

Exchange Report: MBA Summer Session 2018 – WHU (Germany)

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VISA PROCESS

I was initially very confused as to whether I required a visa or not. I looked on the German Consulate website for further information but was unclear whether I needed a Schengen Visa for studying purposes, or whether because I was from Canada I was exempted. I tried to call the consulate for clarification as well, but they told me they could not divulge such information over the phone (they were actually quite impolite). As it turns out I had booked an appointment and went in to see if I required a visa and was informed that I did not need one. I might ensure that future participants in this program (if from Canada) are aware of their exemption to avoid confusion.

INSURANCE

I had insurance through York University (I am part of the YUGSA plan). I also was only staying for a short time in Germany so would have been covered for most of my medical needs, including hospital stay, flight back to Canada, etc. I did not purchase travel insurance.

FINANCIAL

I arrived with euros and would recommend about 500 – 800, especially if the student intends to travel around Europe before, during and after the trip. Some of the places we visited did not take credit card (although places like the train station and grocery stores did, which was convenient), so having cash on hand was very helpful.

ARRIVAL/AIRPORT

I did not face any difficulties when I arrived, the overall process to get through security was relatively painless, and there was a shuttle service from the airport to the school via WHU, which was very convenient. The shuttle times are quite early in the morning in German time, as so as a Canadian travelling to Germany, I would recommend arriving 1-2 days before hand to ensure acclimatization to the new time zone before starting as it the program is fast paced after that and the time zone changes can really affect you.

ACADEMICS

Registration Process: For this program, there were only 2 course options, one that started on May 8 and one that started May 13. They were the same course, titled the MBA Summer Program, but only had different start times. I liked that the cut off for enrollment was later as I made a last minute decision to take this course and am glad I did. I would advise part-time students to look into this program as you can bring an additional guest with you who can participate in some group social activities and it is only 2 weeks so it is not so bad for time off.

Courses: The course is worth 3 Schulich credits and the grades are given via a percentile grade. The course is set up with about 7 different sections, some of which have case analyses and group work, and some that include a company visit. The courses are fairly easy and the marking is generous, but the information learned is very interesting and related to the topic (in this case, the European Business Environment). The work load is fairly easy as well, with just readings to do for each day. Classes are held during the day. The university is one of the few private universities in the area and is known for business focus and entrepreneurial studies.

Classroom: All of the students are doing their MBA, and there were a wide range of students of all ages. There were also representations from many different countries, including Australia, India, USA, Canada, Africa, Singapore, China, etc. There seemed to be a cohort of people from certain schools though that put a focus on this course for international study (ex: Ross Business School and Deakin University). There was no one really from Europe in the course. Students generally used laptops, although the schedule for company visits and social activities can be strict, so some days there may have only been just enough time to drop a laptop back to the room before going out.

TEACHING

The teaching style was relatively the same, with the only difference being that the professors seemed to be “livelier” (although that could be because they wanted to ensure we maximized the short time). Each

day had a different lecturer based on the topic covered, and the associated experts would come in and teach, which was fantastic. They all spoke English quite well also. They had a lot of information to cram into a short time, so the pace was relatively quick, but not hard to follow and I learned a lot. The teaching style is similar to some of the more excited professors at Schulich. The teaching quality was very good and engaging. The course content was a mix of lectures, case work, exercises, real-world examples, in class discussions and business visits.

LANGUAGE COURSES

I did not take any language courses as it was all in English. Many people in the German area also speak English quite well, so I had no trouble. I would download the Google translate app for things like ordering food or drinks, asking for directions, and cordial remarks (please, thank you, etc.).

LANGUAGE OUTSIDE OF THE CLASSROOM

The most common language was German, with second being English. As stated, they mostly spoke English fairly well so it was easy to get by.

INTERNATIONAL SERVICES

Since this was a 2 week course and everyone was outside the university, there was no formal orientation program or initiation. There was only 1 day at the beginning dedicated to getting acquainted with each other and icebreaker exercises.

HOUSING ARRANGEMENTS

The housing was organized by the university if you chose to opt in and was well managed well. You put down your 1st, 2nd, and 3rd options and they match you accordingly based on whatever they have available. They will typically contact you directly if there is an issue with your housing choice and will work directly with you to try and get the best possible option, even if it is off campus. Living on campus though is definitely the ideal option as it is significantly cheaper and very convenient, with every on-campus house being between a 2 and 10 minute walk away from the lecture hall. The town itself is very

safe, and in many ways almost a sleepy, boring town (when students leave the campus, the average age is around 55-65 years), but it is close to Koblenz, which is more lively. On campus, there is a restriction on noise after 10 pm and it is supposedly strictly enforced. The seem to be in very good condition and it was a comfortable stay.

CAMPUS FACILITIES

The WHU campus is significantly smaller than York and located on a hill, so a fair bit of uphill and downhill walking. It is also embedded in an area dedicated to retail and it is very close to a grocery store, which is convenient. There are many study rooms throughout the campus, all accessible via a WHU access card only, and almost always on the higher level floors in the campus study areas. There is a gym on campus as well which the students can use and it is close to the cafeteria. We did not stay long enough to explore any recreational sports or activities, and I had no need for any healthcare requirements so was not sure where to go for this, although there are pharmacy stores around the campus. The university is also very close to the Rhine River which made for a nice walk.

FOOD

The lunches were included as part of your payment for the course (the lunches were good and diverse), as were some of the dinners during the social events, but the breakfast and most meals were not covered and you had to pay for yourself. As indicated before, the grocery store is very close and convenient, so many people went to the grocery store and purchased food and made their own in their rooms, which had an oven, cutlery and a fridge. The prices are average for Europe, but when compared to the Canadian dollar it can seem more expensive (the euro compared it the Canadian dollar is almost 1.5 times more). The alcohol though is very cheap there. They also do not serve free water there, and most of the time if you do get water, it will be mineral water, so you may have to ask for “still” water.

COSTS/EXPENSES

Please give cost estimates that are as accurate as possible. Did you encounter any unexpected

costs? Remember to include how much you spent over a period of time; e.g. rent/month or for the term.

- Accommodation - \$1,150 CDN (housing for 2 weeks)
- Tuition (includes: lunches, social events like river cruise, tour of Koblenz, castle visit, wine tour, night out in downtown Koblenz, etc.), lecture material, bus passes for 2 weeks, arrival/departure shuttle) - \$750 CDN
- Local transportation (taxis, trains) – depending on where you go, could be upwards of \$200 – 300 CDN
- Food/groceries (is this more or less expensive than Toronto?) – For going out and groceries for 2 weeks maybe \$500 CDN
- Entertainment - \$100 – 200 (did not spend much on this as most of it was part of the course)
- Flights - \$1,200 – 1,500 CDN (round trip)

DEPARTURE/AIRPORT

There was a departure shuttle organized by the university to get to the Frankfurt airport. For departure, the airlines are set up by gates like Pearson, but there are organized differently, which made it difficult for check in although the staff were helpful. The process overall was standard, like what I would expect at Pearson. There did not appear to be any tax that I saw for departure.

MUST SEES OR DOS

Because you have a bus pass included as part of the tuition, you can travel around to Koblenz easily and cheaply. From Koblenz, you could take a train to Frankfurt. There is also a train station in Vallendar, but the train rarely comes there at all or on time. The campus is about 1 – 1.5 hours away from Frankfurt, and from there you could really go anywhere you wanted to around Europe using either regional or ICE trains. Many people over the weekend went either to neighbouring cities/countries like Cologne, Luxemburg, Essen, Dusseldorf or went a little longer to Brussels, Amsterdam, Berlin or Munich. There are also a lot of castles to see and anything around the river is beautiful. The train station times were not always reliable or on time, so it would be suggested to get to wherever you want to go early. You can also pay for train tickets online or at the station.

WHAT TO BRING

Computer & charger, walking shoes, rain jacket, cell phone, cash, credit & debit card (in case you need extra money), appropriate clothing (check weather beforehand – also class wear was more casual but not inappropriate), sunglasses, water bottle, adaptor.

CULTURE SHOCK

We were not really there long enough to deal with culture shock. The one thing I will say was difficult was the time change as Germany is 6 hours behind Toronto time. It took me about 3 days to really adjust.

GENERAL IMPRESSIONS

It was an excellent experience, felt like a vacation with learning, and I met some great people.