

Über-cool Germany

Germany has a lot to offer students in terms of natural landscapes, dynamic cities and an open-minded urban population. JANE VERNON SMITH reports.

With an internationally-inclined population keen to show off its charming country, Germany might surprise visitors with its friendly approach and interesting choice of study destinations. First on the list for many is of course the capital, Berlin, which was rebuilt and redefined after the end of the Cold War.

The German capital has a very special feel. For Susanne Jess at Berlin's Carl Duisberg Centre (CDC), the city "is like a mirror of the younger history of Germany. Students can still feel the energy in a transforming city; there is still the atmosphere of creativity." Berlin is a green city and has many places to relax, such as the famous "bar beaches" at the riverside all over the city. The Siegessäule (victory column) and Tiergarten (park), Reichstag parliament building and Brandenburg Gate are all important landmarks to visit and give a flavour to life divided into East and West Berlin as it once was. Jess adds, "There are a lot of festivals that take place in the summer. The Karneval der Kulturen (carnival of the cultures) is special because it shows the international atmosphere which [typifies] Berlin."

According to Uwe Stränger at IH Berlin-Prolog, "What impresses me most is the friendly atmosphere among my colleagues and the professionalism of the [courses in Berlin]." He says that his school manages to keep the language travel experience personal, and that

students are not just numbers. Added to that, the school's location on Akazienstrasse "is a key selling point, and definitely something which attracts students in the first place and keeps them coming back for more," Stränger recounts.

There is a wide range of restaurants and cafés in the area

around the school – many of them, like the Buddha House, Stränger comments, offer special lunch menus at reduced prices – as well as a great selection of delis and interesting little shops and boutiques. Stränger says that Berlin may lack some of the polish of other world cities, but its free and easy lifestyle lends itself to fun and relaxation. "We have one of the best clubbing scenes and parties that last all night. The entry prices and beer are cheap, the DJs world class, and the public is über-cool. What more could any young person want?"

In [nearby] Leipzig, students at the Sprachschule Falk Dietrich can enjoy an atmosphere that "conveys lifestyle rather than

commercialism". Located in the most popular area for students to live, according to spokesperson, Falk Dietrich, the small, private school has just two classrooms, one "looking out onto the hustle and bustle of Karl-Liebknecht-Strasse and one overlooking the garden with a nice and quiet atmosphere," he notes.

Like Berlin, Leipzig, in what was East Germany has undergone a transformation in recent years. "The south part of the town has become a cultural and multi-ethnic melting pot. It is where the artists and intellectuals go for coffees and beer," says Dietrich. With the city's highest density of pubs, cafés and restaurants, Karl-Liebknecht-Strasse boasts "a coherent mile of beer gardens and open air cafés". Furthermore, says Dietrich, it is just a five-minute walk down to the forest and rivers and the Clara-Zetkin Park, which is very popular with walkers and joggers.

Another renowned cultural centre in the east of the country is Dresden. Dubbed "Florence on the Elbe", the city offers a unique blend of stunning architecture, while the countryside adjoining the river possesses great natural beauty, according to Dr Uwe Kaestner, Managing Director of Kaestner Kolleg in the city. Additionally, this Saxon metropolis, with its *Frauenkirche* (church), the *Zwinger* (a complex of baroque pavilions and galleries) and the Moritzburg castle, is the "centre par excellence of the German baroque style", says Kaestner.

Kaestner Kolleg is located just a stone's throw from the old baroque city centre, in the charming Neustadt district right next to the Alaupark, which Kaestner describes as a green oasis in this lively and colourful art neighbourhood. With spacious and well-lit classrooms, the college prides itself on its cosy, inviting and warm-hearted atmosphere, and takes its motto from the words of its German namesake, Erich Kaestner: "There is nothing good, unless you do it".

"I'd say the best time to come to Dresden is spring, summer or fall, because of the



PHOTOGRAPH: GERMAN NATIONAL TOURIST BOARD

The Berlin Wall East Side Gallery (above) is a memorial for freedom and is the largest open air gallery in the world

breathtaking landscapes around the city, and endless open-air activities," says Kaestner, noting that music, opera, jazz, film and dance festivals, art galleries, theatres, and museums of all kinds are on offer year round. Among the highlights of the festival calendar, he picks out the August Dresdner Stadtfest – "a festival of superlatives between high-tech and baroque" – and the June Elbhangfest – the city's largest public festival, with seven kilometres of attractions along the length of the river, that include arts and crafts, concerts, theatre, Saxon delicatessens, wine and antiques.

In the southwest of the country lies the historic village of Oberwesel. Characterised by narrow streets of medieval houses, towers and churches, it is small, safe and pretty, says Ute Nanninga of IP International Projects. Students here can look forward to a more physical, outdoor experience. "Our horse riding lessons allow an exciting ride into the beautiful vineyards of the Rhine," Nanninga enlarges, while "river cruises on the Rhine are a marvellous experience in order to explore one of the nicest parts of Germany". Language tuition takes place in a 1,000-year-old medieval hilltop castle, overlooking the beautiful Rhine valley, and the Lorelei, a slate rock that embodies the most famous figure

of German folklore, the maiden Lorelei, is just five kilometres away, with the cities of Frankfurt, Cologne and Heidelberg within easy reach.

Following the Rhine southwards, one comes to Cologne, a city whose major landmark and essential tourist destination is its cathedral, notes Helga Wuertz, whose school, Carl Duisberg Centren (CDC), is located close by. Students can also stroll through the Old Town, along the banks of the Rhine and take in "the old colourful houses close to the river, especially the view from the right side in Deutz," says Wuertz.

CDC schools place emphasis on the personal touch and here, as in its smallest school in Radolfzell on Lake Constance, the focus is on individual needs. At the Radolfzell school, the personal touch extends to the very top, as spokesperson, Tina Streck, relates: "The director knows you personally and has a cup of coffee with you in the cafeteria sometimes." The town itself, Streck describes as "romantic", and the school is conveniently located within five minutes' walk of both the beach and the railway station. Among the magnificent surroundings of the lake, there are many great year-round opportunities for sport. One >>>



Language tuition at IP International Projects in Oberwesel take place in a 1,000-year-old hilltop castle (above)

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The attractive-looking Carl Duisberg Centren at Radolfzell (above) is situated five minutes away from Lake Constance

of the best ways to see the lake is to cycle around it. In addition, the town's situation at the border of Germany, Austria and Switzerland is, says Streck, "a perfect starting point to explore Europe".

The city of Munich is strongly associated with its annual festival, Oktoberfest, and students attending the Munich Goethe-Institut have the opportunity to make the most of this event. "We not only take [our students] to the numerous festival attractions, but allow them a 'behind-the-scenes' look. They learn about the history of the world's largest and most popular fair, and gain insight into the logistic effort it takes to organise the festival," says the school's spokesperson, Uta Beckmann. Meanwhile, she relates that Thursday nights are reserved for a famous *Stammtisch* (literally, table for regulars) social evening. "It is a great chance

to mix with locals, to dance and talk to all the other students in a relaxing atmosphere," Beckmann notes.

Nearby Augsburg, one of Germany's oldest cities, is home to family-run language school, Augsburger Deutschkurse, where, "The office door is always open, and we are all ears if the students need our help or advice," says Sabine Steinacher. The art nouveau school building's central location is ideal for exploring the city's historic sights, and young students are encouraged to take an interest in its past by participating in a themed summer treasure hunt.

Agent viewpoint



"The valley of the River Rhine is the first thing that any traveller notices [in southwest Germany], and they are impressed by the area. The students find the staff and the locals [at our partner school] to be extremely friendly and helpful. The most unusual and exciting thing that attracts young students to Oberwesel is the fact that they have the chance to live in Schönburg, a real medieval castle."

Camelia Cojocarescu, Mara Travel Group, Romania

"The region [around Bremen] is interesting because of its rich culture and real German atmosphere. This is one of the aspects students most like about the country, in addition to German cuisine and the many historical sites. Students also comment on the friendly people, the caring teachers at the school and good transportation links from Russia."

Elena Verkholtseva, International Education, Russia



"Studying German is usually a personal preference and therefore students tend to be interested in discovering German culture and habits through the arts, history etc. French speaking students studying German are usually above the student average so they will enjoy cultural and historical visits. Of course students also like socialising and they find the local people friendly and the schools good. In terms of after-school activities, it really does depend on the age of the student and the destination."

Laurent Potier, Langues Vivantes, Belgium



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