
Automotive Engineering Summer Germany (AESG) Handbook

Experience Report

Version: Summer 2019



TECHNISCHE
UNIVERSITÄT
DARMSTADT



FAHRZEUGTECHNIK
TU DARMSTADT

Preface

This handbook intends to give an overview of how to navigate the Automotive Engineering: Summer Germany (AESG) program by providing tips and must-dos while participating in the program.

This is a pilot version of the AESG handbook that was written following the Summer 2019 term. It includes information on things from how to efficiently get around, to how to prepare for your courses, to where to get the best Brezel!

Parts of the handbook are anecdotal or based on personal experience so take it with a grain of salt. That being said, they were all great experiences so I hope you are able to have them too!

Overall, the AESG program was an exceptional experience, and one that I would highly recommend you partake in and make the very most of.

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University at Buffalo, 2019

Table of Contents

Preface.....	II
Table of Contents.....	III
1 Background of the AESG program.....	5
2 Application process.....	5
3 Logistics.....	7
3.1 Getting to Darmstadt.....	7
3.2 Visa for stay.....	7
3.3 Insurance.....	8
4 Technische Universität Darmstadt.....	8
4.1 Orientation Week.....	8
4.2 Athene Card.....	8
4.3 TUD email vs. email forwarding.....	9
4.4 Printing & submitting assignments.....	9
4.5 Moodle & TUCaN.....	9
4.6 Libraries.....	10
4.7 Getting around campus.....	10
5 Coursework.....	10
5.1 Trends in Automotive Engineering (TdK).....	10
5.2 Advanced Design Project (ADP).....	11
5.3 Automotive Engineering Lab (AEL).....	11
6 Getting around Darmstadt & Hessen.....	11
6.1 Semesterticket.....	12
6.2 Getting to class.....	12
6.3 DB Navigator App/Website.....	12
6.4 Intra-city travel.....	13
6.5 Inter-city travel.....	13
6.6 Taxis/Uber.....	13
7 Food.....	13
7.1 Mensa (Cafeteria) food.....	13
7.2 Döner.....	14
7.3 Hacienda.....	14
7.4 LichtBar.....	14
7.5 Bakeries.....	14
8 Shopping.....	14
8.1 Cash is king.....	14
8.2 Getting cash.....	15
8.3 Telephone plans.....	15
8.4 Groceries.....	16

8.5	Miscellaneous items	16
9	Communication with locals	16
9.1	General language barrier	16
9.2	Talking to clerks, cashiers, etc... ..	17
10	Things to do in Darmstadt.....	17
10.1	Langener Waldsee.....	17
10.2	Grube Prinz von Hessen.....	18
10.3	Woog.....	18
11	Darmstadt social destinations.....	19
11.1	Ratskeller	19
11.2	Darmstadt Biergarten	19
11.3	Golden Krone.....	20
11.4	Herrngarten	20
11.5	Mathildenhoehe.....	21
12	Travelling Germany	21
12.1	Deutsche Bahn	21
12.2	FlixBus/FlixTrain.....	21
12.3	InterFlix Pass.....	21
12.4	Accommodations while traveling	22
12.5	Berlin.....	22
12.6	Frankfurt.....	22
12.7	Stuttgart.....	22
12.8	München	23
12.9	Wiesbaden.....	23
12.10	Travelling Europe	24
13	Festivals	24
13.1	Heinerfest	24
13.2	Schlossgrabenfest.....	24
14	General Tips.....	24
14.1	Everything is closed on Sundays!	24
14.2	Buy a fan	25
14.3	Recycle correctly.....	25
14.4	Fachschaft Maschinenbau	25

1 Background of the AESG program

The Automotive Engineering: Summer Germany program is a 11-week program from mid-May to end of July. The program is a joint effort between Technische Universität Darmstadt and four North-American universities; University at Buffalo, University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, Virginia Tech, and the University of British Columbia. As the name suggests, the program is focused on automotive engineering. The department that runs the program is “Fahrzeugtechnik Darmstadt”, or the Institute of Automotive Engineering Darmstadt.

The program provides a lot of flexibility in that students usually have to deeply dive into the German/European Culture and foster their personal growth outside the classroom - unless there is a special session/class that week. This, along with the countless opportunities available, create an environ-



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ment that fosters growth and learning.

2 Application process

The general application **requirements** are the following:

- Enrolled as a student at a participating partner university: Virginia Tech, University at Buffalo, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, University of British Columbia

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- Graduate or advanced undergraduate (strongly recommended to have the junior year completed before arrival in Germany)
 - GDP of 3.0 (US), 73% (Canada)
 - General interest in automotive technologies
 - Willingness to explore German culture
 - A driver's license that's valid in Germany (US/Canadian driver's license are usually valid)

Please make sure to check with your home institution about further requirements such as curricula restrictions and course prerequisites for the transfer of credits.

The application **process** is as follows:

- Apply with your Home Institution for the Summer Abroad
- Your home institution will nominate the internally successful students to TU Darmstadt
- TU Darmstadt will confirm the students nomination by informing them and start the application process at the hosting institution which is TU Darmstadt:
 - Register as a in international student at TU Darmstadt though the online portal MoveOn. Tipp: Have you passport, your CV and a Letter of Motivation ready.
 - Pay the course fee
 - Once your application at TU Darmstadt is completed, you will get a letter of confirmation. You will need this letter to apply for a visa in case you are not a US/Canadian citizen.

3 Logistics

3.1 Getting to Darmstadt

Darmstadt is right outside of the city of Frankfurt, home to one of the world's busiest international airports. It is therefore very easy to get to Darmstadt from North America. Most major airports will have either a direct flight to Frankfurt (FRA) or a two-leg flight. Once you get to Frankfurt, you will take the Airliner bus to Darmstadt. The bus leaves every 30 minutes from Bus Stop 14 in front of Terminal 1. Make sure you have 10 EURO in cash on you. Credit cards are not accepted on the bus. You can withdraw euros at one of the ATMs at the airport. This bus will drop you off right in the center of Darmstadt, which is called Luisenplatz. From there, you can take a tram or bus to get to your accommodation. A more detailed explanation of how to get to your home will be provided by



TU Darmstadt. Nonetheless, if you find yourself lost in Luisenplatz, you will likely have Wi-Fi connection via Eduroam, which is used at most North American universities or via Darmstadt's public city network.

3.2 Visa for stay

You are not required to apply for a Visa for Germany unless

- a.) you stay in the country for a continuous period of over 90 days. If you are only participating in AESG and not staying longer or coming in earlier, this should not be an issue. However, if you plan to stay for longer than 90 days, make sure you apply for a Visa!

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- b.) You do not have an US/Canadian Passport and your home country is not eligible for a visit of Germany without a visa. In doubts ask the international exchange office of your home university.

Have your letter of confirmation and a (preliminary) schedule of the program ready for when you get to border patrol at the airport. The important thing is that you have something to show the officer that you will be attending TU Darmstadt. Frankfurt is a very international city, so do not worry about communication issues just yet.

3.3 Insurance

TU Darmstadt does not have any extra requirements for health insurance, but your university might. Make sure you have your insurance information on hand at all times, know what it entitles you to, and where to get care if you need it.

4 Technische Universität Darmstadt

4.1 Orientation Week

The first week of the program consists of an orientation held by TU Darmstadt's "study abroad" office. You'll learn a little more about German culture and etiquette, Darmstadt, and the excursions included in the program fee. This is a great way to get to know other exchange students, as all of the AESG participants in addition to IREP students who will be there. IREP is the International Research Experience week, a 10-16 weeks Research Internship in one of TU Darmstadt's current Research projects that is academically supervised by a professor. Take some time to make new friends, exchange contact info, and build relationships that will likely last the duration of the program, if not longer.

As an AESG participant, you will be enrolled as a student at TU Darmstadt. This means you have access to pretty much any facility a normal student would have access to. This includes things like the library, swimming pool, sport center, etc... A common way to access these resources is with your Athene card, which is explained below.

4.2 Athene Card

The Athene card is the student ID at TU Darmstadt and very similar to the ones that are used across most North American colleges. To get your card, you first need to submit a picture of yourself that meets certain criteria such as size and background color. Once you do that, you will hopefully get an email in a couple days telling you that your photo was approved, and your card is ready to pick up. You can then use your card to pay for things such as lunch at the cafeteria, or printing in the workrooms. To load your Athene card balance, you can use machines conveniently located outside of the

cafeterias using cash. More information can be found here: <https://www.hrz.tu-darmstadt.de/id/athenekarte/index.en.jsp>

4.3 TU Darmstadt's email vs. email forwarding

When setting up your TU Darmstadt email account, you have the option either to use the school's webmail portal, or to have emails forwarded to an external account (such as one from your home institution). I would recommend forwarding the emails, as this allows you to use a program you are already familiar with, and is generally easier to navigate. More information, as well as the link to upload your photo, are found here: https://www.hrz.tu-darmstadt.de/mail/e_mail/mail_studierende/index.en.jsp

4.4 Printing & submitting assignments

There is a workroom in the architecture building (which is in close proximity to the Department of Mechanical Engineering) that has desks for collaborative working, and is not a silent work area. This is a great place to work on group projects or reports since you can actually talk with one another there, as opposed to the libraries that are silent study only.

In the workroom, there is a self-service printer that you can use to print your assignments. This comes in handy, because printing off-campus can be a struggle – an assignment due on Monday most likely needs to be printed on Friday since most copy shops are closed over the weekend. Whenever the workroom is open, you can print your document using a USB and your Athene card. The cost is very reasonable (~5 cents/page) and can also automatically hole punch or staple your paper if needed.

Submission of printed assignments will usually be early in the morning on Mondays; make sure to plan ahead for transportation so that you can turn the assignment in on time. For assignments such as the lab reports, you are individually responsible for printing and submitting, whereas for your ADP project report, your supervisor may be able to print it for you.

4.5 Moodle & TUCaN

Moodle is a digital platform very similar to Blackboard in the US. Your instructors will post things such as lecture slides, lab manuals, and reference material there. You can also find video recordings of the TdK lectures there.

TUCaN on the other hand is more for the management side of things; you will register for your exams and courses on there. More information on how to use both these sites will be provided by TU Darmstadt and your individual instructors.

4.6 Libraries

There is a library located on both the Stadtmitte and Lichtwiese campuses. These libraries are both silent-study only, so while they are not ideal for group work, they are excellent for studying individually. The libraries are air conditioned as opposed to many other buildings across TU Darmstadt. Therefore, on particularly hot days, they can fill up as early as 9 AM! Make sure to plan ahead if you want to grab a seat, otherwise, you can hang around and wait until someone leaves their seat *permanently*. People can leave their seats for up to an hour as long as they leave a green placard with the time they will be returning. These placards are available across the library and are very convenient for when you need to go somewhere and do not want to lose your seat. That being said, avoid taking someone's seat by taking note of whether there is a placard there before sitting down.

4.7 Getting around campus

In general, it is unusual for German universities to have a campus. Most universities are spread all over the city, so that university and city life interact seamlessly. TU Darmstadt has both. The so called Campus Stadtmitte consists of buildings in the inner city. The Campus Lichtwiese is more of a coherent university area. You can use the bus to get closer to certain buildings if need be. Otherwise, the primary mode of transportation on both campuses is walking, and they are quite easy to navigate. The buildings are all labeled with numbers so that you can easily find a certain building. More information about the campuses, including maps can be found here: <https://www.tu-darmstadt.de/universitaet/campus/index.en.jsp>

5 Coursework

5.1 Trends in Automotive Engineering (TdK)

This class features a series of lectures, with each presented by a different lecturer. The common theme between these lectures is that each provides you with information about cutting-edge technology in

the automotive engineering field, and are very interesting. You are evaluated at the end of the course with one test that is worth 100% of your grade, so make sure you take it very seriously, and study each lecture individually, rather than cram it all together at the end. It is not common in the German university system to give weekly quizzes and assignments that make part of the final grade. However, professors might very well give assignments that are not marked. Take those seriously and use them each week as revision and preparation to understand each week's the topic on a deeper and applicable level.

5.2 Advanced Design Project (ADP)

Groups of four to five work together on a project of their choice that is selected during your first week in Darmstadt. Make sure you select a project that you are interested in! Most of the students working with you will be exchange students, but German students are also involved in certain projects. The ADP is similar to a senior design course you would take in the US; it involves an interim presentation and report, as well as a final presentation and report. It is important to take the project seriously and meet with your supervisors more often than not.

5.3 Automotive Engineering Lab (AEL)

The Automotive Engineering Lab is one of the most entertaining parts of the entire AESG program. You will test different vehicles on a closed airfield, collect data, and analyze the results. Before performing the experiment, you will write a pre-report using dummy data provided by the experiment supervisor; this report will help lay out the overall structure and content of the experiment. The experiments themselves will take place over the course of two days in groups of 3-4, however, the reports themselves are written individually. Before each experiment, your group will take a short oral quiz about the experiment and the theory behind it. Be prepared for every experiment you will conduct on the two days – you will be questioned (and graded) about them! One or two supervisors will assist you in carrying out the experiments themselves. Some of the experiments involve students driving the vehicles, whereas others are driven by supervisors, but they are all very interesting and provide important insight into how the vehicles work. Following the experiments, you will write a report on the experiment you performed, and present a report on a different experiment written by one of your groupmates. Use the feedback you get from the pre-report to correct your report before making the final submission.

6 Getting around Darmstadt & Hessen

The public transportation in Darmstadt and Germany in general is super impressive! You can get pretty much anywhere you need to go using a bus, tram, or train. Within Darmstadt, your primary mode of transportation will be via bus.

6.1 Semesterticket

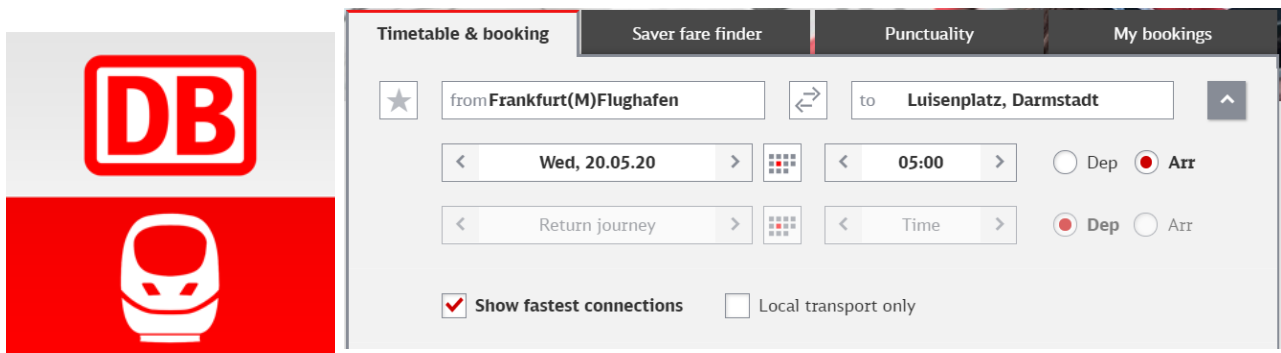
By paying the AESG program fee, you will receive a ‘semesterticket’, which is a plastic ticket with your name and information on it. This semesterticket entitles you to travel within not only Darmstadt, but with the regional trains in the entire state of Hessen, the state that Darmstadt is located in. You are **NOT** entitles to use the IC (InterCity) and ICE (InterCity Express) trains, but the RE, RB, S-trains. Make sure to have the ‘semesterticket’ with you whenever using public transportation, in addition to a picture ID. A ticket inspector will occasionally get on a bus/tram to check all the passengers’ tickets, and you should show your semesterticket and picture ID when the inspector gets to you. If you forget your semesterticket at home or do not have it with you for any reason, take the safe route and buy a bus ticket (~€2) – if you get caught without a ticket, the fine is a non-disputable 60 €! More details on where the semesterticket is valid, including a map, are found here: <https://www.asta.tu-darmstadt.de/asta/de/angebote/semesterticket>

6.2 Getting to class

To get to your Trends in Automotive Engineering class (TdK), you will need to go to the mechanical engineering (Maschinenbau) campus called Lichtwiese. This campus is different from the city center campus, Stadtmitte. To get there, you need to take either a **K** or **KU** bus originating from the city center. The **K** bus is slightly faster since it makes less stops, but both are good options depending on when you want to arrive to campus. Use the DB navigator app to plan your trip, and make sure to budget extra time if it is raining outside.

6.3 DB Navigator App/Website

The [Deutsche Bahn app/website](#) can help you get wherever you need to within Darmstadt and Germany in general. You can enter your starting location and where you want to go, and it will present you with the available transportation options, whether it be a bus, tram, train, or a combination of them. It is very user friendly and is available in English. An alternative app is the RMV App that works in a similar way.



6.4 Intra-city travel

Within Darmstadt, you will likely be frequenting the Lichtwiese, Schloss (Castle), and Luisenplatz bus stops. While Lichtwiese is around a 15-minute bus ride away from Luisenplatz, Schloss and Luisenplatz are only a 5-minute walk apart. Luisenplatz is the better stop to get to the shopping center of Darmstadt if you need groceries, whereas Schloss is closer to the Stadtmitte campus and cafeteria. In general, you will be walking much more than you would at your home university, so wear comfortable shoes! Take a day or two to explore the area around both Schloss and Luisenplatz; nearly anything you could need can be found within a 10-minute walking distance from either stop.

6.5 Inter-city travel

As mentioned above, the semester ticket allows for transportation within most of Hessen as well. This means you can get to cities like Frankfurt and Wiesbaden without paying extra for a ticket. To get to Frankfurt, there are direct trains from Darmstadt Hauptbahnhof (train station) to Frankfurt Hauptbahnhof (Hbf) that are only 20 minutes long. Plan ahead to take one of the direct trains, as the non-direct trains are closer to 45 minutes long. Make sure you take the regional trains, such as RB, RE, do not take the IC or ICE unless you explicitly have booked a ticket for it. There is a lot to do in other cities within Hessen, especially Frankfurt, so make sure to take advantage of the semesterticket and explore.

6.6 Taxis

While you should be able to get to wherever you need using public transportation, you may lose track of time and miss the last bus home or need to get somewhere at a certain time. If this is the case, you will need to call a taxi. To prevent this from happening, use DB Bahn to plan ahead; taxi fares add up quickly. To call a taxi to your location, you can use the [‘FREE NOW mytaxi’ app](#). In general buses and trams will run a later on Friday and Saturday, and earlier/less often on Sunday. Uber or similar is not allowed in Germany and does therefore not exist.

7 Food

7.1 Mensa (Cafeteria) food

TU Darmstadt has a cafeteria on both the Stadtmitte and Lichtwiese campuses. These cafeterias offer hot meals, sandwiches, pizzas, a salad bar, and much more, for a very affordable price. You pay using your Athene card or with cash, but it is easier and cheaper to use your Athene card so that is the best option. Some of the dishes rotate on a daily basis, and you can check the menu in advance at <https://studierendenwerkdarmstadt.de/en/catering-and-canteens/menu/lichtwiese/>

7.2 Döner

Ask any exchange student what their favorite food during the program was, and the answer is likely to be Döner! Döner is a mix of meats such as lamb and beef that are cooked on a rotisserie. There are dozens of Döner shops across Darmstadt, you'll just have to try them all to find your favorite.



7.3 Hacienda

If you are craving authentic Mexican food during the program, Hacienda offers traditional Mexican dishes in Germany. They also have a nice outdoor seating area, so it is a nice place to visit with both small and larger groups.

7.4 LichtBar

Located at the bottom floor of the Lichtwiese library, this is a small café that offers ready-made sandwiches, pastries, hot and cold drinks, and snacks. It is a good place to grab something quick before heading to class or the bus stop.

7.5 Bakeries

Located around Darmstadt and Germany in general, bakeries open early in the morning and offer a delicious variety of bread and pastries. Not only is there a large variety of options that you've likely never seen, they're also baked fresh daily at the bakery.

8 Shopping

8.1 Cash is king

CASH IS KING. Do not expect to pay for a €0.75 pack of gum with your credit card; the cashier will not take kindly to it. Germany is not on the same page as North America when it comes to using credit/debit cards. Cash is the standard for small bills/costs, and is widely preferred. Larger restaurants will typically have card readers, but smaller restaurants and stores are almost guaranteed not to

have one. Even if the store does accept cards, a general rule of thumb is that any bill under €10 (€15 to be conservative) should be paid for with cash.

Therefore, it is important to always have cash on hand whenever you go out. You will quickly realize how many coins you have and use on a daily basis, so it is wise to use a fanny pack or some sort of coin pouch.

8.2 Getting cash

Since you will be using cash for most of your expenses, it is wise to have a card that has either no ATM fees, international transactions fees, or neither. These fees add up quickly – one way to avoid ATM fees is to see if your North American bank has a German partner bank. For example, Bank of America is partners with Deutsche Bank, and you can therefore avoid paying the €5 ATM fee, and only pay an international fee (if your card has one). If your card does have an ATM fee, then withdraw cash in larger increments to avoid paying the fee many times.

In terms of where ATM's can be found, they are abundant in Luisenplatz since there are multiple banks in the area. Some other locations are inside of Luisencenter, which is the shopping center in Luisenplatz. You can also always use your bank's website or google maps to find ATM's as well.

Do not plan on bringing a large amount of cash and converting it into Euros, as this will be more expensive and creates the possibility of losing the money or it being stolen. If you do need to convert from USD to EUR or CHF etc..., you can visit a Reise Bank (travel bank) to do so, although you will need to pay a fee.

8.3 Telephone plans

Phone plans are generally cheaper in Germany when compared to North America. The three main service providers are Telekom Mobile, Vodafone, and O₂ in descending cost order. In Darmstadt, the reception was generally the same between the three providers; they do not differ much in that respect. However, O₂ was much less expensive when compared to the other providers. Vodafone was around 20 € for 2GB of data, unlimited calls, and 300 texts, whereas O₂ was the same price for 5GB of data with unlimited calls and texts. All of the major providers have shops near Luisenplatz, and there are smaller cell phone stores that can help give you an objective overview of the services. Don't delay, and get a cell phone plan as soon as you get to Darmstadt; it will help you get around much easier. Note that plans are valid for 4 weeks, not a month as they are in the US. Most plans also extend to the entire EU, which is also very helpful when travelling to other cities. If you are travelling outside of the EU, take the time to download a google map of the city you are going to – this allows you to access and navigate the map without using data.

8.4 Groceries

Similar to North America, there are many different options to get your groceries. However, the options are not superstores similar to Walmart, Target, Wegman's etc...; most grocery stores are around the size of an Aldi you would find in the US. The main options are:

- Aldi: Almost identical to an Aldi you would find in the US, with the added bonus of fresh bread vending machines. Generally inexpensive with a good selection of produce, meats, canned goods, etc. There are Aldi locations across Darmstadt, with one in Luisenplatz.
- Rewe: Slightly more expensive than Aldi but very similar overall. Rewe also has a salad bar, as well as a bakery with pre-made sandwiches and such. Rewe's are also abundant across Darmstadt, with one in Luisencenter.
- Netto: Also similar to Aldi in terms of goods and price, but not as abundant as Aldi or Rewe.

Buy a couple of reusable grocery bags and bring them when you go shopping, as disposable plastic bags are not a thing in Germany. Also, plan your shopping trips in accordance with the bus schedule – you do not want to wait with dairy or meat items in the heat for a long time.

In general, groceries are a little bit cheaper than they are in North America, and usually the produce tastes better. Buying food and cooking yourself is a good way to spend less and eat healthier, but make sure to try new foods while there! Fun Fact: German students do not have meal plans at the universities, so many of them make it a challenge to cook cheap and healthy.

8.5 Miscellaneous items

If you find yourself in need of other things such as cooking utensils, clothing, electronics, stationery, etc., the best place for a one-stop shop is Luisenplatz. There are department stores such as Kaufhof and TK Maxx, bookstores, novelty stores, and much more in the plaza itself. Luisencenter is a mall in Luisenplatz that has a variety of international stores, as well as regional stores and chains.

9 Communication with locals

9.1 General language barrier

Darmstadt is a very international city and especially the younger generation will speak English. However, since Darmstadt is very multinational, in the older generation not everyone might speak English. Try to know basic words and phrases before arriving in Germany, such as “hello, excuse me, I don't speak German, can you please help me”, etc... Apps like Duolingo can help you learn more vocab if you are interested, but it would likely be more beneficial to directly translate phrases you think you will need.

9.2 Talking to clerks, cashiers, etc...

At larger supermarkets and chains, there is a good chance that either the worker you are interacting with or someone else at the store speaks English. Your first couple of interactions will probably be a little awkward, but do not worry about it. At smaller stores this may be a bigger problem, but worse comes to worse, google translate has a voice to text feature.

10 Things to do in Darmstadt

10.1 Langener Waldsee

Located around 45 minutes away from Darmstadt, Langener Waldsee is a very nice “beach-style” lake. The shore is sandy and is a great place to play some volleyball or simply enjoy the water. Admission is around 3 € for students. It is certainly the nicest lake that can be visited using your semester ticket.



10.2 Grube Prinz von Hessen

This is a free lake closer to Darmstadt, also with a sandy shore. There is no admission fee, and it is only around 15 minutes from Stadtmitte. A good option if you do not have as much time to spend there, or make the decision on the fly.



10.3 Woog

This is a paid lake within walking distance of Stadtmitte, with a rocky/grass shore. There are some ping-pong tables as well as a large grass area to play Fußball. There are also diving boards at the opposite end of the lake.



11 Darmstadt social destinations

11.1 Ratskeller

The Ratskeller is a brewery near Stadtmitte, very close to the Schloss bus stop. They are known for their beer, particularly the “Spezial”, but they also have food as well. This is a great place to sit down and enjoy a couple beers with your friends.



11.2 Darmstadt Biergarten

An outdoor Biergarten with a relaxing environment, this is a nice Biergarten to visit a couple times during your stay. It is about a 20-minute walk from Stadtmitte. They have an interesting drink called Bananaweisse, a hybrid of beer and banana juice that is a pleasant fusion of tastes.



11.3 Golden Krone

A social bar that is well known for its dance parties and nightly concerts, the Krone is located directly next to the Schloss bus stop. It is one of the more frequented nightlife destinations in Darmstadt, open as late as 5 AM on the weekend.

11.4 Herrengarten

Herrengarten is a park located near Stadtmitte where you can bring your own food and bier and sit down in the grass, play Fußball, or do whatever you want! There was occasionally a live band there as well. It is a very popular destination for locals on Friday nights.



11.5 Mathildenhöhe

Mathildenhöhe is a historical artistic district located near Stadtmitte. It features multiple unique pieces of art and architecture, and is a very interesting place to visit. The two buildings featured below are the Hochzeitsturm, or wedding tower, and the Russian Chapel.



12 Travelling Germany

12.1 Deutsche Bahn

Deutsche Bahn is Germany's flagship transportation provider for trains. DB provides transportation both regionally and nationally, as well as throughout parts of Europe. The system is quite reliable and usually on time, with reasonable amenities. That being said, the railway services tend to be quite expensive, especially if booked close to the date of travel. Make sure you check special offers ahead of time. It is also recommended to reserve a seat since Friday/Sunday are heavy traveling times for commuters as well.

12.2 FlixBus/FlixTrain

FlixBus is a company that offers inexpensive travel options throughout Germany and Europe via bus and train. It is similar to Greyhound, except with cheaper tickets and slightly better reliability. They offer routes all throughout Europe, with both direct and non-direct options. In general, FlixBus is reliable, with some exceptions here and there. Otherwise, it is a great alternative to Deutsche Bahn to save a lot of money.

12.3 InterFlix Pass

I would highly recommend looking into getting a FlixBus InterFlix pass for your time in Germany and Europe in general. It gets you five tickets to go from one European city to another for only 99 €.

The caveat is that you cannot use the ticket for the exact same route that you took one way i.e. you cannot use it to go from Frankfurt to Stuttgart and then back from Stuttgart to Frankfurt. However, you could for example, use it to return from Stuttgart to Darmstadt. If you are planning a multi-city trip, it ends up working out well. Furthermore, since Darmstadt-Frankfurt-Darmstadt tickets are included with your semesterticket, it does not pose a large problem or added expense. More information found here: <https://interflix.flixbus.com/>

12.4 Accommodations while traveling

While travelling, there are many options for accommodations, such as hostels, Airbnb, and hotels, increasing in price in that order. Depending on the city and the number of people in a room, hostels can be had for as little as 20 € a person per night. They vary greatly in quality and cleanliness, with some being clean and comparable to hotels, and others not so much. Researching your destination in advance of your trip can help you find affordable, clean, and convenient accommodation. As for Airbnb, the availability, price, and quality all vary from one location to another. Hotels are always a safe option, but are usually significantly more expensive than an Airbnb or hostel. Overall, make sure your accommodation is in a good location that is accessible by public transport.

12.5 Berlin

Berlin, Germany's capital, is a city with important history both domestically and internationally. It is worth visiting to see the architecture, political buildings, history from WWII, the Berlin Wall, and so much more. Only 4.5 hours away via train, it is an excellent weekend destination. A nice hostel to stay at is Generator Berlin, which is located in a great area close to many attractions. <https://www.visitberlin.de/en>

12.6 Frankfurt

Only a 20-minute free train ride away, Frankfurt is the largest main city near Darmstadt. It is an international city that is one of the financial hubs of the world. It features a variety of buildings from historical ones such as the Frankfurt Cathedral, to modern skyscrapers such as the Main Tower. There is a large shopping mall with many international brands, as well as a nightlife scene that is more lively than Darmstadt's. <https://www.frankfurt-tourismus.de/en>

12.7 Stuttgart

Stuttgart is the world's automotive headquarters, and rightfully so. Companies such as Mercedes Benz, Porsche, MAHLE, and more all have large presences in the city. Plan to visit both the [Mercedes Benz Museum](#) (only a €5 entry fee for students), as well as the [MB engine plant facility](#) right next to the museum (€6 for guided tour). To get to Stuttgart, FlixBus is a cheap and convenient option. If you get to Stuttgart early in the morning, you can also visit the [Porsche Museum](#) on the same day.

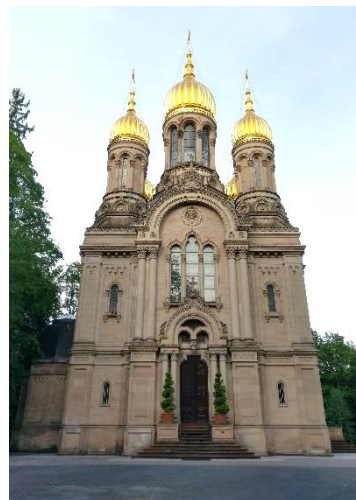
12.8 München

As part of the AESG program, you will visit München and get to see the famous Neuschwanstein Castle, as well as the BMW museum. München is part of Bavaria, which is a different experience than you will find elsewhere in Germany. Visit the famous Hofbrauhaus or one of the many other biergartens for some great bier and excellent food. While at Neuschwanstein, you can rent a paddleboat and go onto Alpsee, a lake sitting at the base of the mountain range. <https://www.muenchen.de/int/en.html>



12.9 Wiesbaden

[Wiesbaden](#) is a spa town in the state of Hessen about an hour away from Darmstadt. Home to bathhouses, hot springs, Neroberg, and much more, it is a great day-trip destination. While in Wiesbaden, check out the Nerobergbahn, one of the only funicular railways in the world that uses water ballast as a propulsion system. After taking the train up, check out the Opelbad, a swimming pool with a spectacular view. After Opelbad, you can walk to St Elizabeth's Church, a Russian Orthodox Church built in 1855.



12.10 Travelling Europe

One of the beautiful things about Europe is that it is much more compact than North America. Therefore, you can take a 5-hour train ride to France, or to Switzerland, or to Belgium; it is all within reach. Make the most of it while you are close by!

Some close and entertaining destinations are Zürich, Switzerland, a worldwide finance hub, Brussels, Belgium, famous for Pommes Frites, Amsterdam, Netherlands, and Strasbourg, France. Booking transportation and accommodation a couple weeks before a trip is a good way to make a trip to a city that is both inexpensive and very fun.

13 Festivals

13.1 Heinerfest

Heinerfest is an annual festival in Darmstadt held during the first weekend of July. Fairground rides are the main attraction of the festival, with rides ranging from teapots to the thrilling Apollo 13 ride, there are rides for all ages and braveness levels. A variety of food vendors are present, serving both traditional German food, as well as dishes from around the world. <https://www.darmstaedter-heinerfest.de/>

13.2 Schlossgrabenfest

Schlossgrabenfest is a weeklong music festival held annually in Darmstadt with more than 400,000 visitors. It features multiple live stages, with various bands and genres performing throughout the day. There are also many food vendors, similar to those you would find at a typical fair. <https://www.schlossgrabenfest.de/2020/>

14 General Tips

14.1 Everything is closed on Sundays!

Everything, and I mean everything, is closed on Sundays. Besides one Rewe market at the main train station, no supermarkets are open. Therefore, plan ahead and do not count on buying any groceries on Sunday. In addition to that, markets are usually quite busy on Saturday night because everyone is doing last-minute shopping, so keep that in mind. Most restaurants and Döner shops are open however.

In addition to stores being closed, some busses will also run less frequently, and not as late into the night. Make sure you account for this in travel plans; otherwise, you may end up stranded. The easiest way to avoid this is to use the DB Bahn app to plan your return trip.

14.2 Buy a fan

Air conditioning is almost non-existent in German homes; therefore, a fan is a good investment for the term of your stay in Darmstadt. You can purchase a fan from a variety of stores such as Saturn, Rewe, or TK Maxx. Not all buses have air conditioning, so it gets a bit hot sometimes. Stay hydrated to help your body adjust to the difference in environment.

14.3 Recycle correctly

Germany has a very systematic recycling policy that is much more detailed and thorough than that in the US. Paper goes in the blue bin, plastic in the yellow bin, general waste in the grey bin, and food waste in the green bin. While this may seem difficult at first, it is not too bad in reality. Do your best to follow the policy as to not upset anyone. However, if you are not sure what bin to use, place the item in the black „rest“ bin. Containers with wrongfully recycled materials will not be picked up and cause problems for the landlord.



On the point of recycling, plastic and glass bottles with this icon have return deposits on them when purchased. Reusable plastic bottles such as water bottles, cola bottles, and some juice bottles, have a 0.08-0.25 € deposit, which adds up very quickly. All grocery stores have a bottle collection station, so keep your bottles and return them for some extra change at the end of the week.

14.4 Fachschaft Maschinenbau

Fachschaft Maschinenbau is the mechanical engineering student council, and is located in the architecture building. After a long day of work, you can purchase and enjoy a bier on the campus for only 0.80 €! They also have other drinks such as cola and juices, so stop by and check it out.