

ERASMUS Exchange report

Friedrich-Alexander-Universität Erlangen-Nürnberg

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Erlangen

Erlangen is a relatively small city located in Bavaria. It has 100 000 inhabitants, and is home to the Friedrich-Alexander-Universität Erlangen-Nürnberg (FAU) and Siemens AG. Siemens employs 23 000 people, while FAU has 40 000 students enrolled, and this results in Erlangen having the highest percentage of highly educated people in the region. The city is roughly 2.5 km by 3.0 km in size, is completely flat, and has excellent pathways for pedestrians and cyclists, all of which makes commuting extremely easy by bike or on foot. Additionally, public transport in Erlangen and to the near cities is free for students in the evening and on weekends. Overall, Erlangen is a great city: it is compact, very safe, and it doesn't have that agitated and stressful big city feel. It has everything you need in your daily life, but as a small city it may be missing some services, activities, or specialised stores you would like. Luckily, you can make weekend trips to the largest city in the region, Nürnberg, just by taking a 15-minute train ride, free of charge.

Studies

The academic calendar at FAU differs a bit from the one at LUT, the main difference being that instead of having 4 periods split between the spring and autumn semesters, they have summer and winter semesters, with no further division. The teaching periods for the semesters are 15.10 - 9.2 and 23.4 - 27.7, with the Christmas break being from 22.12 - 9.2. The exchange period begins with an orientation week, during which the university welcomes its new students and helps them finish the required paperwork. For the winter semester, the orientation took place on the first week of October. The exam period is after the teaching period, as usual, but it can last for over a month. However, the professors are very flexible in accommodating the needs of students, and can often arrange earlier or later exam dates when asked. For example, one of my exams was to be in the beginning of April, while my plan was to return to Finland in the end of February. The professor held an extra exam in February, and everything went well.

Language

FAU offers an intensive German course a month before the beginning of studies. This course costs around 100 €, lasts one week, and covers the A1.1 level, which is roughly what one would learn after studying

German for a semester. I did not take the intensive course, but I can definitely see it being beneficial. I strongly recommend learning at least some German during your stay, even if it is a short, 5-month exchange period. Possibly the biggest surprise for me during my time there was that there are many people in Germany who do not speak English. Generally speaking, most things you need to do at University can be done using English, but even there are exceptions. For example, the website used to register for exams and to view your grades is only available in German. Outside university it is worse, and I would estimate that almost half of the people you meet will be unable to communicate in English. Ranging from bus drivers and cashiers, all the way to student apartment landlords and the help numbers of internet providers, you will find yourself unable to solve issues in English even in very surprising situations. This is not meant to discourage anyone from studying in Germany (I did not speak any German before my exchange), as you will find many people willing to help, but knowing even a little bit of the language can make life a lot easier.

Arriving

Travelling to Erlangen isn't quite as easy as travelling to a larger city, since it doesn't have its own airport. I personally looked for flights to Nürnberg (Nuremberg in English) and München (Munich), but Frankfurt seems to be a good option too. The flights to Nürnberg are usually more expensive, and rarely direct, but getting to Erlangen from there is easier (clarification: the buses and trains between Nürnberg and Erlangen are only free on weekends **after** you start your studies there). Train tickets from München to Erlangen can cost around 40€, or alternatively you can find buses (such as Flixbus) for as little as 6€. Hint: look for buses to Nürnberg instead of Erlangen, as there are many more routes and times to choose from, and travelling from Nürnberg to Erlangen is extremely easy and cheap. As for the departing station, try to search for both München Airport and München Bus Station. Again, you will find more results, and the buses can be significantly cheaper than a train ticket, without huge differences in travelling time. All in all, explore and compare the prices of the entire trips to find the best option.

Living

From my experience, living in Germany costs roughly the same as living in Finland. Alcohol is much cheaper, the food is good (although sometimes fairly salty) and travelling is easy. The weather in Erlangen is warm compared to Finland: it can get very warm in summer (peaking above 30°C), but winter was somewhat disappointing, with freezing temperatures and snowfall being rare, and the snow typically melting within the same day. It doesn't rain a lot in Erlangen, clear weather is common even in winter and the surrounding areas are very beautiful, with plenty of green and the famous "Franconian Alps" (*Fränkische Schweiz*) to the north-east. For skiing and winter sports, the German Alps to the south can be reached in 3 hours by car.

Easily the most irritating thing about living in Germany is the national broadcasting fee (Rundfunkbeitrag). It is a mandatory fee used to produce German TV and radio programs that you are supposed to pay

regardless of where you are from or whether you own a TV or not: if you live in Germany, they will send letters after their money, which totals something in the order of 16-18€ per month per apartment (a shared apartment allows you to split this fee). Personally, due to my short stay, I chose to ignore their letters and not pay. I have already returned to Finland, but possible future consequences are still unknown.

Courses taken

The courses I took during my exchange period were German A1.1, Simulation and Modelling I, Advanced Topics in Computational Fluid Dynamics and Seminar on Solar Energy. I'm an Energy student, with a focus on Heat Transfer and Modelling, and I feel pretty satisfied with the courses taken since they are closely related to my field of interest. FAU has a very wide variety of courses, however, the list of courses in English is somewhat limited.

Miscellaneous info and hints

- Get your European Health Insurance Card from KELA in time. This is not the same as your Health Insurance Card (KELA-kortti), and it allows you to live in Germany without having to buy an expensive health insurance there.
- Many apartments in Germany are built with insufficient ventilation. This means you are expected to fully open the windows for 15 minutes at a time 3-4 times a day in order to keep the room ventilated and prevent humidity problems in the apartment. You are responsible for damage to the apartment caused by insufficient ventilation, such as mould (suom. home).
- There has been much talk about trouble with refugees in Germany in the past years, and this may worry some of the people considering studying there. I had no problems during my stay there, but didn't always feel comfortable in Nürnberg (nothing concrete, just an odd feeling that other people have reported too). However, Erlangen felt absolutely safe, both for me and for the other people mentioned.
- There is a famous week-long beer festival in Erlangen, called Bergkirchweih that takes place in late spring/early summer, drawing close to one million visitors every year from around Germany.