

Frankfurt: Correctly Nicknamed “Mainhattan”

With an exchange to Frankfurt am Main, Germany, you are ensured of having an amazing international experience. Frankfurt being the financial capitol of the Eurozone and referred to as “Mainhattan” because of its skyline, it breathes an international atmosphere unmatched by any other city on the continent. It comes as no surprise that the Johann Wolfgang Goethe Universität, one of Germany’s leading business and economics universities, adds to this with a very welcoming attitude towards international students. The university itself is much like the Erasmus university in many ways. Not only because of their new, state-of-the-art campus, but also in ways of teaching, the level of the courses and the examination.

Before departure, it is not needed to do any additional preparations besides the basics like registering at the university, arranging housing, etc. The housing market in Frankfurt is really tight, so start looking for accommodation early on. The Goethe Universität offers housing for international students, but that does not suffice to accommodate everyone. It is advisable to apply for their housing anyway, since it is only one tick box during registration, but keep in mind that it does not guarantee accommodation. Their dormitories are quite like the ones in Holland; your own room with a shared bathroom and kitchen. The rent for these rooms is around €300 per month. If you are not selected for the university’s housing, you should expect rents between €400 - €600. Frankfurt am Main is Germany’s second most expensive city to live in and rents contribute to this the most. Almost all other prices are comparable with those in Holland, so depending on the housing you can arrange, your expenses are comparable to those in Holland. Public transportation is paid for by the Goethe Universität, so you can travel trough the whole of Hessen for free! This means you can travel to a wide range of other German cities too. Though keep in mind that the semester officially starts at the beginning of October, so you get free transport from that moment onwards. It is in general important to realise that the semester dates differ greatly from those of the Erasmus. The examinations at the Goethe are at the end of February, but as a student from the Erasmus University, you need to be back in Holland around the beginning of January. Some teachers at the Goethe agree to do an (oral) earlier examination, otherwise the examination will be send to the Erasmus University, for which the Erasmus University asks €50 per examination. It is advisable, since you are used to starting in September, to take the free German language course offered by the Goethe Universität in September. For this course you will get four ECTS. The teachers of the course also help you settling in and get to know the Goethe Universität and the city of Frankfurt. This gives you a head start compared to the students that arrive at the beginning of October. You can, for example, do the final step of your enrolment, which has to take place at the International Office at the Goethe, before all the others. This will result in you having your Goethe-card early on. The language course all-in-all helps you to settle in Frankfurt without stress and, of course, brushes up your German. This last aspect will be very beneficial during your stay in Frankfurt, since Germans really appreciate you trying to understand their (difficult) language. The level of English on the university and in the city is outstanding, but if you want to get to know the locals, it helps speaking their language. Knowing the locals (read: German students), their way of living and their traditions, raises your experience from the level of being a visiting student, to the level of being a Goethe student. Germans are very welcoming towards internationals, but you should take the initiative.

If your German is good enough (preferably C2), you can also take the courses in German, though some courses are offered in English. For most courses you get 5 ECTS each, so that means you will have to follow four courses if you have (successfully) followed the language course. It is advisable to choose the courses for which the lecturers agree to do an earlier examination, because this minimizes the problems that come together with the semester differences. As said before, the courses are largely comparable to the courses you are used to at the Erasmus University. A major difference is that almost all (bachelor) courses only have lectures and no workgroups. Exercises are also dealt with during the lectures. The courses that I followed were Leadership in the Financial Industry, Decision making in Markets and Organisations, Marketing Accountability and Pricing. The Goethe Universität uses OLAT, a competitor of BlackBoard, but not all lecturers make use of this, so in that case it is especially important to attend the lectures. This is another aspect you should incorporate in your choice for courses, since you will have to miss some lectures due to your earlier departure. Because you do not have to register for the courses themselves but only for the examinations, you have quite some time to determine which courses you like. The registration deadline for the examinations is in the middle of December, so it could be a good idea to attend many courses in the beginning to figure out which ones you like most. On the career-side, all major financial institutions are very active on campus. If you are interested in a job in Frankfurt, there is plenty of choice. Big dogs like J.P. Morgan, Goldman Sachs and Morgan Stanley are actively recruiting on campus through the Goethe Finance Association (GFA). If you have the desire to end up in the finance sector in Frankfurt, it is advisable to become a member of the GFA. Keep in mind that both written and spoken fluency in German is a necessity for almost all jobs in Germany.

Besides the studying, the ESN in Frankfurt organises many activities for international students. This is a good way to meet other students and discover Frankfurt am Main and its surrounding cities. The ESN organises two introduction weeks, one for those that attend the language course and another for all students. During both weeks, many (of the same) activities will be organised to make sure you get to know as many other internationals as possible. Besides the ESN, the faculty of economics also organises activities and assigns you a buddy under the SIXX Buddy Program. This will be done automatically when you register at the university as an exchange student. The advantage of the SIXX Buddy Programme is that this is only for economics students, so there you will meet the people that you could encounter in the lectures, while the ESN is meant for all students. The Goethe also offers plenty of sporting facilities against greatly reduced prices.

Because Frankfurt is not that far away from Holland, you could travel back for very special occasions. If you are planning to do this, you could consider a DB Bahncard 25, which gives you 25% discount on your ICE tickets. Though in my experience, you'll want to spend as much time as possible in Frankfurt, because there is a lot to discover and a lot of really interesting people to meet.