

Study Abroad in Berlin

Prepping for FU-BEST: What can students expect?

Academia

The FU-BEST program offers an academically challenging and enriching learning environment that encourages students to think and engage with the courses' subject matter and the overall learning environment (on campus and beyond) critically. The notion of the “extended classroom”, featuring local field-trips and assignments as well as a full-week off-site excursion, is an essential component of the program. FU-BEST is an intensive academic program that seeks to provide a valuable “study abroad” experience for its participants. Students who wish to do more of a “travel abroad” semester might be somewhat taken aback by the workload and structure of the program. Freie Universität’s academic expectations for awarding credits at the end of the FU-BEST program are quite comparable to those of upper-division undergraduate courses in our U.S. partner institutions. Though we understand that traveling is an integral part of being and studying overseas, the FU-BEST program advises students to keep in mind that more extensive personal travel can be pursued before or after the semester as well.



Campus and Classes

All classes take place on the Lankwitz campus of Freie Universität Berlin, which is easily accessible by public transport and located in the southwest of Berlin, surrounded by a primarily residential area.

FU-BEST is an official program of FU Berlin but is run independently from Freie Universität’s regular course offerings (which tend to be taught in German and are always offered on a different academic calendar). FU-BEST courses are not open to other students from FU Berlin; they are entirely reserved for FU-BEST participants who tend to come primarily (though not exclusively) from U.S. universities and colleges. For this reason, FU-BESTers do not interact with German students during class time, but still have the opportunity to meet them in their free time on and off campus. They may, for example, try picking up a shift in student-run cafés on campus, sign up for the university sports courses or simply mingle with German students in the city at one of the opportunities suggested in our regular FU-BEST newsletter.

The FU-BEST semester is based on the U.S. academic calendar, which differs notably from the German university calendar. Consequently, the FU-BEST and FU semesters usually only overlap for 6 or 8 weeks (depending on fall or spring semester), and FU-BEST participants will notice that German students will not be as present on the Lankwitz campus for a period of multiple weeks, as a result of the German semester break.

Feeling at Home in Berlin

We advise students hoping for a positive cultural immersion and integration experience here in Berlin to be open-minded and realistic, show initiative, and demonstrate commitment and reliability. During a FU-BEST semester, cultural and social learning takes place to a considerable extent outside the classroom setting. Getting to know Germans is the best and most insightful way to learn more about German culture, practice speaking German, and establish new overseas friendships.

Our program offers a volunteering as well as language tandem option for which FU-BESTers can sign up. These options are only two of many great ways to get to know German students and other locals, but they also require good time management as well as openness and reliability. Cultural exchange is a process of give and take, and will succeed if all sides involved are engaged and dependable.

Transportation

Berliners are urban commuters: whether they rely on public transportation or take the car to get to places, the commute within Berlin is inevitably time-consuming for everyone on a daily basis. Getting to the Lankwitz campus may also take a while, especially depending on where one lives. All students in Berlin are by definition commuter students.



To give you a better and more precise idea of commuting time, and what that means for personal time management: Getting somewhere in under 30 minutes in Berlin is considered fairly quick and close-by; planning to get from door to door in 30-45 minutes is normal. Taking 50-60 minutes to get to your final destination is considered a more extensive commute, but it rarely takes more than an hour to get anywhere inside the city's borders.

Housing

FU-BEST students are given the choice of opting for housing provided by the program (either apartments or homestays). Every semester we also have a few students who decide to find a semester-long accommodation in Berlin independently. However, this independence comes with more responsibilities on the student's side.

Our apartment option is not comparable to the type of dormitory housing participants from the U.S. might know from their home universities. FU Berlin does not own any accommodation, and the apartment complex used by FU-BEST is not in close proximity to any of Freie Universität's facilities. FU-BEST participants living there are considered regular and independent tenants, living in studio apartments on their own.

Students choosing a homestay will ideally have a communicative and enhancing language learning experience involving the person or people with whom they are living. Please keep in mind that the homestay host could be anything from a family of five to a single-person household, and it is therefore important that students be curious and open to meeting and living with locals who have different backgrounds. FU-BEST participants are usually very happy with their homestays and describe their experiences as valuable and overall positive.