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How to **STUDY ABROAD** in

Germany



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One of the world's most popular non-Anglophone study destinations, Germany is an increasingly popular choice for international students.

As of 2015, Germany was hosting around 321,569 international students, with this number continuing to grow every year, and the country looks set to meet – or exceed – its target of 350,000 by 2020.

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Germany's growing popularity is easy to understand. The German higher education system is gaining an increasingly strong profile around the world, highly respected for its consistently high standards and success in combining research and practical application across a broad range of disciplines.

The country's high quality of living comes with relatively low living costs (especially in the context of other similarly developed nations), while its resilient economy offers promising employment prospects, both during studies and post-graduation.

Finally, while tuition fees are increasing in many other parts of the world, Germany's public universities continue to offer the vast majority of courses free of charge, for both domestic and international students.

Got your sights set on studying abroad in Germany? Read on for an overview of the German higher education system, answers to common questions, and practical information about applications, visas, costs and funding.

Higher education in Germany

Germany is home to around 425 higher education institutions. This includes more than 100 universities, more than 200 Universities of Applied Sciences (UAS, or *Fachhochschulen*) and more than 100 specialized institutions – such as medical universities, art schools and colleges of public administration.

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In the **QS World University Rankings® 2016-2017**, 43 German universities are ranked among the world's top 700 – a number beaten only by the US and UK. The highest German placing goes to **Technische Universität München** (60th), followed by **Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München** (joint 68th) and **Ruprecht-Karls-Universität Heidelberg** (72nd).

While German universities can't compete with the likes of Harvard or Cambridge in terms of global fame, the nation's higher education system as a whole is held in high regard, and many individual institutions have established strong names within particular fields of study and employment. In short, German higher education may not have any global 'superstars', but its lack of celebrities is balanced out by consistently high standards across the sector.



Universities of Applied Sciences (*Fachhochschulen*)

Universities of Applied Sciences, or *Fachhochschulen*, focus on providing practical and professionally oriented education, awarding bachelor's and master's degrees in fields such as engineering, computer science, media and communications, business and management, and art and design. They are known for their strong focus on applied knowledge and close relationships with businesses; internships, work placements and practical projects are often core course components. While many *Fachhochschulen* also have a strong research focus, they can only award doctorate degrees through partnerships with universities or research institutes.



Admission requirements & applications

At many German universities it's possible to apply for admission twice a year – to commence studies either in the winter or summer semester. The summer semester runs from March to August at *Fachhochschulen* and April to September at universities; the winter semester is from September to February and October to March respectively.

In general, applications for winter enrolments need to be made by 15 July, and applications for summer enrolments by 15 January. However, application deadlines vary between institutions, and the same institution may set different deadlines for each program – be sure to carefully check the specific dates for your chosen course.

It's recommended to submit applications at least six weeks before the deadline, to ensure time for corrections or additions if any information is missing. You should expect to receive a formal acceptance or rejection approximately one to two months after the deadline has passed.

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The specific documents required and application process will be set by each institution, but you'll typically be asked to submit:

- A certified copy of your high school diploma or previous degrees, and any other relevant qualifications in the original language
- A translated overview of your course modules and grades
- A passport photo
- A copy of your passport (personal information and photo ID page)
- Proof of language proficiency (a test certificate or online equivalent)

To ensure the best chances of acceptance, take care to provide all

the documentation requested, make sure all your documentation is certified (copies of documents also need to be certified by the awarding school), and check that you've filled out all your information correctly before submitting your application. An application fee may be charged.

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Applying for undergraduate studies

If you have a European qualification, such as a baccalaureate or A-levels, then you will only need to prove you can speak German (unless you're enrolling on a course taught in English) and you can then apply directly for a university level course. Students with qualifications from outside Europe may have to sit the *Feststellungsprüfung* entrance examination after attending a preparatory *Studienkolleg*. High-achieving students may be able to bypass this.

For most subjects, you can apply directly to the international office of the university. Alternatively, you can use the website www.uni-assist.de, a centralized admissions portal for international students, run by the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD).

For some subjects, there is a nationwide cap on the number of students who can enrol. For these subjects (mostly life sciences), students from the EU (plus Norway, Iceland or Liechtenstein) need to apply through the Foundation of Higher Education Admission. Non-EU students should apply as normal.

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Applying for postgraduate studies

At master's level, you will need to have completed (or be about to complete) an undergraduate degree. Specific requirements will vary



depending on the course, institution and where you have previously studied. For some master's degrees, applicants are required to have earned a minimum number of credits in specific fields of study.

Applications for master's programs are either submitted directly to the university, or via the online portal www.uni-assist.de. Bear in mind that not all German universities use this service, and those that do may require applicants to complete their own application process as well. For PhDs, applications may be made directly to potential supervisors, by submitting a project proposal, or – for “structured” PhDs – via the official application process detailed by the university.



Master's degrees in Germany

Master's degrees in Germany are usually categorized as either “consecutive” or “non-consecutive”. Those of the first category are designed to build on the academic knowledge gained during a related bachelor's degree, while the second tend to have a greater focus on professional development, often requiring applicants to have both an undergraduate degree and some relevant work experience. Most master's degrees take four semesters (two years) to complete, though some are shorter or longer.

PhDs in Germany

PhDs can be completed in one of two pathways. The “traditional” route involves finding a supervisor at a university, and completing an individually defined research project with support from this supervisor, over a period of around four years. The alternative is a “structured doctoral program”, which means following a clearly delineated program of study and research as part of a larger cohort of doctoral candidates, under a team of supervisors. This route can be followed within universities, graduate schools and research training groups supported by the German Research Foundation, usually taking three years to complete.

Language requirements

Most courses are taught in German, requiring international applicants to submit proof of proficiency in the German language. Two main tests are available for this purpose: the *Deutsche Sprachprüfung für den Hochschulzugang* (DSH, meaning “German language examination for university entrance”) and the TestDaF (formerly *Test Deutsch als Fremdsprache*, meaning “Test of German as a foreign language”).

The DSH is offered only within Germany, at various universities, while the TestDaF can be taken at centers in more than 90 countries worldwide. As always, check the test you intend to take is accepted by the universities you want to apply to.

If you do decide to study in German, but feel you need to brush up on your proficiency, you may want to consider a preparatory course. German universities offer a range of courses designed to help you prepare for the linguistic and content-related sides of your degree in Germany, including the *Studienkolleg*. Another option is to enrol in a pre-study German course, which will generally last for one semester and end with a DSH exam.

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Studying in English

While German remains the main language of instruction overall, a large and growing selection of English-taught programs is available – particularly at master’s level and for students participating in short-term exchange programs. However, there are no English-taught undergraduate medical degrees and only a limited number of courses taught in English at bachelor’s level, so some students may need to either be more flexible about their choice of program, or consider learning German.

A searchable database of English-taught courses is provided by the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) at www.daad.de. Another useful search tool can be found on the official Study in Germany website: www.study-in.de/en/plan-your-studies/find-programme-and-university.



Student visas

Students from countries within the EU, EEA or Switzerland do not need a visa to study in Germany. These students simply need to register at the nearest registry office on arrival, to obtain a residence permit. This also applies to students coming from a number of other countries, including Australia, Israel, Japan, Canada, New Zealand, South Korea and the US. Students from Andorra, Brazil, El Salvador, Honduras, Monaco, San Marino or Taiwan can also follow this path, as long as they don't intend to work before or after their degree in Germany.

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Students from elsewhere will need to apply for a visa before arrival in Germany, via the nearest German embassy. Those already accepted onto a program can apply for a student visa, while those awaiting confirmation or sitting entrance exams will need an applicant visa. The fee for your visa is €60 (~US\$67).

It can take several months for visas to be issued, so apply as early as possible. Visa applicants will be asked to submit the following:

- Completed application form
- Valid passport
- Two photographs
- Letter showing you've been accepted by a German university
- Transcript of academic record
- Certificate of German language proficiency or proof that you intend on attending a language course in Germany (if studying in German)
- Proof that you have sufficient funds to support

yourself while living in Germany (€8,700 per year, which at the time of writing is approximately US\$9,775)

- Certificate showing you've purchased health insurance
- Declaration of authenticity of documents submitted

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Applying for a residence permit

Once in the country, you need to apply for a residence permit. You should do this by registering with the local Alien Registration Office (*Bürgeramt* or *Einwohnermeldeamt*) within two weeks of arrival and after finding accommodation (so that you can register your address). You'll be asked to submit a set of documents similar to those required for a visa, and will need to pay €110 (~US\$125) for the initial residence permit (valid for two years) and €80 (~US\$90) for each extension.

Applying for health insurance

You must take out health insurance before arriving in Germany, as you can't be enrolled without it. Germany has social security agreements with all EU nations, and also with non-EU countries such as Israel and Switzerland, which means that as long as you have public health insurance in your home country, you can get this insurance coverage approved by a public health insurance company in Germany. You'll generally need a European Health Insurance Card (EHIC), however. Private domestic and foreign health insurance policies from other countries may also be recognized in Germany.



Tuition fees, living costs & funding

While affordability is by no means the sole factor attracting international students to Germany, low or non-existent tuition fees undoubtedly add to the overall appeal. At public universities, there are no tuition fees for undergraduate programs or for the majority of postgraduate degrees. Fees are charged at private universities, and for some master's programs at public universities. PhD study is free for at least the first six semesters (i.e. three years).

At public universities, the majority of students simply pay a small 'semester fee'. This is typically no more than €300 (~US\$340) per semester, covering contributions to the student union, administration and the cost of a Semester Ticket – a six-month pass for public transport.

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Living costs vary depending on the location; according to Mercer's Cost of Living Survey, Munich is currently Germany's most expensive city, followed by Frankfurt am Main and Berlin. In general, it's recommended to budget around €800 (~US\$900) per month to cover accommodation, food and other living expenses. Those applying for a student visa will be required to show they have access to at least €725 per month (€8,700 for the full year) to cover living costs. Accommodation will be your largest monthly expense as a student, costing an average of €250 (~\$280).

Study-in.de estimates the following monthly expenses for students, adding up to just under €800:

- Rent and utilities: €298
- Food and drink: €165
- Clothing: €52
- Learning materials: €30
- Car and/or public transport: €82
- Health insurance and medical costs: €66
- Phone, internet and television: €33
- Recreation, culture and sports: €68

Once in Germany, it's also possible to supplement your income through part-time work. EU/EEA students can work part-time for up to 20 hours per week, while other international students are permitted to work 120 full days or 240 half days per year (more if a work permit is obtained), excluding research assistant work.



Scholarships to study in Germany

Despite the minimal tuition fees, it is possible to obtain scholarships to study in Germany. The DAAD provides many scholarships for international students, and lists other opportunities in an online database, which can be sorted by students' subject and country of origin. Individual university websites are also a good source of information about available scholarships.

Sources of funding for PhD candidates include scholarships, prizes, research grants and paid positions within universities, research centers and industry. Notable funding providers include the German Research Foundation (DFG), the Leibniz Association and the EU's Erasmus Mundus Joint Doctorates program. Current opportunities are listed on the government-run website www.research-in-germany.org.

Working in Germany after graduation

A final 'pull' factor attracting growing numbers of students to Germany is the prospect of staying on to work after graduation. Europe's largest economy and most industrialized nation, Germany rebounded quickly and convincingly from the global financial crisis of 2008-9, and today offers one of the world's most resilient job markets.

Strong GDP growth and low unemployment levels are forecast up to 2019, and – in part due to the nation's ageing population – there's high demand for skilled immigrants to fill gaps in the labor force. As in many countries, demand for graduates is especially high in the STEM sectors (science, technology, engineering and mathematics).



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Graduates from EU/EEA countries can stay on to seek work without any restrictions or permits. International students from elsewhere can extend their residence permits by 18 months in order to seek work, commencing from the date on which final exam results are issued in writing. After two years of employment in Germany, it's possible to apply for permanent residency status.

Fluency in German is a definite asset when seeking work. However, some roles are available without this requirement, particularly in international corporations and scientific research institutes.

Frequently Asked Questions

1. CAN I STUDY IN GERMANY FREE OF CHARGE?

From 2014, all public universities in Germany offer undergraduate-level education free of charge, for both domestic and international students. This means students of all nationalities can study in Germany at undergraduate level for free at a public university (with just a nominal administration fee per semester of about US\$300). PhDs are also free for all students at public universities for at least the first three years.

For master's students, however, tuition fees still exist. These fees may be avoided (or dramatically reduced) if you have already graduated from an undergraduate program in Germany in the last few years. If you studied in another country at undergraduate level, you are classed as a 'non-consecutive' student and should expect to pay around US\$11,245+ per semester to study on a reputed master's program.

2. WHAT TYPES OF DEGREE DO UNIVERSITIES IN GERMANY OFFER?

Under the Bologna Process, all universities in Germany offer internationally recognized degrees. A BA or a BSc (Bachelor of Arts / Bachelor of Science) will usually take 6 semesters (3 years) to complete, and these are the most common undergraduate degrees. For postgraduate studies, an MA or MSc (Master of Arts / Master of Science) will take 2-4 semesters (1-2 years) and a PhD (Doctor of Philosophy) will last 4-6 semesters (2-3 years). More specialized degrees are also available, including MBA (Masters in Business Administration) programs.

3. WHAT ARE THE ENTRY REQUIREMENTS TO STUDY IN GERMANY?

To study in Germany you need a recognized *Hochschulzugangsberechtigung* (HZB), meaning 'higher education entrance qualification'. This can come in many formats, particularly for international students who have gained their school-leaving qualifications in a different country.

For prospective undergraduate students, a high-school diploma, school-leaving certificate or university entrance exam result is usually sufficient. For postgraduate programs, students need to provide an undergraduate degree certificate. Usually, if your qualification would allow you entry into higher education in your home country, it will also be sufficient to allow you to apply to German universities.



If you find that your qualification is not recognized, you can take a preparatory course at a *Studienkolleg* before taking a compulsory assessment test known as a *Feststellungprüfung*. This assessment will cover areas that are relevant to the program you wish to study.

You will also need to submit proof of proficiency in either German or English, depending on the course you're applying for.

4. DO I NEED TO SPEAK GERMAN?

The language of instruction at most universities in Germany is German. All students undertaking a German-taught program will need to be able to demonstrate a firm knowledge of the language, either by means of a language test result or by taking a preparatory course. Accepted proficiency tests are the DSH (German Language University Entrance Examination for International Applicants), TestDaF (Test of German as a Foreign Language), GDS (Goethe Institut German Language Diploma) and the DSD (German Language Diploma of the Standing Conference of the Minister of Education and Cultural Affairs, Level II). If you are only studying in Germany for one or two semesters you may not need to provide this evidence.

If you have limited knowledge of German, you could consider taking an English-language program. There are a growing number of English-taught programs at universities in Germany, particularly at postgraduate level. If you are a non-native English speaker, you may be required to provide proof of your English-language proficiency with a TOEFL or IELTS result. If your chosen school requires this, they will list it as an entry requirement.

5. HOW DO I APPLY TO UNIVERSITIES IN GERMANY?

Admissions processes vary between institutions, so make sure to check the information given by your chosen university before submitting an application. If you are unable to find the entry requirements of a program you want to apply for or you aren't sure how to apply, visit the website of the university's International Office (*Akademisches Auslandsamt*) and read the information provided online or contact the office directly. There should be staff members available to provide support and advice on any topic relating to international student applications.

6. DO I NEED A STUDENT VISA TO STUDY IN GERMANY?

This depends on your country of origin. If you are from a country within the EU or the EEA you do not need a student visa. If you are from Australia, New Zealand, the US, Canada, Japan, South Korea, Switzerland or Israel you still do not require a student visa, but you will need to register for a residence permit upon arrival in Germany. If you are from Andorra, Brazil, El Salvador, Honduras, Monaco, San Marino or Taiwan, you only need a visa if you plan on working in Germany before or after your studies. If your home country hasn't been

mentioned above, then you will need to apply for a German student visa at least three months before you are due to travel.

7. WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A UNIVERSITY AND A *FACHHOCHSCHULEN*?

While all degree programs in Germany lead to a recognized bachelor's or master's qualification (or the equivalent), there are some institutions, which are more geared towards practical learning. These are known as *Fachhochschulen* or Universities of Applied Sciences, and typically offer degrees in fields such as engineering, natural science and business administration. Attending a University of Applied Science may give you a closer relationship with industry contacts and offer more opportunity for practical learning, including internships. If you wish to pursue an academic career, on the other hand, *Fachhochschulen* may not be the best option, as there is less focus on theoretic work and they do not award PhDs.

8. ARE SCHOLARSHIPS AVAILABLE TO COVER LIVING COSTS?

Although tuition fees in Germany are non-existent at public universities for undergraduates and some postgraduates, you still need to consider how you'll cover living costs. If you don't have a sponsor or supporting family member, there are various opportunities to gain scholarships to cover these costs.

Scholarships to study in Germany can be obtained in various ways. The German government offers some funding to international students through the DAAD or the European Commission's Erasmus+ scheme, and many opportunities are offered independently by German universities or external funding bodies. Browse the funding options on your chosen university's website to see if they offer any international scholarships – these are often awarded based on merit, subject of study and/or country of origin.

9. WHERE WILL I LIVE DURING MY STUDIES?

Unfortunately, most German universities do not offer accommodation to enrolling students. This means that finding accommodation is up to you. With no tuition fees in Germany, rent is likely to be your biggest monthly expense, and this will vary depending on which part of the country you live in. In big cities within Western Germany (Dusseldorf, Cologne etc.) and smaller, student-oriented cities such as Heidelberg and Freiburg, you should expect to pay slightly more than if you were living in eastern Germany (eg. Berlin).

When looking for accommodation in Germany, you should consider student residences, shared accommodation or an apartment. An unshared apartment is the most expensive choice, and this will generally cost in the region of €350-400 (~US\$390-450) a month. Shared accommodation would be cheaper at around €250-300 (US\$280-340) a month, while student residences are cheaper yet



again at around €200-250 (US\$225-280) a month.

If you struggle with finding accommodation, you can also look for temporary accommodation to cover your first few days or weeks in the country. In these instances, emergency housing may be provided by the university or you could try staying in a hostel, B&B or hotel.

10. CAN I WORK IN GERMANY DURING MY STUDIES?

Yes, you can! If you are a full-time EU or EEA student (excluding students from Bulgaria and Romania) you can study part-time for up to 20 hours per week. If you are a full time student from outside of the EU (or from Romania and Bulgaria), you will be limited to working up to 190 full days or 240 half days per year before you must apply for a work permit. Upon gaining paid work in Germany you should contact the German employment office to learn about the legal conditions.

11. CAN I STAY IN GERMANY AFTER I COMPLETE MY STUDIES?

After completing your studies in Germany as an international student you are able to stay in the country and seek work for an additional period of 18 months. If you gain work in Germany within this time you should make sure that you extend your visa, residence or work permit to ensure you are living in the country legally.



More questions?

Get answers from the *TopUniversities* team and from other international students at www.topuniversities.com/student-forum.