

My name is Sophia Nibbe. I'm doing an exchange semester in Berlin, Germany. I'm in 2nd year of my BA. Though not a perfect experience, it has still been great and to make yours easier I'll give you a few tips that may help.

First things, first, learn German, or try. You can easily get by in Berlin and most German cities without knowing German but when it comes down to your studies, most subjects you want to do won't be in English, if any. It really sucks sitting in a class when you have no idea what's going on.

Also do one of the German courses offered at TUB. It costs extra, maybe 45 Euro, but you'll meet other exchange students that way and continue your studies at the same time. Make sure though, that you know what date you have to sign on. The classes are very popular. I had completed 3 semesters of German and found A2/B1 to be the best fit. Don't worry if you want a lower level class, if you don't understand anything, you won't learn.

Enrol at TUB as soon as you can because your student card (you do have to pay a fee) will be your semester ticket (6 months) for all public transport and public transport in Berlin otherwise is kind of expensive. For the first couple of days, get daily tickets. But there's no refunds on them so get your student card quickly.

The University is confusing and really unorganised. What you need to do is find 10 courses online at the TUB website and find out what times they're on. Then go to those classes in the first and second weeks. For the most part you don't sign on online, you just turn up to the class. Sometimes, classes are popular and you may get turned away if you're late. This is called, "course visiting". You figure out what class suits you and if it fits in your timetable. Sometimes you sign on later in ISIS (like my si-net or blackboard). The language courses (as said above) must be signed on for online.

Try and find a share apartment. With the dorms, you may end up in Lichtenberg which is set far, far away from the Uni. It's not your typical college dorm. You basically just share a flat (which is a small kitchen and smaller bathroom) with two others and because there's no common area, you don't really talk or get to know your flatmates. I guess that depends on who you get. I was unlucky to get someone who stays in their room all the time. ☺ It's cheap but you can find better places that are just as cheap and closer to Uni. Also, try and get a place close to an U-Bahn or S-Bahn station. There's nothing worse than walking for 15 minutes in the blistering cold. Of course if you go in summer that won't be a problem.

Now being in the heart of Europe gives you amazing opportunities, so don't waste them! Go for a weekend to Paris or Amsterdam or Brussels. The best airlines, okay the cheapest airlines, are Easyjet (easyjet.com) and Ryan Air. My flight to Amsterdam was 50 Euro return and to Brussels was 40. There are conditions of course, it's like a bad Jetstar. But if you get there an hour early, it shouldn't be a problem and if you have carry-on then just print your boarding pass out and go straight through security. Trains are also fun (and sometimes cheaper) if you're with a friend, but if you're travelling around Christmas (or anytime), make sure you reserve seats because you don't want to end up like me, sitting in the doorway on your luggage for 6 hours. Sooo not fun!

This sounds bad but in Starbucks, there's usually a really good and free map of Berlin. On it has different options for walking tours which sound lame but are actually a great way to see your new city and meet some people along the way. There's one in Paris as well, which I really enjoyed. It can get boring by yourself anyway.

Also, if you're interested in Museums and Galleries then get a Jahreskarte (yearly ticket), even if you're only there for 6 months. It's only 20 Euro for students and will get you into most museums and galleries around Berlin. Most entries are 4 Euros for students.

I know this is a lot of information but it might make the transition easier. Bon Voyage.

Cheers, Sophia

Best fast food/restaurant: Dolores, they make the most amazing burritos. Rosa-Luxembourg Str. Mitte. Get out at Alexanderplatz (station) and find the Europe Cars on Karl-Liebknechtstr, walk across the road from it and keep going until you come to Rosa.

Best Coffee: Antipodes. Unfortunately you'll be disappointed in what Germany and even France (Italy has amazing coffee) have to offer but this joint is owned by New Zealanders and they know how to do it! Fehbellinerstr. Get out at Senefelderplz or Rosa-Luxembourgstr U-bahns. U2



