

ERASMUS EXPERIENCE AT ULM UNIVERSITY

I've really enjoyed my time here so far and expect that to continue in the summer. I've loved the freedom of living away from home (definitely moving out for my final year now). It is refreshing to experience another country as a resident rather than just a tourist. I have made so many friends from Germany and all around the world. My college experience at Ulm has been completely different than my college experience in Maynooth.

Ulm is a small regional city by German standards but with a population of 200,000 it feels like a metropolis compared to Maynooth!! The advantages of studying at a medium sized city like Ulm is, that it isn't too big (Munich), or too small (Tübingen/Maynooth). Ulm isn't too big so travel times are short, you can never get lost and you are never too far from anywhere (e.g. parties). Ulm isn't too small so there is a large enough city centre and plenty of options for shopping centres, nightlife and sport facilities.

Ulm is a nice city and has a stunning post-card perfect picturesque city district known as the "Fischerviertel" (fisherman's quarter). The city also has a fully intact walled section along the banks of the Danube and the world's largest Protestant Cathedral whose impressive tower I have yet to climb. Ulm's other claims to fame is that the city is half in Bavaria and half in Baden Württemberg and it is the birthplace of Einstein. Having said that Ulm isn't as pretty as the smaller Tübingen but the post-war reconstruction isn't that ugly. We've just finished Christmas Market season here in Germany. I visited the markets in Tübingen, Nuremberg and Salzburg. Each market was fantastic but I think the Christmas market here in Ulm was the best, larger then Tübingen, less crowded than Nuremberg and livelier than Salzburg. I'm living in a 4 room apartment with 2 Germans and an Egyptian. The apartment is basic enough but comfortable. Rent is only 257 a month and I get on well with my room mates. The apartment is in a block in student accommodation. There are 10 apartment blocks in this complex which has numerous facilities such as a free Gym and a student bar which opens Wednesdays and Mondays and offers 1:50 beer!!! College is 15 minutes' walk or a ten minute bus ride. Ulm University is comparable to Maynooth with 10,000 students. The campus is massive and includes Ulm's main hospital, a military base of some sorts and various research labs and factories. Ulm University in contrast to Maynooth is very specialised and only offers courses related to science, finance, engineering and medicine (no arts students). There are numerous courses offered in both German and English (ideal for me) and there is also a language school where they teach German among dozens of other languages.

Ulm University is a dull functional place in comparison to the energy of Maynooth University (imagine Callan building multiplied). Most of student life takes place off campus which was a shock to me. Students live in apartment complexes like mine off campus, each with their own student bar. Student parties take place in the student bar's off campus and in the apartments also off campus. Clubs and societies also take place off campus. The student union is less active or creative in comparison to Maynooth and is more of a help desk (although they did organise two awesome parties before Christmas).

Student life is great here. I'm a member of the excellent International community. We meet once or twice a week to go drinking. We also play sports every week such as football and volleyball. Almost every second weekend we have done a day trip to another city in Germany and they done weekend breaks to Prague and Amsterdam. Through this organisation I have made tons of friends from Germany and around the world. Ulm is a truly international college and I have made friends with so many nationalities e.g. Turkish, Italian, Russian, French, Taiwanese, Mexican. To this date I'm the only Irish person I have met in Ulm. I have a friend from England so we understand the British/Irish sense of humour. There is an Irish bar called "Murphy's Law" in the city so I go there when I feel home sick to drink a pint of Guinness and eat Tayto. But only messing I've never been home sick, too busy to be honest. Everyone speaks perfect English which can be annoying when you want to speak German, but I struggle on. The German's by and large are polite and helpful. Although the Germans and especially the Schwabens can be reserved they are friendly and funny when you get to know them.

So far my life here has been good. I have been invited by friends to visit numerous places in Europe during the semester break. I'm looking forward to summer here, Apparently it's excellent (sun, beer gardens and swimming in lakes). I also have to find a part-time job, I decided not to look for one before Christmas as I wanted to return to Ireland for the break. I also have the spring beer festivals to look forward to.

As for transport, you can fly from Ireland with Ryanair to Memmingen airport which half an hour by train or with Aerlingus to Munich (1.5 hours away) or Stuttgart (1 hour away).

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