



My Exchange Evaluation

Basic Information

Host University	University of Cologne
Semester & Year of Exchange	Semester 1, 2023
Otago degree(s)	Bachelor of Commerce
Major(s)	International Business

Academics/ course load

Which papers did you take whilst on exchange?

Course title	Language of instruction	Otago equivalent
Organisationsgestaltung	German	GERM334
Einführung in die VWL	German	GERM334
Deutsch Allgemeinsprache B2.1-2 (Intensivkurs)	German	GERM331
International Strategic Management	English	MART236

Total Otago credits gained: 54 points 72 points 108 points _____

Any comments about these papers?

The papers that were delivered in German were extremely challenging, yet very rewarding. The exams were 60 minutes long, which is much shorter than the style of 2 or 3 hours at home. Therefore, time management strategies factored a lot more into my exam preparation. Again, this was for my papers that were delivered in German.

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

It didn't differ too greatly, however there was a lack of assignments, and the entire course was usually packed into a 60 minute exam at the end of the semester.

Accommodation

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

I stayed in the Studierendenwerk student village in Hürth, which is a town just outside of Cologne, and about a 10 minute tram ride from the city.

Regarding pros, it is the cheapest accommodation option you'll find in Cologne. I paid **268** euros per month, compared to others who paid upwards of **600**, which was great as it allowed for a freeing up of cash that I could use on other activities. I had a lot of things supplied, such as a bed, a desk, pots and pans. My flatmates were lovely, and the village is a great environment to live in. They also put on social events every now and again, and there was a bar in the village called Efferino, where you can meet other students and have a good time. I definitely think it is undoubtedly the best accommodation option in Cologne.

I can only think of two cons. Firstly, it can be difficult to gain a place in the village. The trick is to apply early. I applied in November, and wasn't arriving until February. Luckily, this was early enough to allow me to gain a place for March.

Secondly, and this wasn't an issue for me as I really enjoyed the quiet nature of the village, but if you're looking to live right in the thick of the city this may not be the place for you. However, the pros far outweigh these low level cons in my opinion.

Here is the website for the accommodation, but I recommend visiting them in person, and finding direct contacts to call. <https://www.kstw.de/>

Money matters

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

- Accommodation: **268** euros per month
- Flights: \$2828 NZD return
- Visa: **113** euros
- Germany Public Health Insurance (Included in Blocked Amount): **122.24** euros per month.
- Food: **325** euros per month
- University Contribution:

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

As an international student in Germany it is mandatory to open a blocked account, which is essentially a system designed to prove that you can financially support yourself while on exchange. You must also open a Current German Bank account, I used Commerzbank but any will do. You have to put **934** euros per month of your stay in Germany into the blocked account, which added to a total lump sum of **5783** euros for the Semester. I recommend using the service Expatrio for opening the blocked account, which is a system that assists you in setting everything up, as well as giving you advice on applying for your visa. I'll drop a link to their website below.

I also recommend opening a wise account, which is a back account service that makes exchanging currency very simple. It is a great system for when you travel to countries that aren't on the euro, as it can seamlessly exchange money on the spot for a low fee. You can also open multiple accounts for different currencies, so you can have balances in NZD, British Pound, Euro, etc. Linked below.

www.expatrio.com

wise.com

Visas & Insurance

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

Germany is notoriously bureaucratic, and the visa application process is no exception to this. I didn't apply for my visa until after I arrived in Cologne, which I would recommend as the process is much simpler if you are there and on the ground, due to the places you have to visit and contact. You have 90 days after your arrival to apply, due to the EU automatic holiday visa for New Zealanders.

The process is as follows:

- Open your blocked account and current account
- Have German public health insurance (I recommend using TK health insurance)
- Register your permanent address with the city of Cologne (or Hürth in my case as I lived outside of the city.)
- Have proof of your admission to the university.
- Fill out a visa application form.

You then apply for a meeting with the foreigners office and they should grant you your visa on the spot. It is a tricky process, but is much simpler if you break it down into steps and get started as soon as you arrive in Germany.

Did your host university have a mandatory insurance?

Yes, the university, as well as the student visa had a requirement for German health insurance.

Extra-curricular/Social Activities

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

I didn't encounter many events organised by the University itself but the PIM and CEMS club is a great option for students who are looking to engage in the social side of Cologne. The club organises an orientation week which has a lot of great events and an opportunities to meet fellow exchange students.

One of the highlights of my experience was Karneval. It is an annual 5 day festival throughout the entire city which includes street parties, parades, and events. Fancy dress is a must, the goofier the better. I arrived around a month early specifically for the event, which runs from February 12 – 17.

What was the university/ city like?

The University is slightly run down looking, it is covered in scaffolding and has been under renovations for around 5 years. It is in a great central location, and is easily accessible to most parts of the city. 1 highlight is the 'Mensa', which serves hot lunches every day for around 3 euros. A great opportunity to have a nice, affordable meal and socialize with fellow students.

Cologne is a lovely, 'friendly city' of Germany. A lot to see and do, very progressive and open minded. Once you know the train system it is easy to get around, and it also has an exciting nightlife. Cologne will quickly feel like home, it is a safe and secure feeling place to be, and has the feeling of being a big city without being overly hectic. I now consider the city to be my second home, and I look forward to the opportunity to be able to get back.

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

Walks along the Rhine and the Cologne Cathedral (Dom) were a highlight. Also visit the local restaurants and brew houses which serve traditional Kölsch (Colognian) food and beer. There are also a lot of trendy bars to hang out in, and the beer gardens open up in the Summer which is great.

As a student of the university, you are also granted a free travel pass to anywhere in the state of North Rhine Westphalia, using your student ID. This is a great opportunity to catch a train to the cities surrounding Cologne, such as Bonn, Düsseldorf, and Aachen. This pass also applies to all public transport within the city, which is essential for getting around. Cologne's location in Western Germany also gives it great access to France, Belgium and the Netherlands. This is great for travel purposes, and these are all countries that I recommend visiting.

Any tips for future students?

There are a few reasons to choose Cologne as your exchange destination, and I'm not going to sugar coat it. You have to really want to go to Germany, and be committed to spending time living there. I was a student of the German language (not possible anymore unfortunately) who had a serious admiration for the country and its culture, and even at one point had a desire to live and work there after graduating. There were a lot of roadblocks and challenges, such as applying for visas, and difficult university processes. If you are simply looking for a fun, breezy, European exchange programme, perhaps look elsewhere.

Overall Experience

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

Simply put, my exchange was one of the most challenging yet rewarding experiences of my life. Being dropped by yourself in a foreign country is one thing, but I also opted to take my courses in German, a language that I'd been studying for two years. I chose to do this because I could not sit the semester language course I wanted to, but my chief goal of being in Germany was to improve my German, so I opted to take the route of full immersion and sit business exams in German. This made the semester the most challenging and study heavy semester of my life, as I was attending lectures and studying for exams that were conducted completely in a foreign language. I managed to pass everything however, which has become one of the crowning personal achievements of my life.

I still managed to balance study time with other activities: I also loved immersing myself in the German culture and history, visiting plenty of historic buildings, cities, museums etc, and trying my best to learn as much as I could about the place that I was living in. I also indulged in the German cuisine a lot, Schweinehaxe (Pork Knuckle) is my new favourite food and is a must try for any roast pork lovers.

I also met a good group of friends, which allowed for a good balance through the semester. I liked to catch up with them for lunch, or a few drinks on a night out.

Overall, I loved the challenges that I faced on my exchange. It developed personal skills such as adversity management, discipline, adapting to change, and social skills that I hope will carry on into the rest of my life. I couldn't recommend going on exchange enough for these reasons, and if not Germany then I'm sure wherever you go will ensure this great sense of enjoyment and personal development (even if you aren't crazy enough to take your papers in a foreign language!)

