

# European Summer School 2024

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## PURPOSE

My study abroad experience in Germany was a time of discovery and growth, where I explored new subjects and cultures, learned a lot about myself, and experienced a different way of life. My main goals were to develop a deeper cultural awareness, understand life as a student in a different country, and build lasting relationships with my international peers. As a business management major, I knew that understanding different cultures and being able to adapt to new environments is key to my future career. This trip was an opportunity to step out of my comfort zone, live independently, and experience the nuances of German culture firsthand.

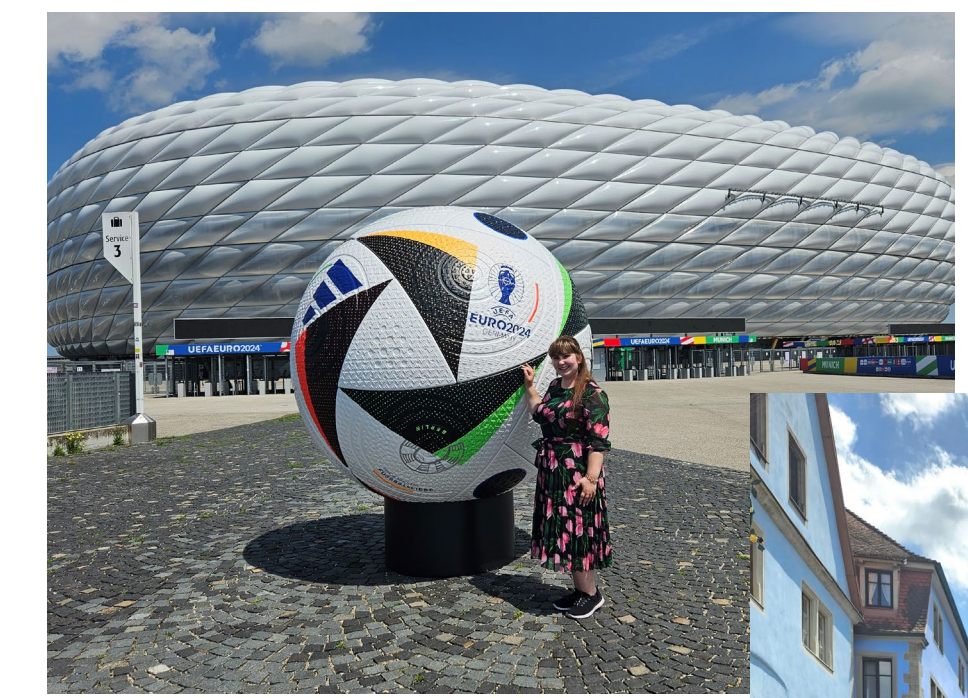


## INITIAL IMPRESSIONS AND INSIGHTS

Landing in Bielefeld, Germany, felt like stepping into a familiar yet intriguingly different world. At first glance, life seemed pretty similar to home. However, the more I immersed myself, the more I realized how unique German culture really is. From the surprising prevalence of free body culture to the Sunday law that requires most businesses to close, every day was a lesson in understanding and appreciating new norms. Even something as simple as paying for public restrooms offered insights into the local way of life. During my time at Hochschule Bielefeld (HSBI), I attended various lectures and participated in International Week, which allowed me to interact with professors and students from around the world. These experiences taught me the importance of doing cultural research beforehand, which helped me blend in and communicate more effectively with my German peers.

## CULTURAL EXPLORATION

Exploring Bielefeld and beyond was a significant part of my experience. I visited historical sites like Sparrenburg Castle, the Bielefeld Botanical Gardens, and Externsteine in the Teutoburg Forest. Our trip to Berlin included visits to the Bundestag, Brandenburg Gate, the Wall Museum, and Sachsenhausen Concentration Camp, enriching my understanding of Germany's history. But it wasn't just about visiting landmarks. Living in Germany provided numerous cultural revelations. I learned about the country's unique customs, such as the common practice of serving beer in university cafeterias. Additionally, learning to adapt to Germany's complex recycling practices and dealing with Deutsche Bahn's punctuality issues taught me a lot about daily life there.

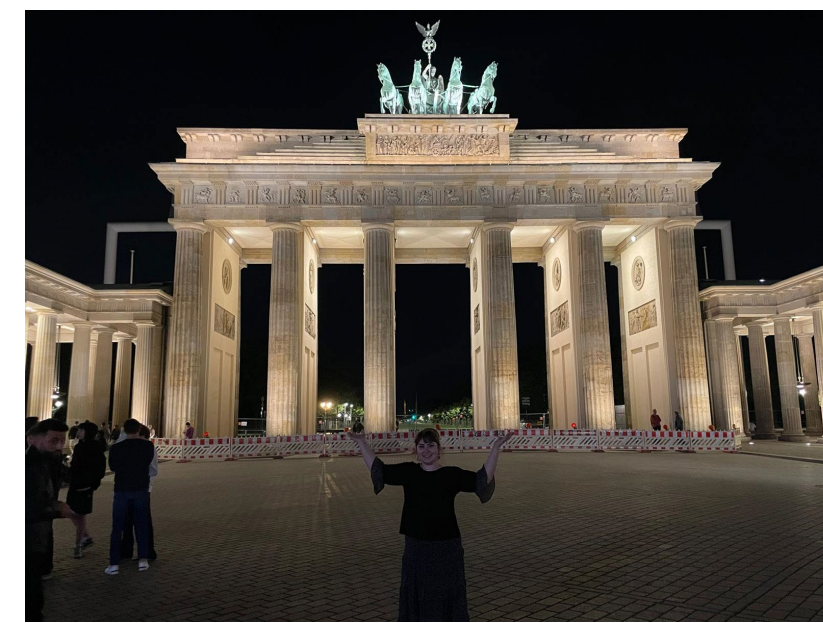


## PERSONAL GROWTH

On a personal level, the trip taught me independence, financial management, and the importance of adaptability. One of the most significant lessons I learned was the value of flexibility and spontaneity. Initially, I struggled with the lack of a clear itinerary and the need to make quick decisions without prior planning. However, this experience taught me to embrace uncertainty and adapt to changing circumstances, which proved invaluable during group projects and solo travels. For example, my solo trip to Switzerland, despite initial hesitation, turned out to be a rewarding adventure that boosted my confidence and expanded my comfort zone.

## PRE-DEPARTURE QUESTIONS

- How do the academic and social experiences of German students differ from those in the U.S.?
- How does daily life in Germany compare to my expectations and pre-trip research?
- Will I have the skills and confidence required to live independently in a foreign country, and how can a study abroad program help me develop these abilities?



## SOCIAL INTERACTIONS

Forming connections with fellow students was a crucial part of my journey. My roommates and I bonded through daily activities and travels, creating a support system that made my stay more enjoyable. Engaging in discussions with German students opened my eyes to their passion and involvement in topics like sustainability and politics, which was quite different from what I was used to back home. The local German students' hospitality and our shared experiences fostered a warm sense of community.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

For future students considering a study abroad program, I highly recommend thorough pre-departure research on the host country's culture, norms, and political landscape. This preparation will ease the transition and enhance your ability to engage meaningfully with locals. Once there, immerse yourself fully in the local culture, from trying traditional foods to exploring off-the-beaten-path locations. Additionally, be open to flexibility and spontaneous decisions, as these moments often lead to the most memorable and impactful experiences. Stay open-minded and embrace the differences you encounter, as these will be the most valuable lessons.

