

My experience at Hochschule Reutlingen... Where do I begin?! I always wanted to study in Germany and to learn the German language. When researching where to study during my exchange semester, Hochschule Reutlingen stood out for me. They offer so many language courses and have a great selection of classes from all faculties that are taught in English. The application process was very simple, and I always felt supported throughout. Whenever I emailed any questions to Reutlingen International Office, I always received a timely and informative response. RIO also helped me to receive this scholarship and gave me all the information I needed to successfully apply for accommodation on campus. The student guide RIO gave me was also a true lifeline when I first arrived in Germany, it contains just about everything you need to know about living and studying in Reutlingen. My home university also offered support during the application process, but I found that responses to my emails were often delayed and sometimes my questions were not answered. My home university did not offer me any scholarships even though I have quite a good GPA, and I found this quite disappointing.

The registration process and course selection were done during my first few days on campus. It was straightforward and there were plenty of university staff present to help the exchange students. I was surprised that everyone spoke English so well! All my lecturers and professors were passionate and professional, and I really enjoyed the small class style of lectures in Germany. They were quite different to the large and often impersonal lectures in Australia. I found the teaching style both engaging and rewarding, but keep in mind that interactions with professors in Germany are less casual and more respectful than in Australia. My language courses were fantastic, and I am amazed at how much German I learned during my time in Reutlingen. The course 'Germany Within Europe' was also very interesting. I learned so much about German history and the events that have shaped it as a modern country. I also took part in the class 'Intercultural Management'. Whilst this course was my least favourite, I still found many aspects very interesting. I suppose I just don't have much of a mind for business!

The excursions organised for the Pre-Semester Intensive German Course were inexpensive and a perfect way to make friends and see some of the region. I also got the opportunity to take part in a skiing trip to Switzerland which was organised by the ESB. It was an unforgettable experience and the first time I tried my hand at skiing. I had plenty of bruises, but even more amazing memories! The school spirit at Reutlingen is fantastic. Everyone is so proud to be students there and the frequent parties and events were a great way to meet people and learn of other student's experiences there. Cannstatter Volksfest and the Christmas markets are perfect examples of this.

Another thing that really helped me settle in at Reutlingen was the Student Buddy program. My student buddy was awesome, she showed me around the university, around Reutlingen and introduced me to many local students. It was through her that I made so many German friends.

Also, the foreign language speaking buddy program organised by the Institute for Foreign Languages is fantastic. I made a great friend and had the opportunity to improve my German and impart some of my knowledge of English.

Even though Reutlingen isn't a particularly large city, I think my time here was much better than if I had studied somewhere like Berlin or Munich. I feel like I was really able to be a part of German culture and society. Not to mention, Swabian food is delicious! While I was in Reutlingen, I had the opportunity to travel throughout much of southern Germany and Austria. This was made inexpensive by staying in hostels and traveling by bus. I was able to visit many beautiful places such as Lake Constance, Neuschwanstein, Garmisch-Partenkirchen, Berchtesgaden, Munich, and Nuremberg just to name a few.

If I could impart any knowledge to future exchange students at Hochschule Reutlingen, it would be this:

- Start learning the language! It's incredibly rewarding, and it also makes it much easier to communicate with your flatmates and get by in everyday life.
- Take part in as many events and parties as possible. It's the best way to meet new people and network within the uni.
- Travel! You can do it very cheap there and you will never forget the things you see... Germany is one of the most beautiful places in the world.
- The Hostelworld app is the best way to find cheap dorm style accommodation all around Germany. Flixbus is by far the cheapest way to get around and you will find that they go to most popular tourist destinations.
- Open a German bank account. It will make life much easier for you!
- Do your grocery shopping at Penny, it's within walking distance of the campus and their prices are unbeatable.
- Accept the culture shock. It will be hard at first but the more you get out and experience Germany, the more you will love your time there.
- And last but not least... Don't just hang out with people from your own country! Make German friends. Take advantage of the student buddy program, you will definitely get the most out of your time in Reutlingen.

In closing, my time at Hochschule Reutlingen was the best experience of my life. Exchange isn't always easy, but it's incredibly rewarding. I learned so much about myself during my semester abroad and I think I am a better student because of it. I also think that having an exchange semester on my resume will be advantageous when applying for jobs in the future. When I return to Australia I will certainly be recommending that my fellow students experience a semester at Hochschule Reutlingen!

Danke für alles und auf Wiedersehen,

Louis Werckmann