

### Student Profiles

Isobel English Literature

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## ACCOMMODATION

Isobel I stayed with a family friend. However, some friends never found anywhere permanent to live - they got air bnb's and changed house every month or so (although some of them enjoyed this because they got to try living in different parts of the city). There are a lot of people looking for somewhere to live!! There is university accommodation, and on visiting it, it was nice, although very far outside the city, but in a very pretty area. Generally, it is much cheaper than Manchester (I was paying 200 euros), but the prices are increasing steadily. Normally you contact the person renting the flat directly, instead of going through agents, and leases are very flexible. Start looking a long time before you get there (although there are a lot of scams, so don't pay anything until you've seen it), otherwise you will end up living in a hostel for a month looking for a house).



## ACADEMICS

Isobel The academic system was very different. The seminars were either very formal (never first name basis with lecturers), or really informal, with students sat on the floor, wandering in and out of lectures etc. For every module, you are required to do a presentation. All of my modules were judged by one large essay at the end of the semester, which meant I spent the first couple of months not doing very much university work, and then the whole summer right up until the start of October frantically doing essays. I was in most days of the week. The modules themselves aren't assigned to years - so you might have masters students and first-year students in the same classes - which sometimes meant we were covering basic things. Also, the modules themselves change dramatically every year, so the modules which are on the course catalog for the year before won't be the same as the modules that you will be taking (and they only release the right ones after you have chosen your exchange university). The choice of modules is very varied, though obviously restricted by which ones are in English. However, they tend either to be very specific, so one book for the entire term, or very broad - so the lecture will be English from the Middle Ages to present day, and you can choose from a range of seminars e.g.. Modernism etc. They tend to make you write your own essay questions.

Unfortunately the module system was very, very chaotic. It's on several systems - some lectures want you to email them directly and then they sign you up, some want you to sign up on a system called campus management, some have blackboard, some don't so there is no extra material or reading. You have to select once you get there - they give you a lecture on how to do this. Usually, you try as many modules you can in the first week, and pick your modules the following week. They offer a free language course for all levels at the beginning.



## FINANCES

Isobel How did the cost of living compare to Manchester? Less expensive

You will need a couple of hundred pounds for things like your travel ticket and student's union membership (obligatory). I paid all of my rent upfront when I got there. No one I knew set up a bank account. I used the cash passport the university provided, and if not my Nationwide credit card - on which I was able to take cash out and make card payments without getting charged. However, generally, most places in Berlin don't accept card - they only take cash - so it's worth taking a large amount of cash (keeping it in different places), and using that instead of a card.



## LOCATION

Isobel The campus is outside the city, but easily accessible by train and bus. It took me an hour (on 3 trains) every day to get there, but it is normal to travel that to get to most places in Berlin, and for some friends it only took 15 minutes on a bus. The campus itself is quite spread out. The main building is a maze, but full of small quirky cafes (Vegetarian cafes etc.) and roof gardens. There is a much larger variety of people who attend university there compared to the UK, so people often brought in their children to university, or elderly parents. Someone used to bring their dog to one of my seminars. The lakes are only a couple of stops away on the train from the University, as are the botanical gardens - great for the summer!

Berlin is amazing. The city itself is split up into different regions, each one is very different (then there is the East/West split). Everything is connected by trains and an underground (for which the Uni gives you a pass). There is a lot of travelling because Berlin is huge and everything is really far away. I lived there for 5 months and there are still places I want to go, things I want to see! Just a couple of the things I did - underground tours of cold war bunkers, swam in lakes, free performances at the Berliner Philharmonie, flea and food markets (especially the Bear pit karaoke every Sunday at Mauer park (sounds weird but people come from all over the world to go, and we ended up going every Sunday)), art galleries, the museums on Museum Island, walked around the botanical gardens, visited Churches and the Reichstag, roof top bars covered with plants, outdoor cinemas, travelled to Prague and other German cities, river trips, festivals in the street (the entire city takes to the streets, with floats and music and dancing). No matter what you are interested in, you can do it in Berlin. Every day is an adventure and an opportunity to try something new, and I don't think you can go anywhere better (although the weather varied continuously between stiflingly hot and torrential rain).



## TRANSPORT

*Isobel*

The transport system was amazing. You are required to pay a couple of hundred euros before you go to the students union for becoming a member of the union, and your travel ticket. Your travel ticket lets you travel anywhere in and just outside Berlin on buses, trains and trams.



## MEDICINE & HEALTH

*Isobel*

The medical system is odd. You can sign up to any number of doctors (you just take your passport), and generally you refer yourself to specialists. There is a much greater emphasis on alternative therapy and medicine there.



## PACKING TIPS

*Isobel*

Take both hot and cold clothing. A good raincoat - the rain is very hard there. A portable plug converter. Get a contract on your phone which gives you free calls to anyone in the EU - really worth it!



## TOP TIPS

*Isobel*

1. When you get there, talk to everyone, try everything, and spend as much time exploring as you can before university starts - do as many things as possible, every day. Especially, go on all the Erasmus trips and events. It was the people I met from all over the world who ended up being the best thing about my experience. Also, make friends from different countries and then you can go visit them all.
2. Start your essays as early as possible, otherwise you will have no summer.
3. Travel to other parts of Europe - it was 15 euros return by bus to Prague for a weekend! I wish I had travelled more.
4. Submit a provisional learning agreement before you go, and change it when you get there. I didn't, and it meant that, because you only receive your grant once all the documentation has been submitted, I had no money for the first month which was very stressful.
5. Take a language course - it's free and taught by native speakers!! Speak as much German as possible.