



How to study abroad in Germany

Updated for 2021



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Introduction



One of the world's most popular non-Anglophone study destinations, Germany is an increasingly popular choice for international students. In 2017, Germany met, and exceeded, its target of hosting 350,000 international students by 2020 three years early, with 358,900 foreign students enrolled.

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, the majority of Germany's public universities continue to offer most 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.

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Higher education in Germany

In the QS World University Rankings 2022, 46 German universities are included in total – with three ranked among the top 100 in the world. The highest-ranked German university is the Technical University of Munich, which is joint 50th and scores particularly well for its reputation among employers.

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.

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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.

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)

At many German universities it's possible to apply for admission twice a year – to commence studies either in the winter or summer semester



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.

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).

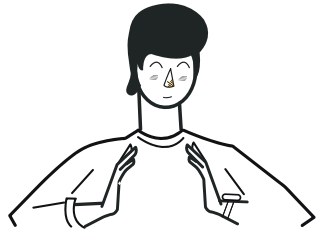
For some subjects, there is a nationwide cap on the number of students who can enrol. For these subjects (mostly life sciences), students from the EU (plus Norway, Iceland or Liechtenstein) need to apply through the Foundation of Higher Education Admission. Non-EU students should apply as normal.

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.

To ensure the best chances of acceptance, take care to provide all the documentation requested, make sure all your documentation is certified, and check that you've filled out all your information correctly before submitting your application





Applications for master's programmes are either submitted directly to the university, or via the online portal www.uniassist.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 categorised 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.

For some master's degrees, applicants are required to have earned a minimum number of credits in specific fields of study



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.

Studying in English

While German remains the main language of instruction overall, a large and growing selection of English-language programmes is available – particularly at master’s level and for students participating in short-term exchange programmes. However, there are 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.

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Student Visas

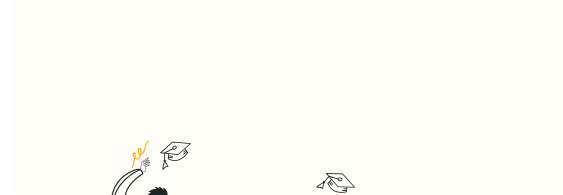


Students from countries within the EU, EEA or Switzerland do not need a visa to study in Germany. These students simply need to register at the nearest registry office on arrival, to obtain a residence permit. This also applies to students coming from a number of other countries, including Australia, 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.

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 €75 (£64). 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
- Certificate showing you've purchased health insurance
- Declaration of authenticity of documents submitted

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Once in the country, you need to apply for a residence permit. You should do this by registering with the local Alien Registration Office within two weeks of arrival and after finding accommodation



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 will need to pay between €60 and €110 (£50-94) for the initial residence permit depending upon your situation.

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.



Student cities



Find out more about the cities you could call home during your studies...

Berlin

Cities don't get much trendier than **Berlin**, which easily competes with the likes of London and New York in terms of the cool factor. It goes without saying that this tolerant, multicultural and creative city is known for being a great place for students – and it helps that it's also a relatively inexpensive place to live. Top universities in Berlin include three ranked within the world's top 150 in the **QS World University Rankings® 2019**; these are **Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin** (ranked 121st), **Freie Universität Berlin (130th)** and **Technische Universität Berlin** (147th). Berlin itself is currently ranked within the top 10 in the world in the **QS Best Student Cities index**.

Munich

Thanks to its world-famous Oktoberfest (a huge annual beer festival), Munich will forever be associated with Germany's beer-brewing tradition. But there's more to this southern German city, which is often voted one of the world's most livable cities. For one thing, Munich is home to the two highest-ranked universities in Germany: **Technische Universität München** – ranked 61st in the world, and **Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München**, ranked 62nd in the world. A sleek modern financial hub, Munich can be a little on the pricey side

but it won't cost you anything to enjoy the beautiful Bavarian countryside which surrounds it. There's plenty of history to enjoy too, and no visit would be complete without a visit to King Ludwig's palaces and grottos.

Heidelberg

Despite being part of one of Germany's most densely populated areas, Heidelberg manages to retain a certain quaint rustic charm. It's popular with tourists, who come to see its ancient castle and red-roofed town center. Top universities in Heidelberg include the famous **Ruprecht-Karls-Universität Heidelberg**, which is Germany's oldest and third-highest ranked university (ranked 64th in the world). It boasts connections with more than 50 Nobel Prize winners, of whom 10 were (or are) professors at the university.

Cologne

Cologne is known for its dramatic cathedral, Kölner Dom, its pleasant riverside, and its liberal and tolerant nature. It has a vibrant student community, is peppered with museums and art galleries, and does a good line in beer halls and independent stores, particularly in the Agnesviertel district. Direct trains run to Paris, Brussels and Amsterdam, and Luxembourg isn't too far away either, so Cologne could be a good choice for those keen to explore Western Europe. Universities in Cologne include the flagship **Universität Köln (University of Cologne)**, ranked joint 306th in the world, which is one of Germany's largest universities.



Cities don't get much trendier than Berlin, which easily competes with the likes of London and New York in terms of the cool factor



Frankfurt am Main

The beating heart of Germany's financial and business sectors, Frankfurt is also the home of the European Central Bank. Accordingly, its city center is a mass of gleaming skyscrapers, and its airport is the busiest in continental Europe. However, it's not all work and no play. Frankfurt is known for offering some of the best nightlife in Germany and hosts a number of colorful festivals throughout the year. As for universities in Frankfurt, the most prestigious is **Universität Frankfurt am Main**, ranked joint 279th in the world, which is particularly strong in social science subjects.

Stuttgart

The capital and largest city of the southwestern state of Baden- Württemberg, Stuttgart (pronounced Schtutt-gart) is known as the 'cradle of the automobile', while the wider area is one of the country's strongest industrial regions, making it an attractive choice for engineering and technology students who may wish to stay in Germany and work after their studies. However, Stuttgart is far more than just an industrial city, and, as its tourist slogan says, 'offers more'. It has a rich cultural heritage, with concert halls, sports arenas and Broadway-style musical theaters. It also hosts the world-famous annual Cannstatter Volksfest, a beer festival and traveling funfair, second only in size to **Munich's** Oktoberfest. Stuttgart was a new entry in the QS Best Student Cities 2018 at 58th, with its highest-ranked university, **Universität Stuttgart**, currently standing at joint 260th in the world rankings.

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



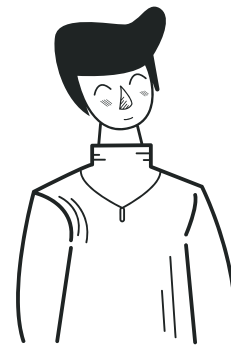
While affordability is by no means the sole factor attracting international students to Germany, low or non-existent tuition fees undoubtedly add to the overall appeal. At public universities in most of the country, there are no tuition fees for undergraduate programmes or for the majority of postgraduate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

Tuition fees for non-EU international students were reintroduced in the south-west state of Baden-Württemberg in August 2017. These fees currently stand €1,500 (£1,286) a semester. Refugees and PhD students are exempt.

Elsewhere in the country, the majority of students at public universities simply pay a small 'semester fee'. This is typically no more than €350 (~\$300) per semester, covering contributions to the student union, administration and the cost of a Semester Ticket – a six-month pass for public transport.

Living costs vary depending on the location; you can use the QS Best Student Cities ranking to see how different cities compare for affordability. In general, it's recommended to budget around €850 (~US\$730) per month to cover accommodation, food and other living expenses, which works out at €10,200 (~\$8,645) a year. 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.

*Once in Germany,
it's also possible to
supplement your
income through
parttime work*



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

- Rent and utilities: €323
- Food and drink: €168
- Clothing: €42
- Learning materials: €20
- Car and/or public transport: €92
- Health insurance and medical costs: €80
- Phone, internet and television: €31
- Recreation, culture and sports: €61

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.



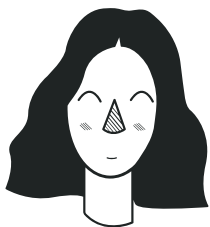
Working in Germany



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 industrialised 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.

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.



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More questions

Get answers from the TopUniversities team and from other international students at www.TopUniversities.com/Student-Forum.



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