



## My Exchange Evaluation

### Basic Information

<b>Host University</b>	Universität Tübingen
<b>Semester &amp; Year of Exchange</b>	Summer Semester 2023
<b>Otago degree(s)</b>	LLB, BA
<b>Major(s)</b>	Law, History

### Academics/ course load

Which papers did you take whilst on exchange?

Course title	Language of instruction	Otago equivalent
Corsairs, Captives, and Conversions in the Early Modern Mediterranean (Übung)	English	4ECTS
19th century Germany (Repetitorium)	English	6ECTS
Native American Encounters: Indigenous Histories and American Culture (Übung)	English	4ECTS
From the Iliad to Assassin's Creed: History, Entertainment, and the Public's Eye (Übung)	English	4ECTS
The Byzantine Frontier: Science and Networks of Learning in Classical Armenia (Übung)	English	4ECTS
Deutsch A1.1 for Erasmus and Exchange Students (Sprachkurs)	English	6ECTS

Total Otago credits gained:  54 points  72 points  108 points  \_\_\_\_\_

Any comments about these papers?

I chose these papers as they are topics not (generally) covered at Otago, so my advice would be to definitely try something new while on exchange. I was unable to complete any law papers on my exchange as it requires a high level of German, so the papers I took were to complete my BA in History.

I would highly recommend the Deutsch A1.1 for Exchange Students – it's worth a good amount of ECTS and it's a really good way to make friends and learn a new language! I believe that the Übung courses (exercises) are unique to the Tübingen History department, and I chose to do several rather than a Hauptseminare (these are worth 9ECTS and are block courses that generally took place over the duration of one month). All of my classes required a high level of engagement and participation was required. It's important to do the readings for the Übungen as each class was based on a different

reading which you were expected to discuss with your peers. I found these classes to be quite relaxed and I definitely didn't feel like I was silly if I did say something or didn't know something.

Unfortunately, because my German was not good enough I was unable to partake in the START kurs or Deutsch-Kompakt-Sprachkurs. My friends who did take the START course, however, really enjoyed it. They were able to make friends easily and they were split up according to their German language level, so the level of German varied (ranging from A2-C2). If you can I would recommend getting your German to a high enough level in order to engage in these. As I had only started to teach myself German when I knew I was going on exchange I wasn't able to get a high enough level in time, but it's definitely possible!

*How did the academic experience/ workload/ style of teaching differ from Otago?*

I found the workload during the semester to be a lot lighter compared to Otago. However, my friends doing politics and other humanities subjects found the workload throughout the semester to be (presumably) similar to Otago's. The way the courses are structured differs a lot from Otago – I had one two-hour class for each subject per week (so roughly 8 hours of class per week). Most of the courses I took didn't require much internal work throughout the semester, although it was expected we did the readings in order to participate. However, the last week was quite stressful with moving out, doing two exams and going to class and trying to say goodbye to everyone!

I found 19<sup>th</sup> Century Germany to be the course most similar to Otago, as it required doing to lectures and taking notes, although class participation was welcomed. This required a verbal exam in the last week of classes which I found difficult, but since you only need to pass it definitely takes a lot of pressure off!. Übungen were taught by visiting professors/academics, and the way these courses ran varied quite a lot. For example, the course on "From the Iliad to Assassin's Creed" and "Corsairs, Captives, and Conversions" were taught by the same person, yet the former required a form of historical entertainment (my group did a podcast) and the latter two sources analyses and weekly discussions. There is an emphasis on term papers as the method of examination. All four of my Übungen required take-home essays rather than exams (excluding the Iliad course).

One thing I didn't enjoy as much was the fact that I was only really hearing what my fellow students thought, which is definitely important, but it would have been nice to hear more about what the professor thought.

## Accommodation

*What accommodation did you stay in? What were the pros and cons of your accommodation?*

Like most Otago students who have gone on exchange here, I stayed in the WHO (Waldhäuser-Ost). This option is popular with exchange students due to the bar/club in the middle of the accommodation – the Kuckuck – and the fact that it's home to hundreds of German and international students meaning there's a good chance your friends will live there too! There are approx. 4 buslines running to and from the WHO so I genuinely never found it an issue as there's always a bus going every few minutes from several locations throughout the day. Wherever you go you'll have a great time – I had plenty of friends that didn't live in the WHO who really enjoyed their accommodation!

Fichtenweg 18 was one of the "nicer" buildings which meant I paid more, but it also meant that we had weekly flat inspections so the flat common areas were always tidy (cleaned on a rotating roster). My room came with a single bed (you can pay extra to get a duvet and pillows), a desk and chair, sink, shelves and a huge closet. I shared a bathroom with one other person. You do have to provide your own Wi-Fi router but luckily previous exchange students had left theirs behind. Cooking equipment is

not provided but I had everything I needed from past exchange students. You need a student ID to use the washing machine and dryer in the building. The size of the flats varied – I had 9 flatmates (mostly couples) but my friend above me only had 5.

Some of my friends in the WHO lived on floors, similar to our first-year halls and paid around €250p/month. Although you did pay less, there wasn't really a flat vibe due to the spread-out nature of the floor and the number of students living on it. Some of the kitchens and bathrooms could get pretty gross as there are no weekly inspections (but probably not much more gross than your standard student flat) so it really depends on how much you're willing to put up with. The accommodation website which you apply through will tell you what each building is set up like.

A huge con was the moving out process. Because Fichtenweg 18 required a high level of cleanliness I lost a little bit of money off my deposit. The Hausmeister (caretaker) for my area of the WHO was really strict. I did everything in the last week of uni and it was very stressful. You also had to clean the common areas which I found weird.

The WHO also has an Edeka (supermarket), gym, pool, a Turkish restaurant and even cows next to it! You can pat the cows which is really exciting. Although I heard that the French Quarter also had cows.

## Money matters

*Please detail your basic costs, e.g. accommodation, flights, visa, food, insurance*

My rent was €295 per month (approx. 504NZD) and included Wi-Fi and power. My bond/deposit was €896 (approx. 1580NZD).

Food costs about the same as in Aotearoa, although some things are cheaper than others and vice versa (e.g. rice is much cheaper here than in Germany). Alcohol is significantly cheaper there and the cocktails at the Kuckuck only cost €4 and shots only €1. Beer is very cheap too. Like NZ, Germany is also going through a cost of living crisis, however, the produce was still much cheaper than in NZ.

I bought my flights in September 2022, flying from Auckland to Frankfurt in late February, and flying from Frankfurt to Auckland in early August. In total, my flights cost 2100NZD, which is pretty cheap for a return flight to Europe! Using Skyscanner is a great idea as it shows you the cheapest and fastest flights. I found my flights using Skyscanner but I ended up booking them directly through Lufthansa as it was a bit cheaper, so keep that in mind too!

Insurance was a huge expense as you have to pay for both travel insurance and mandatory health insurance in Germany. For travel insurance, I went with InsurancesafeNZ's Studentsafe insurance which cost \$642. I went with TK for my German health insurance – the cost was €120 p/month.

The visa (aka Residence Permit) costs €50 which you have to pay in cash at the time of your appointment.

*What means did you use to access your finances? What would you recommend? (Credit card, Cash passport, foreign bank account, etc.)*

I used Wise to pay for my rent etc, but I also used my ANZ card as I wasn't charged for any additional costs (e.g. conversion fees). Some of my friends set up a German bank account as their home country required it for the Visa process – this essentially puts your money into a blocked account and releases a certain amount to you each month to prove you have sufficient funds for your stay – but as I was

only in Germany for 5 months I didn't really see the point. Make sure you ALWAYS have cash on you if you're shopping or going out to eat. Germany is a really cash-based society.

## Visas & Insurance

*Did you have to apply for a visa? What was the process?*

Before applying for a visa you need to get registered with the city of Tübingen, there will be a link on the University website. The process of applying for a visa was long and paper-based. Luckily the NZ passport allows you to stay in Germany for 3 months without a visa, but you have to book an appointment a few months in advance if you want any chance of getting seen soon after your arrival. Some of my friends really struggled to get an appointment, so go on the website before you arrive so you can book one. Once booked, you'll be mailed a form to fill out, which you need to take to the appointment along with your passport. Also, take a biometric photo with you! They don't do them at the office - go to the Hauptbahnhof (train station), and there'll be a photo booth by the Burger King where you can pay €10 to get a strip of photos to take to your appointment. It takes quite a few weeks for the visa to be processed. Efficient bureaucracy is not Germany's specialty. In theory, you then get sent a letter whereby you can email the Ausländerbehörde to make an appointment to pick it up, but I just turned up to the office to get mine.

*Did your host university have a mandatory insurance?*

I went with TK for my German mandatory insurance – the cost was €120 p/month. It is possible to get a certificate saying you're exempt from buying the mandatory insurance but I didn't meet anyone who was able to get this. I did ask a couple of insurers for the certificate but I think, post-Covid, they were less willing to give them out.

## Extra-curricular/Social Activities

*What organised activities were available to students? What extra-curricular activities would you recommend to future exchange students?*

Tübingen had lots of fun things to do. StudIT organises a lot of trips – I went on a hike to Bebenhausen (about a 30 min walk from the WHO) and a trip to Burg Hohenzollern – both were really fun and I'd recommend getting involved as much as you can. The advisory course, which takes place the week before semester starts, is a great way to make friends and it has several events throughout the week. StudIT also has language tandem classes – check out their Insta or website for more info.

If you're there during the Summer semester definitely check out the Frühlingsfest in Stuttgart, which is essentially a smaller version of Oktoberfest, although it can still get extremely busy.

You can also sign up for a huge variety of sports/exercise activities via the University website – the advisory course will show you how to do this. It ranges from soccer to Salsa Dancing!

I went to the Freibad a lot, which is a public swimming pool. It costs €2.50 for students and is a great place to cool down after class.

*What was the university/ city like?*

Simply amazing. It's really a lot like Dunedin in that it is a student town with a student bubble. Much like Dunedin, you're always surrounded by other people your age. The Neckarbrücke was a lovely

place to sit with your friends in the summer. I had a lot of picnics in the Bota (old botanical gardens close to the Uni) during the summer too. I genuinely loved Tübingen and I absolutely would've stayed another semester if I could've! Everyone is really friendly and it has such a youthful vibe.

*Any recommendations for things to do, places to visit, places to eat etc.?*

I backpacked around Europe for a month before arriving in Tübingen so I spent a lot of money on bus rides (Flix Bus is the way to go), flights, hostels and food. I also travelled around the Balkans and Central Europe which is cheaper, so that's something to keep in mind when planning.

I got the Baden-Württemberg semester ticket, which cost about €155, but you can now get the Deutschland ticket which costs €50 a month, or €35 if you buy it through Naldo (the Tübingen transport system, although you need to be registered with the city first). These tickets allow you to use the regional trains and cover all forms of public transport (trams, busses, U-Bahn, S-Bahn etc). If you're planning on travelling outside of Baden-Württemberg a bit then I would recommend the Deutschland ticket. The places I went in Baden-Württemberg were:

- Stuttgart
- Heidelberg – has an amazing castle, panorama ride and town centre
- Lake Konstanz (Constance) – here you can walk over the border to Switzerland
- Bad Urach – there's a cute waterfall nearby
- Wurmlinger Kapelle St. Remigius – we hiked to this chapel and it was so worth it
- Bebenhausen
- Ludwigsburg – has an absolutely stunning castle, and you should definitely check out the palace grounds, there's a children's fairy-tale-themed and it's amazing
- Burg Hohenzollern
- Schwäbisch Hall – cute little medieval town
- Rothenburg ob der Tauber – 110% check this place out
- Ulm – where Albert Einstein is from!
- Blautopf – a really blue lake that's close to Ulm, super pretty
- Schloss Lichtenstein – I took the train to Reutlingen, then bussed to Honau, and walked about an hour up to the castle. My friend found a way to bus to the castle
- Sigmaringen – has a really neat castle that has a self-guided audio tour
- Karlsruhe
- Baden-Baden – super cute
- Freiburg im Breisgau – amazing place, would highly recommend visiting
- Esslingen – not far from Tübingen and had lots of stunning churches

Baden-Württemberg is a beautiful state and there are so many beautiful towns and hikes, particularly in the Black Forest. I did a lot of travelling outside of Germany too, including Serbia and Romania! There are lots of cheap flights from Baden-Baden through Wizz Air and Ryan Air.

Also, do the Stocherkahn! You can hire a punting boat with your friends and it takes you along the river. You can also hire someone to drive the boat, which I would recommend. I would also recommend going to the Österberg – it has an amazing view over Tübingen – as does the Tübingen castle.

#### **Places to eat:**

Tübingen is a very green city. Every place to eat has vegan and vegetarian options which is great. I ate a lot of Turkish, as there are lots of yummy places. The Mensa, which is a university service, provides €3-5 lunches every weekday. Alternatively, you can buy food from the university cafes (bread etc).

Both options require a student ID. As I'm gluten-free I ended up doing a lot of cooking as Europe isn't great for this dietary requirement.

*Any tips for future students?*

Organise your timetable so that you can maximise your time. I had classes from Mon-Thurs, but since you can (generally speaking) miss up to 2 classes this meant I could still travel for 4 days at a time! Try to involve yourself in as many activities as possible and put yourself out there. Everyone is in the same boat and looking to make new friends and have new experiences.

Make an effort with your German flatmates!! My flatmates were some of the loveliest people I met and made me feel so welcomed (and helped me learn some German). Most of your flatmates will be German – mine said their previous international flatmates often didn't pay much attention to them, which is a shame as Germans are super lovely people and willing to help.

## Overall Experience

*Please write one paragraph (or more) about your exchange experience. Please include some photos!*

Going on exchange can be challenging, but it's important to remember everything you're experiencing is completely normal. It can be really daunting moving to a new country and making new friends, and there were aspects of this that I found challenging. However, these hard moments are also what makes exchange so life-changing and exciting. By the time my exchange had finished, I didn't want to leave! It's amazing how fast you can settle into a new place and make new friends.

I valued my time in Germany so much and I feel very grateful that I this opportunity. I made friends from all over Europe and it's so invaluable to hear perspectives on different international issues that we wouldn't hear about it in NZ. For most Germans and Europeans you will be the first Kiwi they have ever met – I would often hear "Wow, I've heard NZ is so beautiful! I would love to visit one day." People are really curious about NZ and I found that I had to think about what it means to be a Kiwi!

If you're thinking about going on exchange, just do it! I haven't met anyone who has regretted it, and I know I don't regret mine in the slightest 😊

