

**FU-BEST (Berlin European Studies)**

**Program**

**Semester / Academic Year in Berlin**

**Student Guide**

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## **WELCOME LETTER from Director Dr. Dirk Verheyen**

Dear FU-BEST participant:

Welcome to the Berlin European Studies Program, brought to you by Freie Universität Berlin (FU)! I am excited that you will join us for what I am confident you will find to be a stimulating and rewarding experience in one of Europe's most fascinating cities.

Berlin is a wonderful city in which to live and study, with countless historical, political, economic, and cultural features and sites that await your exploration. It is a city undergoing a dramatic transformation, ever since the notorious Berlin Wall's demise in 1989, Germany's reunification in 1990, and the parliament's decision in 1991 to re-locate itself and most of the government from Bonn to Berlin by the turn of the century. This re-location process is now basically completed, and the city is bustling not only with politicians, civil servants, and interest groups, but also with countless people attracted to Berlin's unique cultural vibrancy. Many construction cranes still dot Berlin's skyline, as a dizzying array of often striking architectural projects transform the historically scarred city's physical profile. Berlin is also a fascinating "hinge-city," located strategically on the former dividing line between east and west in Europe and subject to multiple cultural influences as a result.

The Freie Universität (FU), founded in 1948 with considerable U.S. support, is located in the southwest of the city, in the former "West-Berlin." It is here that you will have your academic home. Utilizing the city's superb public transportation network, you will be able to explore both Berlin and the surrounding area (the state of Brandenburg) to the fullest.

Please note the official starting date for each semester, as communicated to you once you have been accepted into the program: you **MUST** be on-site in Berlin no later than this day! On the starting day of the program, you will be transferred to your furnished studio apartment or picked up by your host-family (depending on which housing option you selected). Your host-family will tend to be located 30-45 minutes from the Freie Universität by public transportation; the apartments are about 30 minutes by bus/metro from the university.

As you prepare for departure to Berlin, make good use of the "Quick checklist" provided in this Student Guide! And please remember: always consult the program's website with its extensive information – [www.fubest.org](http://www.fubest.org).

In the course of the summer (in case of the Fall semester) or in November/December (in case of the Spring semester), you will be sent a copy of the Masterschedule for the semester. Key elements in the Masterschedule are the Orientation Days (with Welcome Dinner), the week-long excursion, the one-week mid-semester break, midterms and finals weeks, and the Farewell Dinner. Please note the end-dates of the semester as listed in the Masterschedule and communicated to you. Those in apartments who wish to stay on in Berlin for a few days or so after the formal end of the program should note that the apartments are available until December 22 in case of the Fall semester and through April in case of the Spring semester. Those in homestays might be able to stay with their family a bit beyond the formal end of the program, but that should be cleared with the host-family in a timely and diplomatic manner!

**In case you plan to have family or friends visit you in Berlin:** be aware that your responsibilities connected with this program take precedence, so avoid scheduling visits that

conflict with your class and/or excursion obligations! It is **not** permitted to have friends or relatives join you during excursions or field-trips, unless explicitly approved by the program.

You will receive all your textbooks, course readers, etc. on site, as part of your Program Fee. Barring unforeseen circumstances, all classes will be held in the same location, in the same building in which the program office is located as well. You will be registered with the FU, giving you access to the university library, food services, intramural sports activity, etc.

Perhaps not all of your questions will have been answered once you finish reading this Student Guide. If there is something you wish to discuss which I have not covered, check first on our website (or with the relevant staff and/or faculty on your home campus, if it is an issue that concerns things back home). Also, once you are formally admitted to the program, you will be prompted to sign up at [www.distributed-campus.org](http://www.distributed-campus.org) and in doing so gain access to loads of vital information there as well. If, after that, you are still not sure, feel free to get in touch with me.

Before you know it, you'll be on the plane en route to Berlin... Take the time to rest and to prepare yourself well. "Berlin ist eine Reise wert..." (Berlin is worth a trip...) is a well-known saying in Germany. I am confident that your experience here will cause you to agree!

"All the BEST,"

Dr. Dirk Verheyen  
Director

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## **BEFORE YOU LEAVE**

This guide introduces you to the Berlin program and advises you on what to bring, what to expect, and what to do when you are on-site. Keep an open mind and a sense of humor. Basically, your experience will be what you make of it – try to make it as German as you can. Be brave enough to reach beyond your own country's customs and creature comforts as you explore the rich culture and beauty of this exciting and changing city.

We do not need to convince you of the benefits of study abroad, nor do we want to "map out" your semester in this guide. Your semester abroad will be your own unique experience to discover. In writing this guide, our aim is to provide you with pre-departure information geared toward preparing you for an adventure of a lifetime. Read through this guide carefully, making the most of all the information and advice it offers.

One of the biggest regrets that many study abroad students have is their lack of research and preparation before departure. Your study abroad experience is an investment in your education, money, time away from loved ones, as well as your future. As the weeks draw closer to your departure, think about preparing your mind for the journey, as well as your suitcase. A few hours spent researching the history and culture of your host country will pay off in a few short weeks, we promise! The more you prepare now, the better adjusted you will be when you arrive, and the more you will learn about your host culture and yourself. At the end of this guide is a list of suggested reading and viewing.

For many students, this semester abroad will be your first opportunity to live and travel in another country. You will soon notice the distinction between „living“ abroad and „traveling.“ If you have left your home country before for a short trip, you will have already had an experience in making yourself understood in a different language or in navigating around an unfamiliar city. As you live in Berlin for the semester, however, you will get the insider view on German culture through trips to the post office, the corner market, little towns nearby, the hair dresser's, the doctor's office, etc. It can be frustrating at times to leave your comfort zone linguistically and culturally. It's difficult to navigate German systems when public transportation is delayed and crowded and when bureaucracy at the post office or train station seems to be incomprehensible. There are many benefits to a long-term stay abroad. During your time abroad, you will develop a routine, get to know the city, and even be equipped to give tourists directions! The challenge is learning to adapt. The reward is learning a new culture, and learning about your own culture.

Your semester will be both a joy and a challenge. FU-BEST aims for it to be an excellent learning experience. Our advice to you is that you keep an open mind and learn to be flexible. Germany is a beautiful country bursting with cultural and historical riches. Take advantage of the opportunity to live abroad, and make a big effort to „do as the Germans do.“

Begin preparing yourself for the fact that things are going to be different in Germany. Some things in your daily life are going to be „better“ than at home and some are going to be „worse.“ You will miss some things that you like, but you will also come to like new things that you can have in Germany/Europe but that you can't find back home. Keep in mind that you are the guest and it is up to you to conform to the customs and living habits in Germany/Europe. Neither Germany nor Europe will change for you. You may have to modify your expectations about the lifestyles, habits, and customs of Europeans. You will certainly encounter frustrations and you will go through an adjustment period. But that is part of what this experience is all about, and you will become a better person as a result.

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## **STUDENT RESPONSIBILITIES**

The FU-BEST program is an academic program, involving an academic community. Although we recognize the importance and attractiveness of personal travel in Europe during the program, your academic obligations will always come first in this program. Class attendance and participation in field-trips and excursions are mandatory. As a student in this community, you can expect to be treated as an adult but you are also expected to behave as an adult. You must respect the rights of your fellow students, the staff, the faculty, and all individuals with whom you come in contact. Remember that you are a guest of the Freie Universität (FU), enjoying the status of

visiting student. Exercise due respect for the property of the FU and for the rights of all individuals whom you encounter there.

Keep in mind at all times that you are residing in a foreign country. You are subject to the same laws that apply to all residents of Germany and **not** to the laws of your home country. German laws are likely to be different from those of your own country in many instances. Please remember that if you violate the law and find yourself under arrest for any reason, there is little or nothing that your university, the FU-BEST Director, or anyone else associated with FU-BEST can do on your behalf. Remember also that in these circumstances, your country's embassy in Berlin can do little more than recommend a local lawyer for you. It cannot intercede with the German government on your behalf and it cannot get you out of trouble.

With respect to your private life, FU-BEST is neither eager nor able to regiment your behavior. You are free to exercise your own judgment, drawing upon your own values in the personal choices that confront all of us as adults. However, the personal choices that you make could have a negative impact on others and tarnish the reputation of our academic community as a whole. If it becomes necessary, the Director will exercise his authority to dismiss you from this program in the event of your academic delinquency or if you behave in a manner that is detrimental to yourself, to your fellow students or to the program. The Berlin staff wants you to take full advantage of all the opportunities offered to you in this great city, but at the same time we remind you to always employ wisdom and discretion in your personal conduct. We are confident that you will do so and that we will all enjoy a great semester in Berlin.

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## ARRIVAL INSTRUCTIONS

You are expected to arrive in Berlin no later than the official starting date, as communicated to you upon admission. Please provide contact and travel information to the FU-BEST office in Berlin by e-mail in a timely manner, so that we can e-mail you any updated information regarding arrival procedures, if needed. Failure to do so may complicate your arrival in Berlin. Berlin has a first-rate and easy-to-use public transportation system. Since experience shows that students arrive at strongly varying times, please note that you will not be picked up at the airport or train station. Instead, you are expected to use public transportation or a taxi to come to the program office at the Freie Universität. Most of you will arrive at Berlin-Tegel Airport. Those coming to Berlin from elsewhere in Germany or Europe by train will generally arrive at Berlin Hauptbahnhof. Directions from the airport and central train station to the FU-BEST building are provided through [www.distributed-campus.org](http://www.distributed-campus.org), to which you will have access after you have been formally admitted to the program.

From the airport or the train station, you should go to the program's office at the Freie Universität, where you will be met by your host-family or taken to your apartment (depending on which housing option you choose). Pick-up by host-families is in the course of the afternoon, and apartment students will be transferred to their apartments in small groups throughout the arrival day.

If you arrive in Berlin **before** the program's official starting date, you need to make your own temporary housing arrangements. Do **not** count on being able to move in to your apartment or

your host-family's home before the official starting date. We recommend the following youth hostel:

Karl-Renner-Haus  
Ringstrasse 76-77  
D-12205 Berlin  
(in the Lichterfelde part of Berlin)  
Tel. +49-(0)30-83203913  
Fax +49-(0)30-83203911  
e-mail: [steglitz@naturfreundehaus-berlin.de](mailto:steglitz@naturfreundehaus-berlin.de)

If you know that you'll need housing before the official starting date, don't leave for Germany without first making a temporary lodging reservation, unless you expect to be adventurous! One night's stay (including breakfast) costs about 20-25 Euros.

### **DIRECTIONS:**

As pointed out above, FU-BEST is located at Brentanostraße 50, 12163 Berlin. The nearest U-Bahn (subway) station is Breitenbachplatz on the U3 line in the direction of Krumme Lanke.

Most of you will arrive by plane and at the airport called Berlin-Tegel. As noted above, you will NOT be met at the airport (or the train station, if you happen to arrive there; if traveling by train, you will most likely end up at Berlin Hauptbahnhof). Instead, you are expected to use public transportation or a taxi (your own choice) to come over to the program office. A taxi ride might cost anywhere around 25 Euros.

At Tegel airport, buy a regular 2.10 Euro AB ticket from the driver in bus 109 or X9. That's all you need for your whole trip down to the program office (transfers are included). Take either bus to the first stop, called Jakob-Kaiser-Platz. There you go down into the subway, line U7, and take it in the direction of Rudow. Get off at Fehrbelliner Platz and transfer to line U3 in the direction of Krumme Lanke. Get off at the station called Breitenbachplatz and exit the station through the middle exit (not the exits at either end of the platform).

Outside the station, turn right towards the traffic light, leaving the little Imbiss with snack food behind you. Across the street from the light, at the corner, you see, of all things, an undertaker (Bestattungen). Just past it, you can see the street sign for the Brentanostraße. Go there, turn right into the Brentanostraße, and walk about 400 yards until you reach number 50.

If you happen to arrive by train at Berlin Hauptbahnhof and want to use public transportation, buy a single 2.10 Euro AB ticket from one of the machines and board the S-Bahn in a westerly direction and get off at Berlin Zoologischer Garten. From there, take subway line U9 in the direction of Rathaus Steglitz. Get off at Spichernstraße and transfer to line U3 in the direction of Krumme Lanke. Get off at Breitenbachplatz and follow the directions given above. One ticket will be good for the entire trip, including transfers.

The FU-BEST office in the Brentanostraße 50 can be reached at +49-30-838 56582 or +49-30-838 57583. The director's mobile number is 0163-5525130, if dialed inside Germany, or +49-163-5525130, if dialed from outside Germany. In the US, add 011 in front of the 49; in other parts of Europe, add 00 in front of the 49.

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## REGISTRATION & PROGRAM STRUCTURE

Please familiarize yourself with all information and regulations at your own university regarding academic registration, beyond the paperwork you filled out and submitted to the FU-BEST office. You will have the customary Drop/Add options during the first week of the program in Berlin, but remember that switching courses in an overseas setting like Berlin is more complicated and at times simply impossible. Also keep in mind that changes in your course enrollment will usually require that you first obtain long-distance approval of such a changed course schedule from officials back home. Be sure that you registered for the proper German language section, especially if you have already taken some German language courses at your own institution. As always, communicate with your advisor! Unless you are a complete beginner in German, you will be tested by means of an online placement test prior to the semester's start in order to ensure that you end up in the proper language section.

Classes meet on a Monday-through-Thursday schedule, and four mandatory local field-trips are scheduled for specific Fridays. German language tends to be taught in the mornings, with non-language courses scheduled in the afternoons. Full schedule information will be available on the day of arrival at the latest. **Do not make any independent travel plans until you know for sure when the various mandatory elements of the program are scheduled.**

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## POST-BERLIN REGISTRATION & HOUSING

Registration materials for your "post-Berlin" semester back home can be sent to the Berlin office by your university, or perhaps all registration is taken care of via internet. Check with the appropriate office back home to find out what procedure(s) will be followed. We suggest meeting with your academic advisor prior to your departure to discuss your course schedule for the next semester. Bring a list of possible courses with you and/or check your school's website for the schedule of courses when it is time to register. This will make the registration process much less stressful.

In addition, it is strongly suggested that you take care of any required **pre-departure housing matters** for the "post-Berlin" semester as well. If you are planning on living on-campus when you return, make arrangements with a roommate before you leave. If the person you want to room with is going to be abroad as well, then pick someone to „squat“ for you during room draw. If you want to get off-campus housing, figure out the arrangements before you leave.

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## HOUSING IN BERLIN

There are two basic housing options in the FU-BEST program: a fully furnished single-occupancy studio apartment or a homestay. Please refer to the information about housing options in Berlin available on our website. Choose whatever you feel will suit you best, but make sure to keep an open mind vis-à-vis the cultural challenge that accompanies any living abroad, and don't expect everything to conform to your wildest dreams or imagination!

**PLEASE NOTE: Participants opting for apartment housing are required to provide credit card information as security deposit. See the application form for details.**

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## FOOD & MEALS

### Mensa

This is the name of the standard German university's food service. You will have daily access to this meal option during weekdays. The meals are truly inexpensive. You will receive a meal card for this facility during the initial Orientation and can put money on it as time goes by.

### Restaurants and additional food options

Food prices vary considerably, depending on one's tastes and standards, so it is hard to generalize here. Tipping in restaurants is minimal, as the tip is already included, along with taxes, in the bill. Leave about 1 Euro for every 10-15 Euros on the bill. Tips are never left on the table, but rather given directly to the waiter or waitress.

Berliners love to eat and drink. One usually seats him/herself in the restaurant, and in a crowded restaurant or bar it is perfectly acceptable to share a table with people already sitting there. Just ask "Ist hier noch frei?" (Is this free?). While you are not expected to talk to your table mates, it is a way to meet Germans.

There is an endless number of "reasonable to expensive" eating establishments in Berlin. And there are fast food stands (*Imbiss*) on many corners where a variety of *Würste* (sausages) and *Pommes* (french fries) can be quickly and inexpensively purchased. There are a huge number of *Döner Kebab* shops, featuring relatively inexpensive Turkish food. Throughout the city one can also find Thai, Mexican, Greek, Indian, Italian, French, American (Hard Rock Cafe), and vegetarian restaurants. Cafes are also very popular. They are abundant, frequently visited, and range in style from the upscale Viennese variety to those that appear to have put no money into the decor, but serve great espresso and have a diverse younger crowd.

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## SOCIAL & CULTURAL ISSUES

Berlin is a great place to spend a semester. It is a large and exciting city with interesting ethnic neighborhoods, any lifestyle you could wish for, and a great nightlife. One popular area is Kreuzberg, with a large Turkish population. Students will also find neighborhoods, particularly those in the former East, which are distinctly Berlin (for example, Prenzlauer Berg, around Käthe-Kollwitz-Platz). Building cranes still dominate parts of the landscape and are a constant reminder of the historic changes underway in the city. In many ways it is a unique and exciting time to be living in Berlin.

It would take more than a semester to take in all the city offers, so consider enrolling in FU-BEST for an entire academic year! Rich café life, first-class theater, fantastic opera, cabaret, world-class orchestras, interesting neighborhoods, lakes and rivers, an alternative art scene, and of course, years of history: Berlin just seems to have it all.

The Freie Universität is located in an area called Dahlem, which is a very pleasant, primarily residential part of the city. It is extremely well linked to the rest of Berlin (located approximately 30 minutes from the center of Berlin by U-Bahn, S-Bahn, and buses). At the U-Bahn station Dahlem-Dorf, on one edge of campus, is Königin-Luise-Strasse, with its small shops (bookstore, copy shop, *Apotheke*, a supermarket, card shop, florist, *döner kebab* shop, 3-4 restaurants, a post office, newspaper/magazine shop, STA travel agency, etc.). In addition, not far from campus (at the S-Bahn and U-Bahn stations Rathaus Steglitz – a mere 10-minute walk from the FU-BEST building) is the bustling Schloßstraße, a popular shopping street (including several shopping malls, department stores, cafés, a big electronics store, bookstores, and an internet café above Dunkin Donuts....).

Students will receive a map of the campus and surrounding area upon arrival in Berlin. **We urge you to purchase a copy of Berlin (Lonely Planet Travel Guides) as well as a comprehensive Berlin city map.** Filled with background and practical information, the Lonely Planet book is a very valuable resource for your semester, and you will find yourself turning to it again and again.

### **Tips from an American living in Berlin (but also useful for non-Americans!)**

This section is written from the perspective of an American who moved to Berlin some years ago. She wanted to share some of her insights with you on what she has learned and observed since arriving in Berlin. Even if you are not a U.S. citizen, you might find her observations worthwhile to consider.

"I have learned, among other things, to be punctual for both meetings and dinner invitations. I have learned to fully appreciate dogs; they are deeply loved in Berlin (although dogpiles are a nuisance in many parts of the city...). Most Berlin dogs are well behaved, tend to be of the large variety, and are commonly spotted in cafés in the summertime. In fact, there is one beach in the Grunewald reserved just for dogs and their owners!

I have learned to be more direct and a bit more assertive when speaking to Germans. Directness is a characteristic not to be mistaken for rudeness. In other words, a "toilet" is a "toilet," not a "restroom," a "powder room," a "wash room," or a "ladies/men's room."

Along the same lines, I have learned it is wise to carry some coins with you, since frequently one must pay to use the public toilets (which may be difficult to find at times).

I have learned to shop with far less "service with a smile." This should not be taken as rudeness. They just want to give the service they think you want, with a minimum of distracting nonsense. On the other hand, when entering a store and many restaurants, one should always give a nice greeting ("guten Morgen" in the a.m., for example). I have also learned to bag my own groceries, and bring my own bags.

**I have learned to take the initiative to introduce myself when I want to meet people.** Germans are not outgoing in this respect, but are very friendly once you get to know them. I have also learned not to assume I can call people by their first names. Titles are frequently used with strangers and one's elders.

I have gotten used to using the 24-hour clock (10:00 p.m. is 22:00), centigrade, and the metric system. I have learned that most Germans, at least in the former West, speak much more English than they first let on. Of course, it is appreciated if one makes an effort to speak German. I have learned to be more tolerant of smokers, who make up the majority (at least it seems to me!). However, smoking is prohibited in public transportation, on train platforms, and in most restaurants. During winter months, contact-lens wearers with sensitive eyes who plan to frequent bars might want to consider bringing along a pair of glasses when they go out.

Lastly, I have learned that one need not necessarily feel "unsafe" when living in a big city. Of course there is some crime, but little is of a violent nature."

## Culture Shock

The medical community still has not developed a vaccination for that most difficult of all maladies experienced by the traveler: *CULTURE SHOCK*.

The symptoms usually appear when a person is uprooted from the safe and secure surroundings of home and transplanted – voluntarily or otherwise – to a totally different cultural setting. The majority of people residing in a foreign country for an extended amount of time encounter physical and psychological reactions to an unfamiliar culture.

Culture shock is a rite of passage for many people – a time when the initial newness of foreign surroundings wears off and the realization sets in that you are going to be in this situation for a long time. Frustration, loneliness, homesickness, depression, irritability, and loss of appetite are the major signs of this „traveler’s disease.“

It’s always the little things that begin to threaten your sense of stability and well-being that cause culture shock:

- the way purchases are made
- people’s mannerisms and how to respond to them
- distinguishing between serious and amusing statements
- using different kinds of transportation
- attitudes towards life values
- doing laundry

- food shopping

Some symptoms of severe culture shock are:

- homesickness (longing to be where things are familiar)
- compulsive eating and excessive drinking
- irritability and excessive need for sleep
- boredom (no discovery of new aspects of the culture)
- hostility and stereotyping of native people
- avoiding contact with natives
- inability to perform work or study efficiently
- tension and conflict with those around you
- unexplained crying and physical problems

Fortunately, not everyone experiences all the above symptoms. The majority of people adjust to the local culture reasonably well. They experience some of the symptoms, but are able to recognize and work their way through the problems successfully. For those who don't, it is important to know that some degree of culture shock is inevitable and can occur to anyone.

Almost everyone who has lived abroad goes through four stages of personal adjustment, regardless of what country they previously lived in:

At first, you experience the initial excitement of being in a new culture. You hold very high expectations and an extremely positive attitude toward the host country and people. You focus mainly on similarities between the cultures.

Next, irritability and hostility to people and customs causes you to focus on differences in every aspect of your life. Minor incidents are often blown out of proportion and you react in a very negative way.

Gradually, you orient yourself and begin to notice some of the cultural clues missed before. The crisis stage has disappeared. Your outlook brightens and things become comfortable and familiar.

Finally, your attitude changes and you are able to function confidently in both cultures. You begin to enjoy different ways of doing things.

YOU HAVE BECOME BI-CULTURAL.

We encourage you to discuss any discomfort or difficulty resulting from culture shock with those around you in Berlin: your fellow students, the FU-BEST Director and his office colleagues, your teachers, and/or your host-family.

Also, expect to experience some form of re-entry culture shock after the program, when you return to your home country! There is nothing wrong with you when you find yourself having some trouble readjusting!

Useful website: [www.worldwide.edu/travel\\_planner/culture\\_shock.html](http://www.worldwide.edu/travel_planner/culture_shock.html)

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## PERSONAL BUDGET CONSIDERATIONS

**Credit cards** are not (yet) used in Germany nearly as widely as in the U.S. and some other countries. With the exception of better restaurants, MANY establishments will only take cash. It is always best to ask if credit cards are accepted before making purchases to avoid embarrassing situations. Large department stores generally take credit cards.

To obtain cash, you are normally able to use an ATM card from your own home bank. Avoid making cash withdrawals with a credit card, since the fee and interest rates tend to be very high. Traveler's checks have all but disappeared. Furthermore, one can buy Euros at many banks, at change bureaus (*Wechselstuben*), or even at large department stores. Commissions are fairly standard, so no need to spend much time shopping around. Banks will usually advance cash on major credit cards, such as VISA or MasterCard, but, as noted, this involves considerable fees.

Unless one has regular bills that need to be paid to someone in Germany, students will probably not need to open a bank account. Personal checks, as Americans know them, are virtually nonexistent.

Prices in Germany are generally comparable to or even, for many items, slightly below U.S. prices. As for other countries, we cannot give general indicators here. In the end, it is always difficult to generalize about these matters. Your standard budget during a semester at home may suit you generally well in Germany, but if you add in any significant personal travel and related expenses (souvenirs, concerts, etc.), you may wish to ensure yourself additional financial resources.

Movies seen Thursday through Sunday cost about 8 Euros. Monday through Wednesday are the popular nights, however, as admission is only about 5 Euros (note that prices often vary among movie theaters). Movies in English are designated OV or OMU. There are discounts available for opera and theater shows. For example, all unsold tickets for any opera at the Komische Oper can be purchased after 12 noon on the day of the performance at half the normal price. Student tickets at the Staatsoper, available right before the performance, cost about 10 Euros.

Dry-cleaning is on average somewhat more expensive than in the U.S. Clothing and most other consumer items can be found at prices spanning a considerable spectrum. It is therefore impossible to generalize here.

Hours were recently liberalized and many stores now remain open until 8:00 p.m. (instead of the usual 6:00 p.m.) on weekdays, and until 4:00 p.m. or even 8:00 p.m. (instead of 2:00 p.m.) on Saturdays. It takes time especially for many Americans to get used to the idea that stores, except for mini-markets in gas stations and a few shops at the rail stations and airports, are closed on Sunday throughout Germany.

For those wishing to take home souvenirs, popular items include the traditional beer mug, cutlery, wooden toys, etc. Such items can be found at Christmas markets (*Weihnachtsmärkte*) in November/December, in case you spend the fall semester in Berlin. One tends to find more unique items when outside Berlin, in the smaller cities or towns. It is also possible to find some interesting things at Berlin's popular flea markets.

In conclusion, when it comes to personal finances, budget realistically. On the one hand, you will almost certainly spend more than during a normal semester back home. On the other hand, unless you are independently wealthy or intend to win big in a lottery soon, your means will have some limit. This is particularly important when planning independent travel: aside from your academic obligations (otherwise known as homework), which would interfere with unlimited travel (especially during weekends), keep a realistic eye on your "financial well" and don't let it run dry early during the semester!

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## CITY TRANSPORTATION

Public transportation in Berlin is excellent. There is an extensive, easy-to-use network of buses, U-Bahn (primarily underground train system), and S-Bahn (part of the German rail system, primarily above-ground). **As part of your FU-BEST Program Fee, you will receive a pass for use of the public transportation system throughout Berlin, primarily tied to your Freie Universität student ID card.**

Bus stops are indicated by a sign with a green capital H inside a yellow circle. U- and S-Bahn stops have signs with a large capital U or S. They are all safe, clean, efficient, run every 5-20 minutes (depending on location and line), and operate until a bit past midnight. Thereafter, regular night bus service is available; or one walks or takes a taxi. Night life begins late in Berlin. One can easily find much to do at 2 a.m., if so inclined. It is usually easier to find a taxi stand than to hail a taxi from the street in central Berlin. Rides cost 2-3 Euros as a base price, then costs vary according to distance and time. Night buses run all night throughout the city, frequenting each stop about every hour.

The commute between the FU and several of the popular areas – Mitte, Prenzlauer Berg, Kreuzberg, the Ku'damm, Savignyplatz, etc. – usually will take about 30 minutes, but can range from 20 to 45 minutes.

For information regarding public transportation in Berlin, go to [www.bvg.de](http://www.bvg.de).

Another transport option worth mentioning is a bike. There are special paths, with their own miniature traffic lights, specifically for bikers between the road and the sidewalk in much of this biker-friendly city. Bikes can be taken onto the U- and S-Bahn (you need to pay a supplemental fare when doing so, however). There is a network of paths in the Grunewald. This is a fantastic forest with lakes located 15-20 minutes (by bike) from the FU, especially great for mountain/all-terrain bikes (not to be missed by anyone interested in nature).

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## INDEPENDENT TRAVEL

For travel outside Berlin, and outside Germany (Prague, for example, is only 4 hours away), German trains (*Deutsche Bahn*) are great – efficient, comfortable, stress-free. *Bahncards* (railcards),

which take 50% off domestic fares for a year from date of issue, are available. For those aged 26 or younger, the Card costs about 70 Euros per year. Another great deal is the *Schönes Wochenende* ("pleasant weekend") ticket. One ticket, priced at about 18 Euros, is good for two persons traveling together Saturday and Sunday on local/regional trains (*Nahverkehrszüge*). It is not good on the IC, ICE, EC, or IR trains (the fast trains, in other words), but still a useful and inexpensive ticket for a weekend jaunt to a destination a few hours from Berlin, of which there are many. For train information in English, call 01805-996633, once in Berlin, or check [www.bahn.de](http://www.bahn.de). Fares change over time, so the above information may not quite match reality while you are in Germany/Berlin!

Many students have told us that the **ISIC (International Student Identity Card)** is helpful, even essential. It can be purchased at STA Travel offices (also in Berlin).

According to [Hostelling International Europe](http://www.hostellinginternational.com), Germany has about 622 **youth hostels**, the largest network in the world. The individual hostels tend to be larger than average, and always have the best of standards. Priority is given to those under 27, and in Bavaria there is a maximum age limit of 26, except for group leaders and families. Most hostels have family rooms. German Hostels are rated, and the price varies according to the category. The average price will hover around 20-25 Euros per night.

If you plan on traveling extensively, whether in Germany or other European nations, we recommend purchasing the International Youth Hostel Card. This allows you to stay at Youth Hostels all over Europe at reduced rates. Access the website at [www.iyhf.org](http://www.iyhf.org). You may also be able to buy this card while you are abroad. Budget hotels, pensions (small family-run inns), university dorms, and *Zimmer frei* (B&B concept) are plentiful, but they are slightly to considerably more expensive alternatives. Regardless of where one is staying, it is common practice in Germany to ask to see the room before paying for the night.

For other reduced student rates, you can also look at [www.studentenpreise.de](http://www.studentenpreise.de) to find cheap rates for phone and internet service, travel, movies, museums, theater, and much more (in German).

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## HEALTH INSURANCE & MEDICAL ISSUES

FU-BEST does not offer its own health/accident insurance and thus requires each student to have personal medical insurance that will cover expenses abroad. Students may choose to accept their university's policy or continue with their own policy. However, be sure to review the policy to ensure that it covers treatment abroad. When treatment is received in Berlin, you will have to pay out-of-pocket. When seeking reimbursement from the insurance carrier, remember to get translatable itemizations of the treatment received. Check with the study abroad staff at your school on what arrangements are to be made here.

Health is a major concern for most travelers. It can be difficult to deal with medical problems when you are in a different country because of differences in medications as well as the medical system. The Lonely Planet website has a section devoted to health (<http://www.lonelyplanet.com/health/>) with information for pre-departure measures that you can take as well as how to deal with any health issues that may arise while you are abroad.

The FU-BEST office will provide you with medical information when you arrive. Each student will also receive a list of emergency numbers at the arrival orientation.

Most doctors will expect payment at the time of service (the student will receive a receipt to submit to his/her insurance company), while others will allow patients to wait until billed. Most bills are mailed out quarterly. Students should make all payments prior to leaving Germany, so that doctors are not made to track down students abroad. Most consultations will run between 25-75 Euros during office hours. Dental care tends to be somewhat expensive. If you think you may need work done in the near future, then we suggest having it done before coming to Germany.

Pharmacies (*Apotheke*) frequently do not carry the same brands of medicine as you might find at home. It is suggested that all current prescriptions be filled for the length of time you will be in Germany. There is at least one *Apotheke* open 24 hours every day in each neighborhood. If you wear glasses and/or contact lenses, be sure to bring along a copy of your prescription(s), in case you need it/them.

Berlin has three major university hospital centers, including Universitätsklinikum Benjamin Franklin in the Steglitz area, located at Hindenburgdamm 30. It provides quality medical care in every field.

For psychological help there is an American Hotline (0177-8141510). This is an outreach service for English-speakers offering emergency help 24 hours a day. Additional information on an English-speaking counselor is also contained in the information packet distributed during the Orientation.

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## SAFETY

By and large, Berlin is a fairly safe city. Crime rates are well below American big-city averages, for example. Yet it is always important to be careful and aware of your surroundings. A few tips are:

- Bring a money belt for safekeeping of documents and money.
- Use your inside pockets. Do not keep important valuables in your jacket's outer pockets or in your backpack.
- Keep your purse zippered shut, and try to hold it to your chest or worn across your body.
- Try to use ATM machines in banks only. Try not to take money out of an ATM on the open street by yourself unless absolutely necessary.
- Never carry more cash than you actually need for one day.
- Consider not carrying a credit card with you unless you are out shopping. If you only need one credit card, only carry one with you.
- Never carry your original passport with you unless you are traveling. It is good to carry a photocopy of your passport, however.
- Keep a copy of your credit card numbers and the phone numbers to cancel cards, should they be lost or stolen. Keep this info separate from your wallet.

- Beware of conspicuously friendly strangers. There are many schemes for robbing foreigners.
- Do not fall into a false sense of security.
- Be aware of your environment and use common sense at all times. Be careful, especially after dark.
- Bring a padlock to clip your bag to the seat during a train ride (this does not apply to subway rides).

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## **PACKING ADVICE**

Please pack all important documents, including your passport, travel documents, and program contact information in your carry-on luggage. It is also a good idea to pack one change of clothes in your carry-on. Please mark all of your luggage with both your home and FU-BEST program office contact information. You are allowed to take one carry-on bag with you, either a backpack that will fit under your seat or a larger bag that will fit in the over-head compartment.

It is best NOT to plan having a lot of stuff, such as clothing, sent to you in Germany through the mail, since many students have faced unpleasant bills from German customs officials. Just be realistic about what you need and about what you can/should bring!

Know that forgetting something is not the end of the world. There is little that you will not be able to find in Berlin. Pack an umbrella, rain gear, clothing for variable seasonal conditions as well as for occasions such as concerts or opera, and any medical prescriptions. Toiletry brands may differ from those in your home country, so you may want to pack your own.

110-volt U.S. appliances need a transformer in order to use 220-volt German/European current. An adaptor is needed as well to make the plug fit in the holes. It may be just as easy to buy a hair dryer or curling iron in Berlin. Clocks and other appliances which require 60-cycle current will not function properly even with a transformer. We suggest you bring a battery-powered clock to be on the safe side.

### **Quick checklist**

- passport (required); visa (if needed)
- ISIC card (recommended)
- IYIC card (recommended)
- prescriptions (eye and medical); extra medication (recommended)
- health/accident insurance (required)
- academic arrangements for post-Berlin semester (recommended)
- housing arrangements for post-Berlin semester (recommended)
- electrical transformer/adaptors (recommended)
- laptop computer with internal modem (highly recommended)
- Berlin book (Lonely Planet Travel Guides series) (recommended)

## **Clothing**

As for clothes, Berlin is a big city and on the street – ANYTHING GOES. There are neighborhoods where T-shirts, jeans, and piercings are common, and others where the women walk through parks in high heels and fur coats. Bring whatever you feel comfortable wearing.

Clothes for going out tend vary based on the occasion: jeans to some bars, dressier wear to others. There will be occasions where one will want to be more "formal" (opera, theater, museums, holiday events, etc.).

Keep in mind that you will be coming to Berlin in the fall and staying through the early winter (Fall semester) or in winter and staying into spring (Spring semester). Bring appropriate clothing to match the semester(s) in which you are participating. Also, it is important that you think about bringing VERSATILE clothing that can be mixed-and-matched with each other. This is especially good for when you go on trips and only have room for a few outfits in your backpack or suitcase.

You can check out the weather in Berlin by going to [www.wetter.com](http://www.wetter.com) or [www.dwd.de](http://www.dwd.de). If you have trouble thinking in Celsius, you can find temperature conversions at: <http://www.onlineconversion.com/temperature.htm>.

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## **POSTAL MATTERS & COMMUNICATIONS**

In Germany only ONE agency exists for your postal needs: the Deutsche Post, which you can easily recognize by its bright yellow color.

Postage: an airmail postcard overseas costs 1 Euro and a normal letter (up to 20 grams) 1.70 Euro.

Website tip: <http://www.deutschepost.de/dpag?xmlFile=828>. Go to “Produkte & Leistungen” and then to “Preise & Fakten Übersicht” to get an overview (in German) of postal rates.

Please note that the opening hours usually are from 9 a.m. to 6:30 p.m. from Monday to Friday and on Saturday from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m.

### **Receiving mail and packages:**

If you opted for a homestay, it is best to have all your mail sent there. If you opted for an apartment, consider having all your mail sent to the program building:

Your Name  
c/o FU-BEST Program  
FU Berlin  
Brentanostrasse 50  
12163 Berlin  
Germany

If someone is sending you a package or parcel, be aware of customs restrictions! It is best to have them write the following phrase on the box: "Persönliche Effekte / Gebrauchtwaren für Studienaufenthalt in Berlin". If customs officials suspect that import duties ought to be paid, you will receive a notice by mail and will be asked to go to the local customs office to pick up your package/parcel and possibly pay an import fee.

## Telephone:

**International phone calls require the use of international access codes and country codes.** The international access code when calling abroad from the U.S. is 011, in Europe it is 00. This is then followed by the country code (1 in the case of the U.S. and 49 in the case of Germany, for example). After that come a city or area code and then the rest of the number. So when calling the U.S. from Berlin, for example, dial the optional money-saving prefix (see under "Call-by-call" below), followed by 00 + 1 + area code + number. City codes in many European countries start with a 0, which is only used when calling from one city to another inside a particular country but is dropped when an international call is made. For example, Berlin's city code is 030. You would use the full 030 when calling Berlin from, say, Munich, but you would only use 30 (after 011 and 49) when calling Berlin from the U.S.

Calling to Berlin from the U.S. requires the code for Germany +49 and the area code for the city Berlin (0)30. When you call Berlin from somewhere else in Germany, you have to dial 030.

Again, calling abroad from Germany: dial 00 + country code (e.g. 1 for USA) + area code + number.

Call-by-call: it is much cheaper to make long-distance/overseas calls via a call-by-call number. The rates of several of those private providers are worth checking out because there are great differences and you can save a lot of money by doing some research!

[www.billiger-telefonieren.de](http://www.billiger-telefonieren.de)

[www.billiger-surfen.de](http://www.billiger-surfen.de)

List at the bottom of the page in the section called *Wirtschaft* of the Berliner Zeitung, which comes daily to the FU-BEST building.

Phone number directories with search engines can be found online.

[www.dastelefonbuch.de](http://www.dastelefonbuch.de) (White Pages)

[www.ods.gelbeseiten.de/yp/quick/yp](http://www.ods.gelbeseiten.de/yp/quick/yp) (Yellow Pages)

Important emergency phone numbers in Berlin: [www.berlin-tourist-information.de/english/berlin-infos/e bi stadinfos berlin-q-z.php](http://www.berlin-tourist-information.de/english/berlin-infos/e_bi_stadinfos_berlin-q-z.php)

For those of you interested in obtaining a cell phone: most participants wait until they get to Berlin to purchase an inexpensive cell phone.

Another telephone option is to bring a calling card. They are convenient and can easily be used in both Germany and the rest of Europe. The only real negative aspect is that one is charged a minimum of \$2.50 with AT&T when calling the U.S., for example, even if one only gets the

answering machine. **Alternatively, and importantly, you can purchase low-priced phone cards in Berlin, sold at a range of small shops across the city. Phone rates from Germany to the U.S., for example, are currently lower than the other way around.**

Most public telephones in Germany operate with older style telephone cards rather than money. Such cards, which are different from the cards described in the previous paragraph, can be purchased at post offices, gas stations, *Telefonläden*, many stationary stores and tobacco/newspaper stands for various Euro amounts. The value of your card is reduced according to the length of your call. Although there are still some coin-operated public phones, you won't find them when you really need one.

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## COMPUTERS

Students who own laptops are urged to bring them. We have installed wireless access in our program building, enabling you to access the internet for free by using your own laptop. We also have several regular computers in place, along with a copier/printer you can use (not free-of-charge). The apartments do not feature telephone or internet connections; a cost-effective wireless internet connection can be purchased directly by each participant at his/her own expense at a nearby office/shop, using information provided by the program. Most participants buy a cell phone once they are in Berlin. The FU-BEST program assumes no responsibility for telephone or internet connections in the apartments.

There is, of course, also always the option of utilizing one of several Internet-Cafés in Berlin for internet access. A popular place is Internet-Café "easyEverything," Kurfürstendamm 224 (tel. 88707970), where you can surf for about 2 Euros for every 50 minutes. Another "easyEverything" location can be found in the Schloßstraße (Schloßstraße station on U-Bahn line 9; above the Dunkin' Donuts store....). There are additional internet cafés throughout the city. Consult an electronics store at home to discuss issues such as electrical transformers and adapters.

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## GLBT ISSUES

FU-BEST students in Berlin will experience conflicting messages about the acceptance of GLBT individuals. There is a thriving GLBT social scene in Berlin (there are many clubs, organizations, and magazines tailored especially for GLBT individuals) and students can expect to see open expression of alternative sexual orientations. There are GLBT radio stations and consistent representation of GLBT issues in the media. For GLBT information/help in Berlin, contact any of the following: Lesbenberatung (Lesbian Counseling Center), Kulmer Strasse 20a in the Schöneberg area, tel. 2152000; Schwulenberatung (Gay Counseling Center), Mommsenstrasse 45, tel. 32703040; Schwules Überfalltelefon (Gay Attack Hotline), tel. 2163336; Mann-O-Meter, Motzstrasse 5, tel. 2168008, [info@mann-o-meter.de](mailto:info@mann-o-meter.de)/[www.mann-o-meter.de](http://www.mann-o-meter.de), for general info (open Mon.-Sat. 5-10 p.m. and on Sundays until 9 p.m.). If you go to <http://www.studieren-in-berlin.de>

[deutschland.de/english/4.86.325.html](http://deutschland.de/english/4.86.325.html) and click on „Gays and Lesbians,“ you can access short articles about GLBT issues in Germany.

Legally, Germany has had one of the worst records in Europe for providing equal rights for GLBT individuals. Although a new liberal coalition government, which promised equal rights for GLBT individuals, came into power in 1998, federal legislation protecting GLBT rights (including an anti-discrimination law) and covering same sex partnership recognition is only now gradually emerging. East Germany was always more sympathetic to GLBT concerns and Berlin's regionally more progressive GLBT laws are symptomatic of this historical trend. Be aware that multiple forms of harassment of GLBT individuals are still common in many areas of Germany and protection is most accorded to gay men, not lesbians. Although in Berlin attitudes towards sexual orientation will appear very open, you should carefully negotiate each setting and „test the waters“ to ensure safety.

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## **DISTRIBUTED CAMPUS: A COMPREHENSIVE INFO SOURCE**

As a FU-BEST participant, you will have access to a unique source of information created at and by the Freie Universität, known as Distributed Campus (DC). Please visit the DC website ([www.distributed-campus.org](http://www.distributed-campus.org)) and register there as a new participant after you have received your formal admission to the program. You will then gain access to all the information and options (including German language modules to work on your language skills) offered by the DC team.

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## **READINGS & GENERAL INFORMATION**

### **German language**

If you feel like brushing up on your German language skills before you get to Berlin, there are free downloadable German courses on the Deutsche Welle site [www.dw-world.de/de/0,2142,2547,00.html](http://www.dw-world.de/de/0,2142,2547,00.html), either in .pdf format or as audio .mp3 files.

Another good site is [www.german.about.com](http://www.german.about.com), which is all about German language. There are online courses on this website as well. Remember the German language exercises available at [www.distributed-campus.org](http://www.distributed-campus.org) as well!

### **City Guides**

[www.berlin.de/english/index.html](http://www.berlin.de/english/index.html): Berlin Online official website (in English). See also [www.berlinonline.de/tip/.bin/index.php](http://www.berlinonline.de/tip/.bin/index.php) and [www.berlinonline.de](http://www.berlinonline.de).

[www.zitty.de](http://www.zitty.de): Zitty contains tons of information about cultural events, music, clubs, restaurants, etc. (in German).

[www.eng.cityvox-de.com/guide\\_berlin/cityhome](http://www.eng.cityvox-de.com/guide_berlin/cityhome): Online city guide for Berlin (in English).

[www.german-way.com/berlinlinks.html](http://www.german-way.com/berlinlinks.html) Berlin links for memorials, museums, and other cultural information (in English).

There is a list of Berlin city guides at:  
[www.studieren-in-deutschland.de/english/4.22.3.111.html](http://www.studieren-in-deutschland.de/english/4.22.3.111.html)

## Travel

Anything you could possibly want to know about travel in Germany can be found at [www.reiseplanung.de](http://www.reiseplanung.de) (in German). Another key website is STA Travel: [www.statravel.de](http://www.statravel.de).

[www.germany-tourism.de](http://www.germany-tourism.de) is a site in English that is devoted to German tourism. It contains information about German cities, upcoming events, and transportation.

We have already mentioned that the Lonely Planet guide for Berlin is excellent. If you go to [www.lonelyplanet.com/destinations/europe/germany/berlin](http://www.lonelyplanet.com/destinations/europe/germany/berlin), you can find some of the information in the guide. You can also purchase the book from the website. Also go to [www.lonelyplanet.com/destinations/](http://www.lonelyplanet.com/destinations/) to search for any country (there are limited city guides available online as well, such as Frankfurt and Munich).

Although it is highly unlikely that you will have a lack of things to do in Berlin, an „Uniparty“ is always a fun time, and a great way to meet Germans. If you want to know what university parties are happening in Berlin, just go to [www.uniparties.de](http://www.uniparties.de) (in German). You can search by city, so you'll always have a party to go to, no matter where you are!

[www.germany.info.org](http://www.germany.info.org): Germany Online! This site, brought to you by the German Embassy and the German Information Center, is a comprehensive site about all aspects of Germany. This is a good resource for information about government, politics, culture, academics, and many other aspects of Germany.

[www.studieren-in-deutschland.de](http://www.studieren-in-deutschland.de). This site is wonderful – it has a lot of great articles about the latest news, information about studying in Germany, and articles about German culture (in English/German).

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## METRIC CONVERSIONS

### Length

1 millimeter	= .03937 inches	1 inch	= 2.54 centimeters
1 centimeter	= .3937 inches	1 foot	= .048 meters
1 decimeter	= 3.937 inches	1 yard	= .9144 meters
1 meter	= 1.094 yards	1 mile	= 1.609 kilometers
1 kilometer	= .6214 miles		

### **Weight**

1 gram = .03527 ounces      1 hectogram = 3.527 ounces  
1 kilogram = 2.205 pounds      1 metric ton (1,000 kg) = 984 US ton (2,000 pounds)

### **Liquid Measure**

1 liter = 2.114 pints      .946 liter = 1 quart      3.785 liter = 1 gallon

### **Temperature**

Fahrenheit: Water boils at 212 degrees and freezes at 32 degrees.  
Celsius: Water boils at 100 degrees and freezes at 0 degrees.

### **To convert temperatures:**

Fahrenheit: Celsius degrees times 9, then divide by 5, and add 32.  
Celsius: Fahrenheit degrees minus 32, multiply by 5, and divide by 9.

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## **RETURNING BACK HOME**

As someone who has lived and studied abroad, your attitudes, perceptions, and values will change considerably. Though you may not realize it, getting on a plane and flying home does not end your international experience.

„**Re-Entry Shock**“ is the reverse of Culture Shock.

Re-entry is the process of readjusting to your home culture, which has remained the same while you have changed.

Your family and friends can be supportive listeners. However, don't expect them to fully understand your experiences.

It is very important that you search for the positive aspects in your home surroundings. On your home campus or in your city, find ways to take advantage of your new „cross-cultural“ interests. A few of the ways you can incorporate your new interests and cross-cultural insights into your life are:

- Search out international student groups and become involved with them by participating in their activities, tutoring and helping new arrivals adjust to your own society.
- Keep in contact with fellow students who may have studied abroad with you.
- Talk about your own experiences in a different culture and the problems you had in adjusting to it.
- Share stories and photographs with others.
- Follow the news of the country in which you studied.

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**Disclaimer**

We have made every effort to provide you with accurate and up-to-date information in this document. However, errors occur and information changes over time. This version of the FU-BEST Student Guide was updated in March 2009.