FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS
STUDY ABROAD
MUNICH, GERMANY

In preparation for the SIUC School of Social Work study abroad course in Munich, Germany, please read carefully the following frequently asked questions and responses. After reviewing the questions and responses, feel free to respond with your own comments.

1. **What about money? Where do I exchange money?**

I have found that the best way to exchange money or obtain the local currency, the Euro, is through automatic teller machines. You can do this with a VISA or MasterCard credit card, and some debit cards. You will need a pin number. ATM’s are everywhere, and if you have time, an exchange of money can be done at the airport when you arrive. Many establishments in Germany accept VISA and Mastercard for purchases, just as they do here, but you will also find that many do not. In general, I highly recommend having a credit card or debit card with a pin number. As a backup, you could carry a small amount of traveler's checks in Euros, but this is usually not necessary. Also, there are more fees associated with traveler's checks than with the ATMs. By no means should you try to exchange money inside a bank—this will cost you plenty in fees. Everything is automated these days, and ATMs are the way to go.

As for obtaining Euros before you leave, this can be rather expensive through US banks. As I said, you can easily obtain Euros through an ATM upon arrival.

Currently, the Euro is worth about 1.30 dollars, but this exchange rate varies on a daily basis. You may (will) experience sticker shock on some items in Germany. There are many discount stores, though, where the sticker shock is not so great and, with some items, the cost is comparable to the United States. Once you settle in, I will have some tips regarding shopping for food and other common items.

2. **How big is my room where I am staying? What about laundry?**

The reality is that everything in Europe is smaller. There are many more people crunched into smaller areas than here. During your stay in Munich, you will be staying in a hostel with other students, which you might think is like a dormitory room. This is a common way of traveling in Germany and other parts of Europe. The US style hotel exists in cities like Munich, but they are quite expensive ($150-300/day) and would be prohibitive for our course. Laundry facilities, including dryers, exist at the hostel, and laundry should not be a problem.
3. What about food? What do the Germans eat?

Each participant in the course receives a small stipend which you can use for food and other expenses. You can easily get something at a local McDonalds or experience the hostel breakfast—this is your choice. I have found that this works best rather than me trying to arrange meals somewhere.

For lunch and dinner, you will often be on your own. Grocery stores and bakeries have all types of fairly inexpensive items already prepared. What I find intriguing is to visit the grocery stores and various eateries to see what is different from back home but also looks tasty. The bread is wonderful, cakes are delicious, fruits and vegetables are plentiful, sausages are excellent, the list goes on. I suggest you explore the bakeries and food stores and skip the McDonald’s—although nobody will begrudge you for sneaking in a Big Mac. And, if you are a coffee drinker, McDonald’s has a wonderful McCafe—better than the US version.

The program will cover some meals during the course, but some will not be provided. Therefore, knowledge about “cheap eats” is important.

4. Clothing and luggage in general

German weather can be unpredictable. Southern Germany in January can be quite cold (below freezing) and snowy or wet, and I recommend bringing appropriate clothing for these types of conditions. You will not have a large area to store your luggage, and I strongly suggest no more than one backpack or medium sized suitcase for check-in and one carry on. Lugging a lot of stuff around Europe is no fun—I’ve been there, and it is a pain. You will be amazed at how well you can do with just a few items. The accommodation areas are small, and storage will be at a premium. I personally do not check in any luggage and have a small Spinner suitcase and handbag for carry on.

5. Should I bring a cell phone?

If you decide you need a phone, you should make sure your phone will work in Germany. Contact your local cell phone provider for that information. If your current cell phone will not work in Germany, you will need a special phone, which actually does not cost too much. The key word is “unlocked,” meaning a phone that is independent of a particular cell phone service provider. You then purchase a SIM card for Germany. There are some good deals on the internet, but you do need to shop around. Also inquire about the cost of receiving phone calls over there, since that also adds to the overall cost. There are SIM card providers that allow you to receive calls for free within Germany.

As an alternative to the cell phone, there are call centers in German cities. These call centers allow you to go into a phone booth and for about 15 cents a minute, you can call the United States.
6. What about anti-Americanism?

Unfortunately, there is some of that. However, as a rule, any anti-Americanism relates primarily to US government policies, not individuals. Also, what we might interpret as anti-Americanism is not at all interpreted this way by Germans, who generally are more direct in their discussions about politics and social events. That is the way they are with each other, so do not take offense at this. The reality is that the German-US friendship/connection is still pretty strong, although it is a relationship between equals, instead of the Germans playing second fiddle. Keep that in mind, and you will do fine.

7. Do you like to walk?

In Germany and Europe in general, walking is still in fashion. Germans love their cars, but they also walk. Public transportation is also used by most Germans, even if they have a car. Parking can be a problem and navigating narrow streets in cities is not pleasant, even for experienced drivers. So, be prepared to walk and use public transportation.

8. What about public transportation?

You will be expected to navigate the public transportation system for meetings and other scheduled events. The cost of this is covered by the program. However, you will need to be punctual, on-time, as trains in Europe generally run as scheduled—not like Amtrak. If we must catch a train at a certain time, please show up at least five minutes before that time. It is your responsibility to get to an appointed place on time.

9. Final words

I think I have covered most of the broad topics that always come up in my study abroad courses. The key is to keep an open mind, and remember that you are in a foreign country. Germans just do some things differently, and that is their right.