities to meet people. You can also meet people and make friends at pubs, cafés, bars and clubs (see p. 133).

Some departmental committees and student groups organise an event called a *Stammtisch*, an informal get-together at a pub or café on a regular basis. A *Stammtisch* is a good place to get to know your fellow students or make plans to do something together at a later date.

At every university, students with similar interests and hobbies form their own groups. In addition to bands, orchestras, theatre



What's the best way to meet people?

Leonie: *That won't be a problem at university. There are plenty of chances to strike up conversation with your fellow students in your seminars and lectures. I've always met lots of nice people at the university parties.*

and sports groups, you will find a wide variety of student societies and political groups. By joining such a group, you will have more opportunities to meet people. Contact your student council for a list of student societies at your university.

Many students are members of religious congregations in their university towns. These groups not only focus on issues of faith, but also organise excursions, parties, discussions and many other events for their members. You can find their contact info on your university's website.

And finally, many international student organisations hold events which allow international students to meet and share experiences with one another.

Going out

Do you go out often?



Amanuel: *Yes, there are a few really cool pubs and beer gardens here where I hang out with my friends. But sometimes I go there alone – I always end up meeting someone.*

Students in Germany like going out – and do so frequently. Many enjoy spending an evening together at one of their favourite local pubs in their university town. In addition to restaurants and bistros which serve meals, there are countless cafés, pubs, bars, clubs and, in the summer, beer gardens and beach bars.

You can grab breakfast, eat a slice of cake and drink cold and hot beverages at cafés. You can choose from a large selection of coffee beverages, such as espresso, cappuccino, latte macchiato and café au lait – not to mention hot chocolate and tea. Like most countries in the world, Germany also has its share of coffee shop franchises. If you happen to be a tea lover, we recommend going to a tea shop which exclusively serves tea and baked goodies.

Most pubs open around 6 or 7 pm every evening, and close at 1 am. Some bars and clubs are open even longer – all night, in fact – if they have a special permit.

Paying the bill

People usually pay their bills at cafés, pubs and bars in cash. Sometimes people pay as soon as they receive their drinks or wait until the meal is over and pay the entire bill at the end of the evening.

When you go out in a group in Germany, each person usually pays for him or herself. Although there's only one bill, each person pays exactly what he or she has ordered which means the waiter has to calculate each person's bill individually.

The bill at restaurants, cafés and pubs always includes VAT and service charges. Nevertheless, wherever orders are brought to one's table, customers are expected to pay a small tip. For tips in Germany, the rule of thumb is about 5 to 10 % of the total.

Do you have to pay for your drinks at the pub as soon as they serve them?

Mileya: *That depends. Sometimes the waitress writes down everything you order – drinks and food – on a beer coaster. When you're ready to leave, you pay what's on your coaster.*

How do you pay when you got out as a group?

Amanuel: *When you call for the bill, the waiter normally asks "Zusammen oder getrennt?" – Together or separate? I have the feeling Germans prefer paying separately – meaning each person pays for what they actually ordered. Still, I find it a bit complicated.*



Speaking of tips, people do not leave the tip on the table, but pay it directly to the waiter. If you wish to give a tip, there are two ways to do so. Either you pay the total plus tip exactly and say “*Stimmt so*” – meaning “keep the change”. Or, if you only have large notes, you can tell the waiter the amount you would like to pay (tip included), and he or she will give you change back.

Smoking

Smoking in public buildings – if allowed at all – is restricted to specially designated areas. Smoking is no longer permitted in public transportation like buses and trains. The same applies to restaurants and bars, although separate rooms for smokers are frequently available. Smoking is still allowed outdoors, like in beer gardens and beach bars.

It is considered very impolite to smoke at the table while people are (still) eating. Furthermore, when a smoker is invited to someone's home, they should always ask if it's all right to smoke in their flat.

How do I decide whether to say “du” or “Sie” to someone?

Jan: *It's relatively easy. You can use the informal “du” form with students. In fact, you can say “du” to anyone who is around your age or younger. For people who are clearly older than you, I would start out with “Sie”. You can't go wrong by being extra courteous.*

Punctuality

Germans take punctuality seriously. It's considered impolite to keep someone waiting for more than five minutes. If you foresee that you'll be late for an appointment or date, you should call ahead to let them know. This is especially true if you've arranged to meet someone at a certain place, such as a pub. However, if you've been invited to someone's home, it's better not to come too early. Arriving five or ten minutes late is exactly right.

Invitations

Students in Germany love going out as much as they enjoy inviting friends over to their flat-share or student hall of residence, for example, to celebrate someone's birthday.

However, Germans don't always need a special occasion to invite each other over. It's normal to invite friends for breakfast, tea or coffee, dinner or an evening of games or television.

Of course, that doesn't mean you can visit anytime you want. If you would like to visit someone at home, it's always better to call ahead and ask if it's OK to drop by.

Students frequently invite each other over to cook and eat meals together. Usually they make plans in advance as to who will bring and prepare what – such as ingredients for a salad or an appetizer.

Game evenings are also quite popular. People get together at home or a game café and play board and card games.





Watching TV with friends can also be a lot of fun. In Germany people watch their favourite comedy series or crime shows together. Or they watch football games.

And how do you greet people at a party or a café?

Leonie: *There's no clear-cut rule on this. Everyone greets each other in their own way. Sometimes you just say "hello" or you hug, or give each other a kiss on the cheek, or you shake hands. If you're unsure, it's probably best to offer a friendly "hello" and see what happens.*

Weather and clothing

What's the weather like in Germany?



Amanuel: *It's rather nice! The funny thing is that Germans don't care for their weather very much. They always complain about it – too much rain, too cold, too warm ... I think they just like talking about the weather.*

Germany has a temperate climate, which means – when viewed over the course of a whole year – it's not very hot nor very cold, nor very dry nor very wet. Extreme temperatures and weather conditions are rare. The moderate temperatures are due largely to the effects of the Gulf Stream.

Four seasons

There are four clearly distinct seasons of the year. In spring (March to May), the trees turn green and everything blooms. The summer months (June to August) are warm with temperatures frequently higher than 20 degrees Celsius. In autumn (September to November) the leaves turn bright orange and yellow and the weather gets windier. In winter (December to February) the temperature frequently falls below freezing (0 degrees Celsius).

The weather in northern Germany is strongly influenced by the North Sea and the Baltic Sea. The maritime climate causes temperatures to fluctuate less between winter and summer than

in southern Germany. The more continental conditions cause much more snow to fall than at the coast.

Radiators and air-conditioners

Practically all flats and public buildings are fitted with radiators in Germany. The tenants in apartment buildings can simply regulate the temperature themselves.

Most flats are not equipped with air-conditioners or ceiling fans. This is mostly due to the fact that there are only several weeks of very hot weather every year.

I heard that they don't use air conditioners in Germany? Is that true?

Anas: *Yes, it's true. Every apartment has a radiator, but I've hardly seen any with an air conditioner. When it gets too hot in the summer, school kids are allowed to stay home – it's called "hitzefrei".*

Clothing

Because the climate in Germany is so temperate, there is no need to take special clothing with you. In the winter, you should have a warm jacket or coat, hat, gloves and sturdy shoes. In the summer, loose clothing and a light jacket is all you will need.

There is no dress code at German universities or for recreational activities. Students wear whatever they like. Some like to dress stylishly, others like more comfortable clothing. Each person can decide for themselves what they'd like to wear to their courses.

Germans often regard clothing as an expression of their personality. Wearing bright colours or showing lots of skin has much to do with one's character. However, it would be inappropriate to judge a person's moral qualities by the way they dress.





Eating and drinking

How is the food in Germany?



Leonie: *Well, I like the food here. In our dining hall, there's always a large selection of meals to choose from. I'd say there's something for everyone's taste. But to be honest, I've rarely seen typical German meals served at the dining halls – like pickled pork with sauerkraut.*

Internationally, German cuisine doesn't have the best reputation. People associate German food with hearty, heavy meals like pickled or salted pork, sauerbraten, sausage, sauerkraut and green cabbage.

Of course, there are many traditional German restaurants which serve these "time-honoured" meals and other regional specialities. But one rarely finds them on the menus at the dining hall, student pubs or in flat-shares.



What specialty should I definitely try?

Anas: *I'm a vegetarian. So I can only give you some veggie advice – fresh asparagus from Germany. It comes in white and green varieties, and is only available for about two months, from mid-April to the end of June. Absolutely delicious!*

International cuisine

In recent decades German cuisine has become lighter and increasingly international. Germany's top chefs are among the best in the world, ten of whom are three-star chefs. 292 restaurants in Germany have received at least one of the highly coveted Michelin stars.

In larger German cities there are restaurants that serve dishes from countries around the world. You will find a wide variety of ethnic cuisine here – Chinese, Greek, Indian, Italian, Japanese, Korean, Moroccan, Mexican, Persian, Russian, Turkish, Thai, Vietnamese – from fancy restaurants to cheap snack bars and take away.

Most large supermarkets are stocked with a wide selection of international foods. If you'd like to prepare your favourite meal from your home country, you'll find almost everything you need at Asian, Italian, Russian and Turkish markets and other speciality shops.

Beer and wine

Germany is famous for its beer. More than 1,400 breweries – from gigantic, global corporations to neighbourhood micro-breweries – produce around 6,000 different types of beer.

Beer is brewed in accordance with the over 500-year-old German Purity Law – known throughout the world as having the highest standard of quality. There are many beer-mix beverages and non-alcoholic beers available as well. You can try them out at bars, restaurants – or best of all – in a beer garden.

While beer is brewed everywhere in Germany, wine is only produced in the southern and middle regions of the country. The northernmost wine producing region in Europe is the Saale-Unstrut region in Saxony-Anhalt and Thuringia. Other well-known wine producing regions include Baden-Württemberg, Franconia, Rhineland and the Pfalz.

Meals

Germans enjoy eating! The main meals of the day are breakfast, lunch and dinner.

For breakfast, Germans usually eat rolls and slices of bread topped with sliced meats, cheese, jam, honey or chocolate spread. Some people also like muesli, hard-boiled eggs or scrambled eggs and bacon.

Traditionally, lunch was the only warm meal of the day. And for dinner, people ate *Abendbrot*, sliced bread with sliced meat and cheese, and occasionally a side salad. Nowadays more and more people in Germany eat a warm meal for dinner.

Having coffee and cake in the afternoon is a popular tradition in Germany. If a family invites you over for “coffee”, you can also look forward to a piece of pastry, either homemade or from the local bakery.



What should I definitely experience – foodwise
– in Germany?

Jan: *You MUST barbecue! Okay, I love barbecuing – meat, fish, veggies, fruit – you name it! There's something really special about barbecuing. Sitting outside in the evening with your friends around a sizzling grill. Perfect!*

Dining hall and cafeteria

Hungry students can get meals on campus, either at the cafeteria or the student dining hall (*Mensa*).

You can meet with friends at the cafeteria for a cup of coffee and a snack while you wait for your next lecture.

For larger meals, you should go to the student dining hall where they serve a wide variety of inexpensive dishes. For example, at lunch-time the dining hall offers a selection of meals which include a vegetarian dish and salads. Some dining halls also serve special meals for Muslims and members of other religious denominations. Many dining halls offer a warm meal in the evening as well.

The dining hall usually posts the menu for the upcoming week on the internet. You can find it on the website of your university or Studentenwerk.

The prices vary depending on the dining hall and the meal. Generally speaking, a lunch costs around three euros.

Special eating habits

Many people in Germany pay close attention to what they eat. More and more people lead a vegan lifestyle, and those who wish to avoid or cannot digest certain foods is steadily growing.

Supermarkets have responded with an expanded assortment of foods, e.g. lactose- and gluten-free products. The number of restaurants and cafés with vegan items is also growing. Many res-

taurants – and even student dining halls – provide specific information on the ingredients and additives in their meals. This helps people cope better with food intolerance and allergies.

German bread

If you asked Germans living abroad what they missed most from home, they would probably answer “German bread”. By this, they mean the variety of baked goods which are available in Germany. Around 3,000 bread specialties are sold in German bakeries.

Shopping

I'm worried about whether I'll have enough money ...



Miley: *Yes, I know the feeling. I have to live pretty frugally myself. But it's doable. I have to compare prices and buy things on sale or second-hand.*

Students rarely have so much money that they can afford everything they want – that goes for both German and international students. Many try to earn extra money with part-time jobs (see pp. 99–102) and save as much as possible when they go shopping.

You can save money by buying groceries at the large discount supermarket chains. You should also check for weekly specials and compare prices carefully. In this way, you can save a few euros here and there.

Many things, like furniture and crockery, are available at a very low price or even for free. Cities all over Germany operate “give-away websites” where people can advertise items they are looking for and want to give away. You can find a listing of such websites on **www.internet-verschenkmarkt.de**. There are also Facebook groups in every city, in which used items are offered as give-aways.



Saving with your student ID card

Your student ID card can save you money as well. By showing your student ID at the theatre, cinema, swimming pool or museum, you can receive a concession rate on tickets. Public transport companies also offer reduced fares to students. Students pay less for newspaper subscriptions, computer software, mobile phone contracts (see pp. 111/112) and bank accounts (see pp. 91/92).

Also an International Student Identity Card (ISIC) can save you money on airline and railway tickets, admission fees to museums and theatres, and much more. You can purchase an ISIC for 15 euros from your student council and at specially licensed travel agencies in your university town (**www.isic.de**) or order one online. The ISIC is valid for only one year, but can be extended if needed.

Store hours

Store hours vary from place to place. Shops located in the centre are usually open from 10 am to 8 pm on weekdays and on Saturdays until 4 pm, 6 pm or 8 pm depending on where you live. Supermarkets are generally open longer, in some cases from 7 am to 10 pm.

Almost all stores are closed on Sundays and public holidays (see p. 120). In larger cities, however, some markets and kiosks are open on Sundays where you can buy basic necessities. If everything is closed, then the petrol station could be your saving grace. You'll also find a number of bakeries that sell fresh bread, croissants, rolls, etc. on Sunday mornings.

Environmental protection

Does the environment and climate protection play an important role in Germany?



Amanuel: *Yes, it does. Many of my German friends are very conscious about saving energy and water. And there are special environmental zones in many cities. Only cars that meet stringent exhaust emission standards are allowed to drive there.*

According to the most recent study published by the German Federal Environment Agency, on the subject of environmental awareness, citizens in Germany regard environmental and climate protection as one of the central challenges facing society today.

People in Germany are concerned about the effects of climate change. As a result, many feel it is important to save energy and recycle as many reusable materials as possible. They make an effort to cycle instead of drive. They purchase electrical appliances which consume less energy. They install solar panels on the roofs of their houses. They try to save water and generate less waste.

Recycling

In Germany, household waste is separated before it enters the dustbin. In other words, you don't toss all types of waste into one bin. Every apartment building has several waste bins in different colours which designate the type of waste they hold. The colour coding depends on the city and region.

These waste bins are regularly emptied by the municipal rubbish collection. You can refer to your city's rubbish or waste removal calendar to find out which bin is emptied on which day. You can usually download the calendar from your city's website as well. It will tell you where the waste collection containers are located in the city.

The following types of rubbish are usually separated in Germany:

- Glass
- Paper
- Biodegradables (= organic waste, such as fruit rinds and vegetable peels, coffee grounds, egg shells, leftovers, etc.)
- Packaging (e.g. plastic bags, Tetrapak, tins)
- Residual waste
- Hazardous waste (e.g. chemicals, batteries, small electrical appliances, energy-saving light bulbs)

Is trash separation really such a big deal?

Mileya: *Absolutely! My flatmate gets totally upset when she finds paper or glass in the normal trash. That was the cause of some rather unpleasant scenes in our flatshare in the beginning.*

Glass should be deposited into the glass recycling containers located throughout the city. The same applies for paper and cardboard, though you will often find paper bins inside apartment buildings, as well. There are also special containers for hazardous waste.

For many people, deciding how to separate reusable resources is the most complicated task of all. The *Gelbe Tonne* (yellow recycling bin) is where you should deposit packaging and other consumables made of metal or plastic or combinations thereof, for instance, beverage cartons, tins, shampoo bottles, toothpaste tubes, etc.

Larger supermarkets provide special waste bins for “outer packaging”, i.e. the packaging around a packaged product, like frozen pizza cartons. Businesses in Germany are required by law to take back extra packaging left by the consumer.

Deposit on bottles and cans

To prevent waste and promote recycling of reusable materials, consumers in Germany pay a small deposit on most beverage bottles and cans. The deposit is refunded when they bring the empty containers back to the supermarket.

In addition to the more environmentally friendly reusable bottles, the deposit system also applies to disposable bottles and cans.

Stores charge an 8- or 15-cent deposit on reusable bottles depending on their type and size, and for special bottles, even more. A 25-cent deposit is charged on all disposable bottles and cans. Therefore, it's worth your while to cash in your empty bottles and cans the next time you go to the supermarket.





Saving energy

In recent decades Germany has invested heavily into efforts to research and develop renewable energy technologies, such as wind and solar power.

On an individual level, many Germans try to save energy at home – and not only because of the rising price of electricity and gas. They turn the heating down when they leave or ventilate their apartments and switch off electronic devices when they're not being used.

Organic and environmentally friendly products

Many Germans base their purchasing decisions on the environmental impact of the products, their carbon footprint and whether they've been traded fairly on the market. These concerns apply to food, household appliances, stationery, clothing, shoes, etc.

Foods which carry the German organic seal (**www.bio-siegel.de**) are very popular. Practically every supermarket chain now offers a wide assortment of organic products. German cities have also seen a large increase in organic supermarkets which sell environmentally friendly and sustainable products.

Environmental standards play a large role in the purchasing decisions of many other products, such as household goods, stationery, toys, athletic equipment and electronic devices. The “Blue Angel” logo helps consumers choose products that are especially environment- and climate-friendly (**www.blauer-engel.de**).

Equal rights and tolerance

How does it work when people from different cultures live together?



Anas: *We have students from all around the world living at our residence hall – from many different countries and religions. But that doesn't really play a large role. Of course, you have to show consideration for others. But that's always the case no matter where you live.*

Germany is a democratic country. It is proud of its constitution which protects the human dignity of its citizens and guarantees equal rights for all.

People from all around the world live together in Germany – many nationalities from every possible region and culture. Peaceful co-existence is only possible with tolerance.

Cultural differences

Everyone who travels abroad for the first time experiences some degree of “culture shock”. Many cultural differences may strike you as charming, others less so. You might notice that people in Germany think, dress and interact differently than they do “back home”. As a foreign visitor, you have more to gain by trying to understand and accept these differences as unique to German culture.



German constitution, Basic Law, Article 3

- (1) All persons shall be equal before the law.
- (2) Men and women have equal rights. The government promotes the practical implementation of equal opportunity of women and men and strives to eliminate existing discrimination.
- (3) No person shall be favoured or disfavoured because of sex, parentage, race, language, homeland and origin, faith, or religious or political opinions. No person shall be disfavoured because of disability.

Misunderstandings do happen. If you are “shocked” by someone’s words or actions, you might be experiencing culture shock. At moments like these, it’s better to ask the person directly why they’re acting that way. Not only could this resolve the misunderstanding, but also teach you something about German mentality.

Safety

Do you feel safe in Germany?



Amanuel: *Yes! I find it very pleasant that I can move around relatively freely here. There is really no need to be afraid that something will happen. Of course, that doesn't mean you should put yourself needlessly in harm's way either.*

Compared to most countries in the world, Germany is a safe country. There is no reason to be overly worried about criminality. People move about freely through German country villages or large cities, day or night, without taking special safety precautions.

Of course, Germany also has its share of crime. Therefore, you should not take any unnecessary risks – like walking alone through dark streets or in parks at night time.

The Police can help

German police are trustworthy and provide reliable assistance. The police patrol German cities on foot, by bike, motorcycle and car.

You can call the police free of charge from any telephone in Germany by dialling **110**. You can also dial this number when you need help – not only in dire emergencies. The police themselves recommend that people don't hesitate to call, because it's better to be safe than sorry.



If you're confronted with a dangerous or frightening situation, or you've lost your wallet, or you discover that someone has stolen your bicycle – calling the police might help!

Have you ever had contact with the police?

Anas: *Yes, one time I asked an officer for directions. He was really nice and very happy to show me the way!*

Other contact partners

The police are not the only ones who can assist international students in emergencies. Almost every country in the world maintains an embassy (and consulates) in Germany. If you run into problems, you can personally contact an official representative from your home country.

In addition, do not hesitate to contact the staff at the International Office with questions regarding personal safety or any related problems.

More information:

► www.study-in.de/safety

Mobility and travel

Have you travelled around a lot while you've been in Germany?



Amanuel: *A little. I got some cheap coach tickets and spent a few days in Munich. I definitely want to visit Paris. It's actually not too far away from Germany.*

The transportation system in Germany is closely interwoven. There are many ways to travel from place to place in cities and throughout the country. This makes it easy to take weekend trips to other cities, the countryside, the mountains or the sea, or even venture across the border and visit other countries in Europe.

Cycling

Cycling is a popular activity in Germany. Not only is it good exercise and inexpensive, but it protects the environment and is extremely practical for getting around town. You'll find that taking a bike is often the fastest way to reach your destination – you don't have to worry about finding a parking space, getting stuck in traffic or waiting for the next bus.

In every city there are specially marked paths reserved for cyclists, called *Radwege*. There are numerous bicycle stands at public areas where you can lock your bike up. Bicycles are not only a means of



How do you get around in your city?

Anas: *Luckily, most places I go are in walking distance. But when it's further away, I usually take my bike. With so many bike paths in town, it's easy – and it's much more flexible than taking the bus or tram.*

transportation. Many people enjoy taking weekend cycling tours together with family and friends into the countryside.

Taxis

Although rates vary from city to city, taxis are relatively expensive in Germany. Taxi companies charge between 1.50 and 3 euros per kilometre. They frequently charge a minimum fare of 2.50 to 4 euros, which the passenger has to pay no matter how short the journey is.

This is why students rarely take taxis, and if they do, then in groups. If you and your friends agree to share the price of the fare, then a taxi might be an option – especially if you've missed the night bus or the last tram.

Taxis wait at taxi stands in cities. You can also call a taxi or order one via app to pick you up at a certain location.

Buses and local railway

Residents in larger German cities use the bus and railway systems to get around town. There are different types of railway systems in Germany: the underground trains (*U-Bahn*), the suburban railway (*S-Bahn*) and trams (*Straßenbahn*). The public transportation system in a city goes by the abbreviation ÖPNV.

Info sheets, listing bus stops and tram stops, are available at public utility and transport companies, the railway station and the tourist information office.

Timetables are posted at all bus stops and railway stations. Buses, trams and trains usually run more frequently during the week than on Saturdays, Sundays and public holidays (see p. 120).

You can also view timetables and route maps by visiting your public utility website or downloading their respective app.

You must buy a ticket before boarding most modes of public transportation. On buses, you can usually pay the fare directly to the driver. For *U-Bahn* and *S-Bahn*, ticket machines are generally located on the platform.

There are also ticket machines at tram stops and railway stations. Sometimes the machines for local public transport only accept cash (and occasionally only coins). But there are many machines which also accept debit or credit cards. Or you can purchase tickets using your smartphone.

You can also purchase tickets for local public transport from selected kiosks and newspaper stands. If you see the logo of the public transport company in the kiosk window, chances are that they sell tickets there.

You often have to endorse your ticket before boarding or at the start of your journey. To do this, insert your ticket into the small ticket stamping machine located on the platform or near the doors of the bus or tram.

If you have a semester ticket (see pp. 22/23), you need not buy another ticket. However, if a conductor asks to see your semester ticket, you have to show identification, such as a passport or personal identification card.

If there is no semester ticket at your university, public transport companies usually offer students special rates.

It's also possible to take your bike onto busses and trains. It often means buying an extra ticket for your bicycle. Some universities offer semester tickets which include free bicycle transport. However, there is no guarantee you can take your bike with you at any time of day. For example, the busses are quite crowded during rush hour, and the driver may not permit you to take your bike onto the bus.

Railway

Travelling by rail is fast and comfortable. The Intercity Express trains (ICE) can travel up to 330 kilometres per hour. Tickets for ICE, Intercity (IC) and Eurocity (EC) trains usually cost more than for the slower Interregio-Express (IRE), Regionalexpress (RE), Regionalbahn (RB) trains and regional trams.

Travelling by rail can be somewhat expensive when you spontaneously decide to take a trip somewhere. You can save money by purchasing your ticket far in advance. You can buy tickets at the counter in the railway station, at ticket machines or on the website of the Deutsche Bahn. Tickets are often less expensive if you book them online.

For those who travel by rail more frequently, it might be a good idea to invest in a *BahnCard* 25 or *BahnCard* 50. This card automatically reduces the price of your ticket by either 25 or 50 percent. There are a number of special offers available, as well. One such offer is the “Schönes-Wochenende-Ticket” (Good Weekend Ticket), with which up to five people can travel on

Fare evasion

Evading or dodging the fare (*Schwarzfahren*) means using public transport without a valid ticket. Whoever is caught fare dodging in Germany is fined a minimum of 60 euros.

regional and suburban trains non-stop for an entire day at the weekend. The price ranges from 40 euros (for one person) to 56 euros (for five people). Another great bargain is the “Quer-durchs-Land-Ticket” (Across the Country Ticket). You can travel anywhere in Germany on regional trains for just 44 euros on any one day. You can also take four friends with you for an additional 8 euros per person.

Travelling by coach

There are a number of coach companies in Germany which offer bus service between German cities and to European destinations. Coach travel is an inexpensive alternative to the German railway. You can search for bus connections and book tickets online (search word: “*Fernbus*”).

Airlines

You can easily fly to destinations all over Europe and around the world from most German airports. There’s a good chance of finding a bargain if you’re flexible and book well in advance. You can purchase tickets either online or at a travel agency. Many airlines offer concession rates on long-distance flights to students,

Car-pooling

Some students love car-pooling. The idea is very simple. A driver offers space in his or her car to other passengers who happen to be going the same way. All the passengers share the cost of petrol. Not only is car-pooling economical, but also environmentally friendly. And it’s a great way to meet people. You can find car-pooling offers online using the search terms “*Mitfahrzentrale*” or “*Mitfahrgelegenheit*”.





The student council at several universities have a special notice board, called a *Mitfahrerbrett*, where people can offer or look for car-pools.

Driving a car in Germany

Having a car at one's disposal is a luxury for most students. If you would like to drive a car in Germany, you need a valid driving licence.

So many ways to get around in Germany and Europe! How do I find the right one?

Leonie: *Whenever I want to travel somewhere, I check the website www.verkehrsmittelvergleich.de to see which mode of transportation is the fastest and least expensive. Knowing that, it's usually easier to decide.*

German authorities recognise all licenses issued by EU member states. Additional conditions may apply to drivers from outside the EU. For more information, contact the department of motor vehicles in your university town or the German Automobile Club website (ADAC) see **www.adac.de** > “Info, Test & Rat” > “Ratgeber Verkehr” > “Führerschein” > “Ausländische Führerscheine”.

! If you drive a car, you should refrain from drinking alcohol. The legal blood alcohol content limit in Germany is 0.5 mg/ml. Drivers under the age of 21 are not allowed to drink any alcohol. Your licence can be immediately revoked if your blood alcohol content exceeds the legal limit. If you are caught driving without a license, you will be heavily fined!

If you have an accident, you should always contact the police by calling the free-phone number **110**. If you are involved in an accident or are a witness to one, you must stay at the scene of the accident until the police arrive.

For those who don't want to buy a car, but would like to drive every so often, car-sharing might be a good alternative. Car-sharing companies have a fleet of cars, parked at various locations in a city. Car-sharing is becoming more and more popular in Germany with an ever increasing number of car-sharing offers. Students are often eligible for special conditions. Many universities have signed cooperation agreements with car-sharing providers, guaranteeing especially favourable conditions for their students.

Inexpensive lodging

If you travel through Germany, you will need a place to stay. You can find affordable lodging at guest houses and youth hostels (see p.83).

However, if you are interested in a free, no-frills alternative, then you should look into hospitality networks. These are global networks devoted to international exchange. On their websites, you can find a free place to sleep (in other words, a couch), which in some cases, includes a personal city tour by your host or hostess.

In this way, you can benefit from the hospitality of others without being obliged to put up guests yourself. The offers are available to all members of the network. Normally all you have to do to become a member is to register online.

The largest hospitality network is **www.couchsurfing.org**.

More information:

► **www.germany-tourism.de**

Jan: "What is typically German? It's seems everybody has their own take on that matter. But there are just some clichés that won't go away. Maybe because there's a kernel of truth in them? In any case, you can form your own opinion when you get to Germany. And you might end up experiencing something totally different than what is typically German."



Typical German?

Germans drink beer.



Mileya: Yes ... that too! There are an incredible number of different kinds of beers and mixed beer beverages at the supermarket. And not every German likes drinking beer. That's why there are plenty of alternatives – with and without alcohol.

Germans like rules and order.

Mileya: Yes, I find there are a lot of rules here for many different situations – and most people seem willing to follow them. In a way, it's rather reassuring. At the personal level, not everyone is so orderly. I'm always amazed at how chaotic my German friend's notes are. We've often laughed about it.

Germans are punctual.

Mileya: Let's put it this way: most people are punctual for official appointments. And privately, there are some who are not so forgiving when you arrive late without a good excuse. But luckily, the people I know are pretty relaxed.

Germans are hard-working.



Anas: Yes, I believe that too. The people at the company where I did my internship were very focused on their work. I was impressed! No wonder the German economy is so strong.

Germans are not very sociable.

Anas: Yes, it's true to some extent. Many people are nice, but not overly emotional. You have to know them a little longer to see that side of them. They have to build trust first. And not all Germans can do that so quickly.

Germans are serious.

Anas: That's not what I've found. My friends and acquaintances are actually pretty funny. We laugh all the time – or is it just because of me?

The Germans are fearful.

Anas: Perhaps, yes! Many of my fellow German students are worried about their future – whether they'll get a good job, find the right partner – and about political issues in the world. But they're actually doing just fine.

Germans adore their cars.



Amanuel: *Hmm. You do see a lot of people who are extremely proud of their cars and take good care of them. But there are many people at my university who have no desire to own a car. They use car-sharing and are completely satisfied with it.*

Germans are efficient.

Amanuel: *Yes, that's the impression I get. I think Germans have a good sense for organising things. My flatmate is a pro at that. She can pack an entire picnic lunch in no time flat. Amazing!*

Germans are not especially patriotic.

Amanuel: *Yes, and that puzzles me sometimes. Many German students I've met are very critical of their country. I don't get the feeling that they're proud of being German. But yet, they are quite liberal-minded and accepting. I like that.*





