FLIEGEN WIR JETZT ENDLICH LOS?

A Study Abroad Survival Guide – Part 2
Hamburg Edition

University of Rhode Island
International Business Program
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Getting Ready for Hamburg

What to Bring

The big question: what do I need to bring? This is obviously going to be different for everyone, but here’s a decently comprehensive list of some of the things you’ll need to bring. As far as overall allowances, head to the website of the airline you’re using and check their baggage regulations. As a general tip, really think about the things you actually need when packing - you can get things like notebooks and towels pretty easily, and baggage fees add up fast. Also, the rules are generally one carry-on and one “laptop bag/purse.” They are much more lenient with this than with checked bags, so make something like a backpack your “laptop bag” and have a checked bag and a carry-on along with that. Another tip if your bag is getting real tight is to wear your winter jacket (and biggest shoes/boots) on the flight; this can save a lot of space. Make sure you weigh your bag before you go, no one wants to be sorting through socks and underwear while your parents are crying about how big you’ve gotten. Out of experience with Lufthansa, it was somehow cheaper to buy a second bag, rather than over packing one. Also implementing vacuum sealing bags while packing really helped.

- Wallet with coin pouch. You’re going to be dealing with a lot more coins in Germany, so you pretty much need to have a wallet with a coin pouch, or just don’t bring one and plan on buying it there.
- A backpack. This is necessary for everything from travelling to buying groceries to going to school. When buying groceries you might want to bring grocery bags with you, too. They have very “European” backpacks which resemble hiking bags in outdoor stores. The prices may vary (25 to 50+ Euros), but it may be worth considering as a first purchase.
- Pictures of friends/family. Not necessary, but they’re lightweight, and your dorm room is going to look really empty the first couple of weeks. Another suggestion for room decorating is to save all the maps you collect as you travel and put these on your walls. You can also bring or buy lights, tapestries, pillows to brighten the room up.
- Pictures of yourself. You need these for your resume, visa, internship, and probably a couple other applications. This is a standard passport photo type picture, “biometric” nothing else. When you get this photo done, dress up and get 8 copies of them, you will need them for all sorts of things at URI and in Germany
- Voltage Converters. This is a somewhat complicated question, but to make it as simple as possible: Just buy an adaptor. There are the small adaptors which only change the shape of the wall socket, and the expensive ones which convert voltage as well. German outlets have a higher wattage, which means that just something that converts the outlet shape is a ticket to frying your stuff. However, more expensive things (like laptops with AC-DC converters) generally can handle the higher voltage. So figure out what you’re bringing and what you need for it.
- Ethernet Cable. If you already have one, just bring it, chances are you will need it because most of the dorms don’t have Wifi.
- Don’t bring a hairdryer/expensive electronics. If it’s something big, it’s just not worth it, and multiple girls blew them up and needed to buy new ones within a couple days of landing. Just do yourself a favor and buy that stuff in Germany.
- Bring about 500-750 hundred Euros for the first days. We’ll talk about how the first few hours will go down later, but they will be hectic enough without you searching around for an ATM, so just bring some cash with you to start off. Part of this will be used for a housing deposit for APM upon arrival in Hamburg. Be sure to pack it safely; possibly break it up.
Before you go, make sure you have all the documents you will need, and a digital copy of them. It will be a lot easier to get this stuff scanned at home than in Germany. This includes:

- Passport page (the one with your picture on it)
- Prior Approval Form
- Graduation Worksheet (from your Advisor at the Graduate School of Business)
- The list of pre approved classes at HAW-Hamburg
- Lebenslauf and Bewerbungsschreiben (just digital should be ok)
- Digital copy of passport photos (good idea to scan this too)

Bringing your driver’s license from America is nice, because it gives you something to use as an ID before you get anything German, and you won’t have to carry your passport around. You’ll also need it if you want to rent a car at any point during your time there. This doesn’t work in all situations, but it is nice to accompany your visa if you need a second proof of ID.

Something to organize your documents in - You’re going to get even more paperwork once you get settled in Germany: your housing contract, bank info, phone info, insurance paperwork. Bring something that you can keep all this stuff in so things don’t get out of hand. As a side note, most documents are printed on A4 sized paper in Germany, so it may be better to wait to purchase folders.

As a general clothes warning, things like jeans and shirts are a lot more expensive in Germany than in America, think €80 for a decent pair of jeans. These are worth bringing.

Weather-appropriate clothing So bring some warm clothes (gloves, hats, and scarves are all good ideas) along with a good pair of boots and a thick coat. Galeria Kaufhof has some great European jackets for sale. They’re on the expensive side (200ish Euros) but are very good quality and everyone around there wears them.

Business casual clothing - workplaces aren’t very formal in Germany, but still remember that you may be doing an internship for 6 months, so bring more than a couple of button-ups. Business professional clothing should be worn for an interview, but many companies require business casual for the everyday work day. If Bring sensible shoes in case you need to walk/bike to work!

For that matter, Germans in general dress up a bit more than Americans to leave the house, so be ready for that. You won’t see any Germans shopping or going to class in sweatpants, so if you want to blend in a bit be prepared to do the same. Jeans are casual.

Continuing the clothes theme, if you plan on going out, have some decent clothes to do it in. Germans don’t usually go to bars or clubs in T-shirts. Same as the last point, you can do what you want, but expect people to be a bit more dressed up than at URI.

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**The Driver’s License**

Public transportation in and around Hamburg is great. That said, if you plan on renting or driving a car, you need a valid license. An international driver’s license from AAA may be the easiest thing to get beforehand. In some scenarios, it may not suffice. Your driver’s license is valid for the first 6 months you are in Germany, but if you want it to be longer then you will need to extend the validity. This will be explained later, as it deserves its own section.
**Learn to cook**

Restaurants are really expensive, grocery stores aren’t, and contrary to popular belief, you can’t live on Döner alone. Your apartment will have a small kitchen, and it’s important for your wallet that you’ll be able to use it. Keep it simple though, because food prices vary a lot based on whether or not it’s a “luxury” item, but more on that later. (Oh, and if you end up baking something here, don’t forget that the oven temps are in Celsius....)

Consider bringing some measuring utensils if you’re bringing recipes. Unless of course you’re really good at converting metric.

**Flying to Germany**

You are on your own in terms of finding your own flight. Boston has convenient flights to Hamburg with very little layovers/stops. Book early to get the cheapest flights. Also be sure to book a round trip - it’s easier and cheaper to just rebook the return flight.

On the big day, get to the airport at least two hours early to make sure you have time to go through everything and aren’t rushed. Three hours is even better with air travel these days, Also, make sure you check the basics of what not to bring on an airplane if you haven’t done much flying before.

It is nice to have your Buddy pick you up with your transportation card if you can arrange it so that you don’t have to pay unnecessarily for train rides to your dorm.

**Willkommen in Deutschland!**

**Upon arrival**

The first few days in Hamburg are going to be quite a whirlwind, so just take a deep breath. Re-read [HAW’s Exchange Semester at HAW Guide](#) to get up to speed on everything you need to know as well as the On-Site Timeline (Appendix A in this document) which will help you keep track of what to do and when, when you first get there. and pay attention to what needs to get done, as the German bureaucratic machine will not be as forgiving as URI.

Hopefully you will have heard from your Buddy before you get to Germany (there is a Buddy program you have to sign up for), but if not you will probably meet them at this point. This is a student who will most likely email you over the summer to introduce themselves, and is there to help you get set up during the first few weeks. This is the person you should go to first with questions or issues about what you are supposed to be doing.
Getting to the university

There are several important locations to know about.

- The main building is called Berliner Tor. There are two other HAW locations around Hamburg so you just need to familiarize yourself with the locations. (Most likely you will just be at one location)
- There is a Mensa at every HAW location. I highly recommend using these as they are very cheap, but the hours are limited so just be aware and plan your schedule accordingly.
- Grindelallee 9 - where the Studienservice-Center is, another place you might have to go in order to resolve different paperwork issues that don’t concern the IO. The deposit (die Kaution) is a month’s rent, so look at your housing agreement to find out how much it is. Don’t worry, you get it back after moving out (assuming you didn’t destroy your room/apartment). This one is a bit tricky to pay. You can pay by cash or card. Talk to the IO or Studienservice-Center and ask them where it is and what the hours are.
- The IO’s office location in Hamburg is Stiftstr. 69. Your main contact will be Ingrid Weatherall, ingrid.weatherall@haw-hamburg.de. Also, Mariana Muller will be a contact person as well. She runs most of the welcome week activities. Mariana.mueller@haw-hamburg.de

Things to do soon after arriving

We know that you will be very busy during the first few days, but there are a few things here that you need to do, some of which might not have occurred to you. Just take a deep breath and get it done one by one, you should have enough time.

- Register with the City. Refer to the pre-departure visa/permit powerpoint and Appendix A: On-Site Timeline in this document for more information. AFTER you have registered with the city, you can apply for the permit which you should do right away.
- Set up a bank account. The easiest bank account to set up is with Deutsche Bank. You start signing up online and send in your info online. They are everywhere, so when you move, you will still have your same bank instead of switching bank accounts when you move. Also download Google translate to scan your banking documents. It saves a lot of time and allows you to understand what you’re fully agreeing to.
- IKEA or REAL. This is where you are going to buy sheets, towels, curtains, and a lot of other things. Chances are your Buddy will take you there just after you put your stuff in your dorm. If you go to Ikea on your own it may be a good idea to get a bike first. It might be difficult, but try to check before you leave if you need pots/panns/dishes/utensils or if other people in your apartment might already have them. Usually there are communal pots, pans, silverware, etc for you to use because they are used to having International students. If yes, buy them at IKEA (you can split some of the family-size things with other students). If not, don’t bother! Also, hold on to the blue bags you get there, as they are pretty useful.
- You may need to use the wi-fi at a cafe until you have your internet set up so you can confirm to your family that you’re alive. There might not be one nearby, so you might need an international plan for the first week. The wifi takes one day at least to complete set up so start this right away.
- Eat a Döner. This is simply non-negotiable; it is delicious and you won’t regret it. If you get confused, just say “Döner mit allem” (with everything) and you will get what you need. Just be warned now
though, that the Döner does possess a certain addictive power which may become a problem for weaker spirits.

- This is when your organization system from the awesome “what to bring” list starts to get very useful. You need to keep track of your bank account papers, housing contract, phone contract, insurance papers… just make sure you have everything in a way where you can access it when you need it.

- You will also be having a lot of different meetings with the IO (International Office) during the first few weeks, so just pay attention to these and make sure you bring the right papers and don’t miss them.

- Set up rent payments using direct deposit - it’s a lot easier than dealing with the bank. Your best bet here is to just go to a local bank, e.g. Deutsche Bank, and ask them what exactly you need to do this, and then come back the next day with that stuff. They are going to need some of your HAW-Hamburg ID type information, and some of the housing contract things. This will set up an automatic transfer from your Deutsche Bank account to the University on a certain day of every month, and make sure you always have the money in your Deutsche Bank account when this happens. The easiest way to do this is to just go to a Deutsche Bank Automat, use your American ATM card to withdraw money, and then put it right back in on your Deutsche Bank account (once you get this card in the mail). This isn’t something you need to do right away, but also something you shouldn’t forget about. And make sure you actually have the money in your account every month!

If you want to avoid ATM fees when you withdraw money from any German bank, set up an account with Schwab Bank through their online portal: www.schwab.com/

- Be careful signing things! Before you sign a phone or gym contract, make sure you know exactly what they say and what you are getting yourself into (it is okay to give the IO a bit more leeway; they are not trying to screw you over). A key for both of these things is to make sure you understand how long the contract is running and how you will cancel it. A cheap phone plan with a 2-year minimum and a big cancellation fee is not worth it. Be extremely careful when signing contracts, do not sign unless you are 100% certain you know what you are getting, what you are paying for, when the contract ends or how to get out of it.

- If you’re looking for a bike the best bet is to check out the thrift markets that pop up every weekend. You can get a cheap used bike for 50-70 euros or maybe even less. Having a bicycle is a huge help in greatly increasing your mobility. Note that a bell and lights are mandatory on bicycles in Germany. Not having these could get you fined! Also be aware of the bike laws, as they are treated like motor vehicles.

Check out Brian’s guide to getting around in Germany. Any info you could need on mobility can be found here: http://www.gettingaroundgermany.info/regeln.shtml

If you are going to be driving, be sure to pay attention to the rules. They use cameras to enforce traffic laws, so be safe, and follow the rules. Just as a disclaimer: There are speed limits in Germany. If it isn’t posted, it’s 50 km/hr in the city/town and 100km/hr on the Bundesstraßen.

**Cell Phones**

If you want to buy a new phone, go to Saturn in the Schloss to buy a cell phone (it’s like Best Buy). Many of the American phones won’t work in Europe, unless you unlock it with your service provider in America. Most providers allow this after the phone is paid off, or two years, depending.
If you bought a phone at full price in the USA, or if you paid your phone off, you then buy a new SIM card in Germany, insert the SIM card into the phone and it’s good to go. You can get very cheap plans at Aldi or Lidl. Just ask for a SIM card - best and cheapest option. I would recommend Lidl. You can get 2 GB data for 13 EUR per month. If you have a Pixel phone, you can get Project Fi as your cell phone provider in the USA. It includes data in 135 countries (including Germany) without roaming fees.

And what about outside of Germany? There is a new EU law that requires all providers to offer EU wide use of data plans without roaming fees. Phone calls, however, cost a little more outside of Germany. For Sweden, I paid 12 cents per text (3 extra cents), and in the UK I paid 10 cents or so. Therefore you may want to stock up on credit before traveling, but in general you shouldn’t have any issues, especially if you use data. Of course, don’t try calling to the USA through this line, instead use WhatsApp or Skype while on wifi (available at any Starbucks).

**IO orientation/ Enrollment**

Sometime in the first week that you’re here, there will be a several hour long orientation meeting at the International Office. They’ll tell you a bit about the IO and give you a schedule of welcome events (information sessions, parties, etc.); then the fun begins. **It is crucial that you bring ALL the paperwork that you have to this meeting.** The packet from the first day, your passport, passport photos, bank account information, housing agreement, the acceptance letter that the HAW emailed you several months before you came, everything. You will have a welcome week that you will need to register for which consists of a lot of fun meeting games with the other International students. They recommend that you get the AOK health insurance, which you get a discount because you’re a student. However, you have to make your own appointment, but they talk more about this during the welcome week.

While we’re on the topic of the IO, this should really be your first stop for any issues you have while in Germany. They have a lot of resources and experience with international students, and will be able to point you in the right direction for almost anything. Their office is in the section before this (are you even paying attention?). Here’s the IO website and email:

Their office location in Hamburg is Stiftstr. 69. Your main contact will be Ingrid Weatherall, ingrid.weatherall@haw-hamburg.de

Also Mariana Muller will be a contact person as well. She runs most of the welcome week activities. Mariana.mueller@haw-hamburg.de

**German bureaucracy**

Now is probably a good time to warn you about German bureaucracy. Expect delays with everything. Office hours are very strange (Tuesday 9.00-11.30/Thursday 9.30-11.00 is a good example) and not always reliable. No office is open later than 16.00, and leaving early without warning is very common. Someone in one office might tell you that it’s not their problem and send you to someone else, who ends up sending you to someone else, who sends you back to the first person. If they try to send you somewhere else, make sure you are not confused about where you need to go next and what you need to bring. Ask them to repeat and write things down if you need to, even if they start to get short with you. A good tip is to be as specific as
possible with your problem and go to the most appropriate office the first time. Research where to go or ask
the IPP partners for help- as the office workers really appreciate people making their job easier.

**Health Insurance**

At one point in this process the IO will mention how to get insurance. You will not be taken as a group.
They'll mention which is best, AOK, and then you have to make your own appointment. Make sure you bring
your passport and all other documents they ask for to complete the process efficiently. This will be set up
with automatic withdrawals from your Deutsche Bank account every month, so make sure you have money
there on that day of the month! (See Appendices for more money details.)
Basic Tips

These tips are particularly true during your first few weeks, but will never stop being true while you’re there.

Your friends are mostly other international students who speak English, so you have to try extra hard to make friends who speak German so you can practice. Spend time with the foreigners, especially the ones looking to speak German. You’re not there to spend time only with Americans; get out and meet some new people. Try to stay in touch with some of the students from the summer school who are staying for the semester if you can.

This also applies while you’re out shopping or at restaurants. The customer is always right, so if you tell them you would prefer to speak in German, they will. Don’t be afraid to be a bit stubborn; a lot of people will assume they’re being polite by speaking to you in English, just tell them you can already speak English and don’t need to practice it.

Once you start getting a bit better, try watching German movies and TV, or go online and read about things (soccer, news, or whatever else you enjoy reading about) in German. Buying a book or two is also a great way to get better.

University Semester

This is a collection of a whole lot of different things that might help you in one way or another during your time in Hamburg. Once again, this isn’t a totally complete list, but what’s a year abroad without a bit of adventure?

Classes (registration, what to take, etc.)

Just go to the HAW homepage and research classes for your major. Some of this is also in English, but the course descriptions generally aren’t so be ready for that.

You should also take a language class in Hamburg. It is easy to transfer for German credit if you need it, and is really helpful to keep up on your grammar. You will need to take a levelling test in the Sprachenzentrum, and then you can sign up for them. More info about these classes: https://www.haw-hamburg.de/en/international/learning-languages/language-courses-currently-on-offer-at-haw-hamburg/ Language courses do start later than the business ones, so be aware of the different start date.

You need to pass your Business courses in order to get the credits to transfer. I recommend taking the classes you definitely need in English even if you are confident in German because of all of the technical terms used in these classes, it will be harder to understand in another language if you don't already know the specific terms.

If you do take courses in German be sure to stay ahead of them, since there is no homework, quizzes, or tests to let you know how you’re doing. The entire grade is based on the final (Klausur). You should also look into when this is early because many of them are held after you will leave for your internship, but it is possible to reschedule them if you talk to the professors early. Also, please do not forget that many lecturers also have a Übung or Tutorium, sometimes both. Please make sure to attend all of them to be able to pass the exam.

At the end of the semester, make sure to get all certificates and transcripts transferred/sent back to URI. You need to request this/make sure they do this because they won’t do it on their own. Don’t forget to inform them of your language course as well, because they don’t have access to this info unless you give it to them.
Getting Sick

Unfortunately, this is bound to happen at some point. If you need medicine (both over the counter and prescription), go to an Apotheke. They're all over the place and you can find anything you need. The pharmacists also give really good advice about what to do to make you feel better and will point you towards the right stuff for your problem.

Regardless of where you go, make sure you bring ALL your insurance information and an ID. If you have US insurance, make sure you have the card on you and expect them to take a while to figure out what to do with it. Otherwise, things should go easily as long as you have everything with you.

Another thing to know: 911 won’t get you anywhere in Germany (or the rest of Europe). The emergency number is 112, and 110 gets you straight to the police.

Locations in Hamburg

- Hamburg city hall: is in the center of the shopping district, right next to the mall, great place to shop for everything you could need. Rathausmarkt 1, 20095 Hamburg
- Thomas Read: Irish Bar, has karaoke and fun concerts and theme nights. Students drink 2 for 1 on Wednesdays, Nobistor 10, 22767 Hamburg
- FC ST. pauli stadium: can get cheap tours, tickets, and merchandise, Heiligengeistfeld 3, 20359 Hamburg
- Reeperbahn: the party mile/district. Clubs, bars, etc goes on for a mile. explore :) 
- Planten und Blomen: huge outdoor garden space. Make sure you go in the fall or in the spring when all of the flowers are in bloom. Marseiller Str., 20355 Hamburg

Transportation in Hamburg

The choices for public transportation here are simple: bus, U-Bahn or S-Bahn Straßenbahn (street tram). The trams are the heart of the city's transportation, and can get you to most of the main places. It would take a book to describe how you get everywhere, so we won’t do it here. It's not hard to learn, and there's a bunch of stuff that helps a lot. The best places to start are online:

Just download the HVV app (it's red), It gives the times, locations and best routes from your current location. I couldn't have gotten around the city without this app. Don't forget that on Saturday and Sunday everything runs less often and at different times, so check the times before you plan something for the weekend. They also run less often at night and not at all between ~1 and ~4 AM, so keep that in mind when you go out partying.
Shopping

To find grocery stores, search for any of these near your address (once you know where you’re staying): Aldi, Penny, Lidl, Edeka, Rewe, Real. This list is basically in order of cheapest to most expensive, but in some senses you do get what you pay for. So at Aldi, Penny, and Lidl things are pretty cheap but there is not a lot of selection and most of the stuff is their brand. Rewe is a better bet to find American-type things you’re missing, and Real is really the only one that is the size of an American supermarket, and also has a lot of other stuff like a Wal-Mart would, but is definitely the most expensive. It does have a foreign food section with some American stuff. Also, it would be a good idea to bring a dictionary to the store the first couple times.

- The Euro Shoppe is the dollar store of Germany, and it is a good place to find cheap notebooks, folders, some kitchen stuff like Tupperware, etc. There are a couple in the center of the city.
- Galeria Kaufhaus: This is basically Germany’s department store, so you can get a huge variety of things here.
- McPaper is where to go if you want more legit office supplies.
- Saturn is where to go if you want any sort of electronics. It’s similar to a Best Buy.
- DM (Drogerie Markt) is similar to a CVS, so head over here for shampoo, toothpaste, deodorant, etc.
- Woolworth’s: This is a home goods store where you can also buy blankets, towels, rugs, glasses.

You are required to have your student ID on you at all times when you’re using public transportation because it is your transportation card as well. For the buses you have to get on in front and show your ID to the driver. For the trams, you just get on and don’t have to show it at all. However, there are people roaming around the city in plainclothes whose job is to make sure that people have tickets. If you’re unlucky enough to have one on your Tram, they’ll show you their badge and ask to see your ticket. Show them your student ID and everything’s fine, but if you don’t have it on you you'll get slapped with a 60€ fine.

Also note that your student ID is only good for local transportation in BS. If you go somewhere else with its own transportation network (Bremen, Berlin, etc.), you’ll have to buy a ticket there.

Or just use a bike! Hamburg is a fantastic bike city. It's fairly small and flat and there are bike paths everywhere. It frees you from public transport and you get some exercise too. It is illegal to bike on the left side of the road, and you will annoy everyone + look like an American + potentially get a ticket. You can also get a ticket for not having a working bell and light, so check for that when you’re buying one. Also remember to always lock your bike! The best place to get these is at the flea market (Flohmarkt); ask your Buddy where to find it.
**Costs to expect**

It can be a bit difficult to figure out exactly what the year abroad will cost, but this is a summary of the main costs that you’ll have. Appendix A has a sample from a couple of students who kept track of their finances during their year in Germany, and shows an average idea of the main expenses that can’t be avoided. It doesn’t include one-time costs (list below), assumes you’re only going out a little bit for food, and doesn’t include other things you might want for yourself (Lederhosen aren’t cheap). Be sure to look at the Budget Sheet for the exchange program in URI Abroad. In addition to the OIE and off-campus payments per semester, URI In-State Tuition for Fall semester abroad, you’ll also have:

- ~1,200€ for flight
- ~100€ at IKEA
- ~100€ minimum for smart phone or ~30€ for cheap phone
- ~60€ for cheap bike, lock, lights, basket (not strictly necessary)
- ~80€ monthly AOK mandatory health insurance
- ~40€ for BahnKarte 25 (highly recommended, explained in travel section)
- 2 X Semester Fee in November and February
- Costs for moving (depends on how you choose to move, could be 200€ or more)

**Sports**

Sports are a great way to meet new friends, have fun, get some exercise, and try something new! Even better, most of the classes are free! Sign-ups take place online during the first week of classes, there are different levels, and you can take anything from soccer to fencing, handball to international dance. There are also fitness classes and some not-actually-sports like some board games. Because you have so many options, it’s a good idea to take a look at the catalog in advance so that you know what you’re interested in. Some of the classes will fill up within minutes of the registration opening so if there is one you really want be ready to fill out your information as fast as you can! There are different levels so check to make sure you aren’t going to an expert-level judo class. You can also sign up for the comprehensive HAW gym membership, which includes and offers classes and teams like these.
ISN Group

Here’s something quick and easy to help you find things to do in Hamburg: the ISN (International Student Network) has a Facebook group, which is where they post a lot of different activities and meetups with people from all over the world right in Hamburg. Definitely worth checking out, since you don’t want to be hanging around with boring Americans the whole time you’re there. At HAW, they have an International students group that you can join, as well as they’ll most likely add you to a group for your specific semester.

Postage

If you need to send something in the mail you can find a Deutsche Post retailer or shop. If you are sending a package of any sort be prepared to fill out a sheet detailing what is inside the package, how much it weighs, and an approximate monetary worth. Sending boxes within Germany is very cheap, but shipping internationally (especially to the US) can get a bit expensive.

There are other package stores like Hermes or DHL which ship packages cheaper. Weigh your options before sending - especially to the U.S.

General Germany/Cultural Notes

When you buy bottled drinks in Germany you are assessed a small fee or “Pfand.” It is usually about 25 Euro cents and you can get it back by returning your bottles to the grocery store or to a bottle collection facility. If you’re returning bottles to a grocery store there is a machine, usually by the door, where you insert the bottle. The machine reads the tag and accepts (or sometimes declines) the bottle. You keep putting in all your bottles and when you are finished you are given a receipt that you give to the cashier and that amount will be taken off your bill or given to you in cash if you’re not purchasing anything. Basically, it’s a way to encourage people to recycle.

While we’re on the topic of grocery stores here are some helpful tips on making your shopping experience a pleasant one. For starters, no one is going to bag your groceries for you. In fact, they won’t provide you with bags either. If you’re buying several grocery items, bring your backpack or buy reusable bags at the checkout. The cashiers scan the items pretty fast so it’s a bit of a game trying to keep up with your bagging. While you’re picking up items you may notice that some things are labeled “Bio”; this means they are organic and probably cost more. Also note that vegetables, eggs, and dairy products are much fresher in Germany than they are in America, although the quality of meat is usually poorer.

When you first get to Germany, you will notice there are some definite cultural differences. One of the biggest differences is the importance of punctuality or “Pünktlichkeit.” If you have an appointment somewhere it is incredibly important that you arrive on time. This applies for class too! Take the earlier bus or tram, because the later one won’t wait.
Germany also has more relaxed policies on alcohol in public areas. It is legal to have an open container on the streets. HOWEVER, if you get out of hand or are belligerent you will be approached and can get in serious trouble.

Unlike in America, waiters/waitresses in Germany make real wages, and they do not depend on tips. Tipping is optional, but it is customary to round your bill up to the next euro or two if you received good service. For example, if your bill was 13.75€ you could say 15€ and that would be fine.

Helpful restaurant phrases:
“Können wir bitte bezahlen?” (Could we pay, please?)
“Welche Biersorten haben Sie vom Fass?” (What beers are on tap?)
“Ich hätte gern das Schnitzel.” (I would like the Schnitzel)

Do not cross the light when it is RED. If a police officer sees you he/she will stop you and you will get a ticket! Also somebody could yell at you in German… Generally try to avoid that.

Travel

Now that your paperwork is taken care of and you’ve got your schedule figured out, use some of your free time to do some exploring! First things first... where should you go?

Germany
Germany is a pretty big country chock full of everything from castles, to modern cities. Hamburg also has a gazillion of these so make sure you visit them, especially the ST. Pauli one! Check out the festivals in Hamburg during October, head to a city like Dresden or Nürnberg to experience famous Weihnachtsmärkte during the month of December, in February Köln is the place to be for Karneval, and during the spring/summer towns everywhere will be having festivals. Try the traditional food (every city has their own style of Bratwurst and Bier), buy homemade crafts, listen to folk music (or the cover bands playing classic rock songs), or watch a Maibaum be hoisted. If you want to experience real German culture check these festivals out, you won’t regret it!

Europe
If you’re looking to travel outside of Germany, or trying to escape the gray winter, you have several options. You can go anywhere from the Spanish party islands of Palma and Ibiza; to Florence, Italy; London, England; Prague, Czech Republic; Vienna, Austria; Paris, France; to Stockholm, Sweden; Amsterdam... the list goes on. See as much as you can! Want to travel Europe? The cheapest flights are usually out of Hamburg through Ryan Air, Google flights is an excellent tool for finding the cheapest flights and very easy to navigate. Reminder that with the semester fee it includes many local locations.

Safety
OIE will run a session on health, safety & security abroad before you leave which will give you the most up to date information you will need on those topics before you go. The number one thing you need to consider when you’re traveling is your safety. Let’s face it, you’re probably going to stick out as a tourist. You’re going to want to take pictures and you’ll probably have a map so you
don’t get lost. That’s fine, just make sure you’re not a vulnerable tourist. **Be aware of your surroundings.** Travel in groups, and avoid talking to random vendors who approach you. Pickpocketing is a real threat but if you’re smart/careful you won’t have any problems. In really crowded areas wear your backpack on your front, don’t keep your wallet in your back pocket, etc. Consider carabiners or chains for valuables, and always keep track of your stuff.

Proper planning will also cut down on stress while traveling. Have good directions to your hostel/hotel, know how to get to the train station/airport, pack a map or buy one as soon as you get to your destination. You might also want to have some ideas for what you might like to see so you can use your time efficiently. That’s not to say plan every minute, but there might be something special at your destination that you’d be sad to miss! If your transportation situation is well planned you will have a lot less stress.

**Transportation**

So let’s talk about transportation. In Europe you have lots of options for travel. See Appendix C for a breakdown of different modes. Here we are going to discuss the websites you will be using and some tips for getting your trip booked.

We’ll start with cars. You will be able to use your American driver’s license for the first 6 months that you are in Germany, but there are some things to keep in mind. For starters, gas is **much** more expensive in Germany than it is in the US. You can pay a little extra to ensure you get a diesel car. This is the best way to go for the money. Also, there is practically no “free” parking. Search car rental services for more information on the terms and conditions of renting a car in Germany. It is also possible to share a ride with someone who is going to the same place as you. This is called *Mitfahrgelegenheit*. You will probably be expected to pay part of the gas or a small fee to the person driving. It’s a popular option with college students traveling home for weekends/holidays and might be a good opportunity for you to practice your German.

You could also take advantage of Germany’s extensive train system. In the region of Niedersachsen you can ride the **regional trains** for **free** with your HAW student ID. However, once you get out of Niedersachsen it is important that you have a ticket! You can also get to Hamburg and Bremen on RE trains for free, but need to pay for the trams/subways once you get there. The same applies for Hannover, which has public transit run by a different company.

If you plan on taking the train on several trips you might want to consider buying a “Bahn Card,” or train card, for discounted tickets. There are a couple different options with the Bahn Card and you should pick the one that best suits your needs

- **Bahn25:** This card will get you a 25% off of any price, whether it is the regular price or an already discounted one (*Sparpreis*). If you plan your trip well in advance this card allows you to take advantage of the additional 25% off of the Sparpreis option.
- **Bahn50:** This will get you 50% off of the **regular price only**. This option is great if you’re going to be taking the train for long distances and for spontaneous trips when a Sparpreis ticket is not available.

In general, if you plan ahead you can find great deals with DB. All information on timetables and buying and printing tickets can be found at: [www.bahn.de](http://www.bahn.de).

For those of you planning on flying, look no further than Ryan Air ([https://www.ryanair.com/](https://www.ryanair.com/)), Europe’s favorite discount airline. Through Ryan Air you can book round trip flights for as little as 15€ (seriously!). But remember that you get what you pay for. Ryanair usually flies out of airports that are located near, but not directly at large destinations. For example, if you’re flying to Barcelona you will actually land in Girona which
is about a 1 hour bus ride from the city. That being said, there is always a bus service to take you to your actual destination. However, plan for that and make sure you buy and print your ticket before you leave! Another thing to keep in mind is the STRICT carry-on policies that Ryanair has. You are more than welcome to check baggage but if you are on a budget and you want to backpack it, just make sure that your bag meets the required size and weight restrictions. They will be checking!!!!

Now that you've got your flight booked it's time to find a hotel or hostel. In Europe it is possible to find cheap, clean, safe hostels. Check out http://www.hostelworld.com/ and http://www.hostelbookers.com/ for accommodations. While booking your hostel, look for places that include breakfast (but don’t expect too much); it can help you save on food. You will also need to decide whether you would like a private room (anything from a single bed to 3-4 bed room that you are sharing with your travel group) or a bed in a dormitory/shared room (a room with 4-8 bunk beds shared by you and other travelers). If you are worried about your belongings, bring a lock (any shared room will have lockers), and consider spending a few extra Euros on the private room. If you are feeling adventurous and want to meet some new people, try the dormitory.

**Leaving Hamburg**

You need to request your grades to be transferred, don’t forget! You need to change your housing registration, finish up cleaning out your room and return your key, and fill out the leaving paperwork. Prep your transfer to your new city.

Make sure you have all of this set up before you leave. The last thing you want is to have to come back from an internship city far away to get paperwork done, or get a fine for something. There is an explanation in the Classes section a few pages back on how to get your grades/transcripts done as well.
Internship Semester: If Applicable

When you’re getting your paperwork and contract for the internship, they might ask you if the internship is a Pflichtpraktikum. It is, because you need the internship to be considered part of the IEP, and this has some tax ramifications for your company, and you don’t have to pay taxes on this income in the US.

Housing during the internship

Now that you know where you’re going to be working for your internship it’s time to find a place to live. When looking for a place, consider commute time and utilities. Some companies may have housing available for you so be sure and ask. If not, be prepared to do some searching on your own. Look at www.wg-gesucht.de/ and www.easyroommate.com/ for finding a place on your own, as well as searching “WG & Wohnung [your city]” on facebook. Here is an example facebook page: https://www.facebook.com/WG.Zimmer.frein.Regensburg. Also try searching “Zimmer frei in [your city]” on google or other search engines.” Start looking as soon as you know where you’ll be or you might end up having to pay out the nose for a place. While you’re searching for housing, beware of scams! Scammers will list an apartment and then begin corresponding with you. They may claim they are out of town and need you to wire them a deposit. Be very careful about sending money without having signed your contract, viewed the house, received your keys, etc. Hate to say it, but if it seems too good to be true, it probably is a scam.

Getting in contact with roommates

From the websites listed above, you can find the emails or facebooks of the roommates and send them a message, preferably in German and English. Let them know what you are doing in Germany, your reason for moving to the new town for the internship, how long you will be staying (6 months), etc. They will most likely want to meet with you once (or skype with you) to get to know you better. Living alone is not particularly bad, it will just be harder to get to know the city and finding new friends.

How to move to your new city

Now that you’ve got a place to live you’ve got to get all your stuff there! Here are a few options: Car vs. Train: If you feel comfortable driving in Germany, and you are moving before the 6 month time period, it is possible to rent a car to move to your internship location. If you are moving somewhere a little more remote it might be the easiest thing to do and you could carpool with IEP students. If you don’t want to drive, you can always take the train. If you have a lot of stuff (your things will multiply when you aren’t looking…) it might be a little tricky getting everything on and off the train so pick one with as few connections as possible so you don’t have to move things around several times. When planning your travel, be mindful of what’s going on in the city as well as the time of day. You don’t want to show up and have to take the soccer Tram right before game time with all of your suitcases!
Registering in the new city

Your company should be able to point you in the direction of the Einwohnermeldeamt in your new city. You will probably have to fill out a short form with information about how long you are staying and where you are living. This step should be done shortly after you arrive. If you happen to get official mail from your new city, speak with someone about it; they likely want to see you for one reason or another.

German Workplace Culture

Welcome to your internship! The workplace in Germany might be a little different from what you’ve experienced in the US. Depending on your job, the dress code could be very casual (jeans and button-down shirts) or it could be formal (suit and tie). For your first day, err on the side of caution and dress more formally. At that point you can ask what is typical and take a look at what everyone else in your office is wearing.

Another small side-note: if people say “Mahlzeit” to you, it is a way of saying that they’re going to lunch soon and you should come! It’s also used as a general greeting in the cafeteria and pretty much any time of the day. The Germans like to eat I guess...

GER 315/316 & Registering for Fall Classes

In order to receive GER 315/316 credits while you are abroad, you will be assigned essays, videos, cultural reflection assignments and other assignments that are due about every few weeks. Prof. Tracksdorf/Berka will send you syllabus and links where to upload your essays or record your videos and due dates. Make sure they include you in this google doc, they forgot me and I had to ask for it. Make sure you keep up with these and submit them on time. They will sneak up on you! At the end of the semester you will also need to take a survey and make a poster summarizing your year in Germany as well as take the IDI (Intercultural Competency Inventory) assessment for the IEP. Reports/videos will be graded, so write them well/ take time to do them well!

During this semester you will also need to register for fall classes. Usually this is as simple as emailing your advisor to have your hold lifted, and then checking the curriculum sheets for what you have left.
Preparing to Leave Germany

Before you leave Germany it is important that you take time to close all of your accounts. It is best if you do not wait until the last minute to take care of this step because sometimes you will need to give advance notice of cancellation. Start thinking about this so it’s not a mess right at the end. These things all get much more difficult/expensive once you have to make transatlantic calls, so get this done before you go!

One of the things that will need to be closed in advance is your Bahn Card. Stop by the train station and let them know you are going back to America and would like to cancel your card. They will probably have a few papers for you to sign but it’s no problem. If you don’t do this, you will automatically be charged for a second year of the service.

You will need to do the same kind of thing for your bank account, gym membership, insurance, internet provider, and phone account. Call them and ask what they need for cancellation, or go to one of their stores. If you have any questions you should send an email to the IO in Hamburg or ask a colleague.

Another stop that you should make is at the Einwohnermeldeamt. This will be the same place that you registered at when you first arrived. Just let them know you are leaving. Once again, they will probably have a paper or two for you to sign but it’s no big deal.

If you don’t have a prepaid phone, also go to a store a few weeks before you leave to ask them how to cancel the plan. Amazingly, some of them will insist that you send a letter of cancellation, so this isn’t something you can do immediately.

AOK automatically cancels your insurance after you leave HAW, so you need to extend otherwise. In recent years, students have had to prove that they are leaving the country to cancel, and a copy of all of your basic documents (Aufenthaltstitel, plane ticket, etc) should take care of it. A simple handwritten letter saying you are moving out on XX has also worked.

What papers to keep

Hang on to your transcripts from classes, bank information, insurance info, and any document you have saying you have closed an account, just in case. That way, if anything happens, you have documents you need.

As far as Deutsche Bank goes, you can either cancel it before you leave or do it from home. On that note, it is much less of a hassle to cancel BEFORE you leave the country. If you are going to do it from home, make sure you keep your TAN numbers, so you can electronically transfer the cash to your BOA account. You can also tell them you are going to be in America, which lets you use your Deutsche Bank card to take out money in America. Changing your address to your home address before you go is also a good suggestion. One way or another, go talk to them and make sure you have this figured out before you leave.
Super-Senior Year

Reverse culture shock

Well, you’ve done it! You lived in another country for an entire year, you (hopefully) had some incredible experiences, made new friends, and learned a lot about yourself in the process. Now, you’re back at good ole URI for your final hoorah as an undergrad.

You might be thinking that reverse culture shock is a myth (yeah, we did too). I mean, what’s so strange about coming home? You’re hanging out with your old friends again, doing all the things you missed in Germany, driving your car, and speaking English!

But take our word for it, there are things that you’re going to miss about living abroad. You were independent, you had a job, lived on your own, and didn’t have homework or studying! And now, well... it’s back to the grind. Instead of hopping on the train and going off to a European city for the weekend, you’re buried in senior design projects and eating ramen noodles. (Or perhaps whipping up Schnitzel like a boss) But it’s ok, you’re not alone! It’s not all doom and gloom and there are ways to get out of that funk, but we’ll get to that in a second, first let’s take care of some paperwork.

Getting your classes transferred & Intent to Graduate forms

You’re going to want to do this ASAP when you get back on campus. Answer any emails you may have received from OIE promptly - especially regarding your transfer credit evaluation! OIE can only start the process if you have remembered to request to have an official copy sent to OIE! Meet with your advisor and fill out the intent to graduate form needed for graduation.

Sharing Your Experiences

Remember that reverse culture shock thing that we were telling you about? Well, this might help. One great way to get out of that funk and back to your normal self is to get involved. Why not help out the next generation of IEP students? They are going to want to hear all about your adventures and ask you lots of advice and questions. You could even be the next person to write a pamphlet like this! See the German IEP Coordinator (TI House office) about being a Student Ambassador. You’ll get to talk to prospective IBP students and 3rd year students about to embark on their own journey, and help make the IBP a better program. What better way to remember your time abroad than by giving back to the program that made it possible?

There are also programs through the OIE that will allow you to connect with international students coming to URI. As a Peer Ambassador you would get to be the next Buddy for a student! They hold fun events on campus like salsa dancing, intramural teams, Thanksgiving dinner, and much more.
While you’re at it you can keep your German skills sharp by going to Kaffeestunde, or even living with international students at the IEP House! The Assistant Director of the IEP Living & Learning Community will send applications to live in IEP housing via email in spring when you are abroad.

Whatever you decide to do, make sure you take some time from job and grad school applications, interviews, and senior projects to enjoy your senior year.
# Appendix A: Checklist for Exchange Students to HAW-Hamburg

## Pre-Arrival

### Prepare
- Check your email & **READ** the information!
- Take out (or be able to get) enough € to cover: deposit & 1st month’s rent
- Pay Semester Fee / *Semesterbeitrag* by June 30th *(Wintersemester)*
- Get bank reference letter & funds ready for proof of finances
- Extra passport photos & copies of documents
- **Join weBuddy Program** – Get a Buddy to help you navigate all things at HAW-Hamburg
- **Register for & Attend International Welcome Week**

### To Do
- **Prepare During Your First Week**
  - Meet Landlord / *Hausmeister*
    - Pay your housing deposit / *Kaution* & 1st month rent / *Miete*
    - Sign & obtain original contract / *Mietvertrag* & housing confirmation / *Wohnungsgeberbescheinigung*
  
  - Get Welcome Package (from mentor or the I.O. Office)
    - Obtain Student I.D. (it’s also your transportation pass)

  - Register with the Customer Service Centers / *Kundenzentrum*

  - Open a German Bank Account / *Konto*
    - Bring Meldebescheinigung

  - Go German Health Insurance Appointment with AOK
    - Finalize Health insurance

## 1st Month

### To Do
- **Apply for your Residence Permit**
  - Make Appt. with the Foreign Authority Office / *Ausländerbehörde*
    - **DO NOT MISS THIS APPT.**
    - There is a processing time to get your residence permit / *Aufenthaltstitel*! You MUST possess a valid residence permit to be able to travel after your initial 90 days in Germany or in the Schengen Zone is up.
    - Bring copies of & all required documents including up to 100 €
    - You will receive either an eAT (temporary electronic residence permit) smart card -DO NOT book any travel out of the country (3-4 weeks) until you receive your final card - OR a sticker with which you can travel right away
    - Receive notification of residence permit & pick it up

## 2nd Month

### To Do
- **Staying an additional Semester:**
  - Complete URI Abroad application (if applicable)
  - Re-Register in December
  - Pay the *Semesterbeitrag* by Dec. 30th *(Sommersemester)*

- **After each semester, inform exchange coordinator at HAW of ALL courses taken, even if you failed. View & download courses through myHAW account**
  - If leaving HAW & Hamburg:
    - You will be Ex-matriculated automatically at the end of the semester from HAW
    - Inform Health Insurance company
    - De-Register from the city of Hamburg or the city you are in / Abmelden ins Ausland
Appendix B: Sample Budgets

It can be a bit difficult to figure out exactly what the year abroad will cost, but this is a summary of the main costs that you’ll have. Appendix B has a sample from a couple of students who kept track of their finances during their year in Germany, and shows an average idea of the main expenses that can’t be avoided. It doesn’t include one-time costs (list below), assumes you’re only going out a little bit for food, and doesn’t include other things you might want for yourself (Lederhosen aren’t cheap).

~$568x 2  OIE Payment for off-campus studies for both semesters
~$450 for 12 months of HTH repatriation/emergency evacuation/health insurance (you can get this insurance waived and purchase a less expensive repatriation coverage only (ISOS, MEDEX) but that requires extra paperwork (waiver to be signed by URI risk manager, Sigrid, Tom H.)
~$10,878.00  URI In-state Tuition
~$1000 for flights (CONDOR one-way PVD-FRA; LH connection to Hannover; CONDOR one way back FRA-PVD)
~100€ at IKEA (or get starter kit from APM)
~100€ minimum for smart phone or ~30€ for cheap phone
~60€ for cheap bike, lock, lights, basket (not strictly necessary)
~80€ monthly TK mandatory health insurance (required for study/internship semesters)
40€ for BahnKarte 25 (highly recommended, explained in travel section)
2 X ~250€ Semester Fee for both semesters
Costs for moving (depends on how you choose to move, could be 200€ or more)

Appendix C: Common Abbreviations

HAW  The Hamburg University of Applied Sciences
ERASMUS  European Exchange Student Program
Hbf  Hauptbahnhof = Main Train Station
IO  Hamburg’s International Office
ISN  International Student Network, works closely with ERASMUS
OIE  URI Office of International Education
SZ  Sprachenzentrum
WG  Wohngemeinschaft = Apartment
Appendix D: Transportation Glossary

Hamburg boasts an extensive public transport system including underground trains, a light-rail network, buses and ferries. Check out the main transportation site for more information.

In General

Trains
- All the trains are run by the national train company Deutsche Bahn ("German Rail"). They also run some of the city transportation
- ICE/ICE Sprinter - Inter-City Express: The fast, expensive trains that make relatively few stops. Mostly run between big cities
- IC - Inter-City: Cheaper, slower version of the ICE. Either makes more stops or provides a direct/non-stop link between two cities, depending on the train
- RE - Regional Express: Fastest local train. Like the ICE/IC of small towns
- RB - Regional Bahn: The slowest trains that stop at every town big enough for a train platform

City Transportation
- The S-Bahn is run by Deutsche Bahn, but the others are run either by the local transportation agency or by a cooperation of the two
- S-Bahn - Schnellbahn ("Fast Train"): Similar to a subway, but usually faster and makes fewer stops. Also usually ground level or elevated. Often runs not only inside the city, but also connects the city to suburbs up to 45mins away
- U-Bahn - Untergrundbahn ("Underground Train"): Subway, big cities only
- Straßenbahn: Street trams, usually found in smaller cities in place of the S/U-Bahn
- Buses: They go everywhere, but are often neither fast nor punctual
Appendix E: Info for DAAD scholarship holders

If you were fortunate enough to receive the DAAD Undergraduate Scholarship, then there’s some extra stuff that you should know.

First, do the paperwork the DAAD sends you as soon as you get to Germany. The Arrival Announcement can be sent as soon as you move in (you need your address), and the bank account information can be sent (obviously) as soon as you set up your bank account. It’s a good idea to fax the bank account info. An easy way to do that is to fill it out and ask someone from the IO to fax it for you after the IO Orientation.

On that note, make sure you let the IO people at the orientation session know that you are a DAAD Scholar. Thanks to the DAAD, you don’t have to pay the registration fees mentioned above, and you also don’t need to sign up for insurance. Make sure you bring your entire award packet, because the insurance people will need to see your award certificate and possibly other related paperwork in order to give you an exception stating that you already have valid insurance. You will also need to report any salary you earn in Germany. Since you will have an internship, you will need to do this. The person to talk to about this is Uschi Niethammer <niethammer@daad.org>

Throughout the year the DAAD will also host various scholarship holder meetings/seminars. The most significant is the Welcome Seminar in Bonn. It’s held at the beginning of October and is free. The DAAD pays for a hostel, all your food, busses in Bonn, and reimburses you for a train ticket up to IC-class (though if you can get an ICE ticket for the same price they don’t mind). The seminars are kinda boring (mostly more intercultural fun), but you get to meet a lot of cool people from all over the US and Canada. (I met a couple people who are studying in other parts of Germany that I still meet up with for traveling and hanging out.) The Friday-Saturday seminar is also a valid reason to miss a day of the summer course... as long as you pitch it well. In the months after the welcome thing, the DAAD will send some of its management people around Germany to meet the scholarship holders in different regions. This is different from the welcome thing for a couple of reasons. First is that the welcome seminar is only for US/ Canadian students, whereas the regional meetings are for any student that receives DAAD money. That means that at the regional meeting roughly 45 countries will be represented, and that you may be the only American there. Second, at the welcome seminar, students are studying all over Germany. Lots are in München, lots more are in Berlin, etc. At the regional one, it’s more, well, regional. The regional meeting isn’t as much fun as the one in Bonn, but it’s still free food and you get to meet interesting people.