

A year abroad is an excellent opportunity to develop language skills, meet new people and explore the wider world. I completed my year abroad at LMU Muenchen in the academic year 23/24. I chose to study abroad because I did A2 to B2 German in my first and second years at Warwick and wanted to improve my German further, and because I wanted to take the opportunity to travel more. I chose Munich because of its proximity to the Alps, the prestige of the university and because of its many breweries. I aim to tell you about my experiences there and help you decide whether to do a year abroad.

## The University:

My impression of LMU, and particularly the maths department, was mixed. Compared to Warwick, LMU is very decentralised. Each department has its own system in place for module selection, assessment registration and other bureaucratic aspects. For example, for physics modules you have to sign up for modules on the “LSF” website, but for maths modules you sign up on Moodle. Furthermore, many processes are completely different for international students, and many lecturers have no idea how these processes work. This, coupled with a lack of online resources or communication, makes the paperwork at LMU incredibly complicated and confusing. I’d like to give the following information to future exchange students at LMU:

- All modules running each semester can be found on LSF. If you wish to take an exam you should add the module to your Stundenplan
- Usually in the first lecture of a maths module you will receive the password for the module’s Moodle page. This will be important for access to assignments and lecture notes.
- If you wish to take an exam you must register for it yourself – it is not automatic like at Warwick. For maths modules you register on Moodle and for physics modules you must email the lecturer personally.
- Most modules are lecture modules (Vorlesungen) and are normally worth 9 ECTS. This information is given nowhere but is universally known for some reason. Usually, the number of credits a module is worth is proportional to the number of weekly contact hours.
- For first year maths modules, the assignments are worth credit, but for later years this is not the case.
- There is no real system in place for giving Erasmus+ students their grades. After your exams, you must continually pester and nag your lecturers to add your grades to your transcript, as the Pruefungsamt cannot do this for Erasmus+ students.

The department itself is also very decentralised. Grade boundaries vary from module to module. They seem to be chosen by the lecturer. Sometimes they are chosen before the exam, sometimes they are chosen after the exam to fit the grade curve. Sometimes they seem completely random. Furthermore, there is seemingly little communication between lecturers as to the content of their modules. Several modules teach the same concepts – linear algebra and abstract algebra both go over the basics of groups and rings – and some concepts are assumed but never actually taught – in topology it is assumed that you have in-depth knowledge of category theory, but this is never taught in any module. What I disliked the most about the department is that lecturers aren’t required to provide lecture notes or assignment solutions, so depending on the module you might be completely without learning materials.

However, the decentralised nature of the department does come with benefits. For example, the department offers small courses called seminars. These are worth 3 ECTS, focus on a niche topic and

involve the participants each giving a presentation on part of the subject for the rest of the class, with guidance from the faculty member. I took a seminar on the topic of geometric quantisation and found it very rewarding. It was a great opportunity to explore a new area of mathematics, learn more about quantum physics and develop my public speaking skills. I would definitely recommend taking a seminar module.

Another difference between LMU and Warwick maths departments is that the modules at LMU are bigger, being worth 9ECTs (18 CATs) instead of 15 CATs. This means that more content is taught in each one, which can be either a blessing or a curse. In some modules, it allows you to more thoroughly explore the topic and delve into more advanced concepts, but in other cases you run out of things to study and end up learning unrelated content.

Overall, I found the department to be a Kafkaesque nightmare but one with some interesting modules. I'd recommend taking seminars, programming modules, physics modules and axiomatic set theory, and I'd strongly suggest maintaining frequent contact with the Erasmus team.

## The City

No words can adequately describe my love for Munich. The city is filled with so much history, and offers a wide range of beautiful buildings and interesting museums. My personal favourites include: the Rathaus at Marienplatz; the many many churches, especially Alte Peter; the traditional Bavarian pubs, including the Hofbraeuhaus and the breweries in Freising and Andechs; the Alte Pinakothek, a gallery including works of van Gogh and Monet; Schloss Nymphenburg and its lovely botanical garden. These and many other historical sites offer almost endless ways to spend your weekends instead of studying.

On top of this, Munich has amazing food and drink, as well as frequent cultural events. The beer is of course delicious, as are the soft drinks (I've been back in England for 9 days and already miss Rhabarberschorle </3), and the local food is perfect after a long hike. During my time in Munich I tried to make the most of the local cultural scene. I went to Oktoberfest, Fruelingsfest, a Maifeiertag celebration, several Christmas markets, and my personal favourite, die lange Nacht der Museen. This was a night on which most of the museums in Munich were open until midnight, and could all be accessed with one ticket. This was loads of fun and I'd definitely recommend it to any future Munich students.

I also loved living in Studentenstadt, a group of student accommodation buildings next to the englischen Garten. Although the buildings are old and a bit dirty, the rent is cheap and the community there is amazing. I took on the role of Stocksprecher (floor speaker), which meant going to monthly house self-administration meetings. While these were quite boring in content, they were a great opportunity to meet people from other floors, so I'd recommend taking on this sort of role to other Erasmus+ students. Studentenstadt has its own events planning group called the VKL, which organises two yearly events: a Christmas market and a music festival in the summer. This festival, called StuStaCulum, was one of the highlights of my year. I volunteered as part of the catering team with some of my friends, and because of this was allowed free entry to the festival and some drink tokens. This in itself was fun and I loved subsequently spending 4 days seeing all the local musicians and drinking Weissbier with my friends. On top of this, there are frequent events in each house, each house hosts an annual party and StudentenStadt has several facilities and passtimes, such as two nightclubs, a bakery, a communal garden, a gym and an I.T service, all run by residents. StudentenStadt has its own culture separate from that of Munich and I'm so grateful that I got to be a part of it.

## Challenges

Moving to Germany was unfortunately not an easy process. The immigration paperwork is so confusing that not even the immigration office seem to understand it. As a result of this Kafkaesque system, I did not receive my residence permit at the time I was promised it, and thus I was unable to leave Germany for Christmas. This was a very upsetting experience, and I felt homesick and isolated, but I had Christmas dinner with two friends from outside of Europe, and I distracted myself with a weekend in northern Germany. Another challenge was of course the German language. While I consider myself to be fairly confident in German, it was still difficult to understand my 8am lectures, my Bavarian flatmates and long boring letters. However, I think that this experience has greatly improved my German, and by the end of the year I was much more confident.

## Munich's Location in Europe

One of Munich's greatest appeals to me was its central position in Europe. Firstly, and perhaps most importantly, Munich is right next to the alps, which means you're always within reach of a hike in one of the most beautiful places in the world. Some of my favourite mountains I climbed are: Jochberg, because of its views of Kochelsee and Walchensee; Rotwand, because of its wide winter path and warm pub at the top; and Wankberg, because of its name. The hiking is probably what I'll miss most about Germany, and the main reason why I'd like to move back to the Alpine region.

Furthermore, Munich lies at the edge of central Europe, allowing quick access to Austria, Italy, Czechia, Hungary and more. During my year abroad I travelled to several countries, including those above, and made use of my Deutschlandticket to travel to Hamburg and Berlin. I think any Munich student should make the most of the city's location to travel to other countries, as it's much easier than from England, and each of them are beautiful and fun locations to visit. I also had a great time visiting other cities and towns in Bavaria and Baden-Wuerttemberg. Exploring Bavaria is great fun and allows you to see lots of artwork, churches and historical sites, as well as experiencing local art and of course beer. I would particularly recommend Nuremberg, Regensburg, Murnau, Augsburg and Chiemsee.

## Conclusion

While moving to Germany offers several challenges, I think that a year abroad in Munich is a great opportunity and a worthwhile experience. It's a chance to explore new academic subjects, learn more German, discover the local culture, make new friends and travel around Europe. If you're unsure as to whether or not you should spend your year abroad in Munich, I'd say go for it. I'll always treasure my memories of Munich and I'll always love the city.