

Summary for VIENNA School of Economics Fall 2010-2011

WU- Wirtschaftsuniversität

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Intro:

If you qualify for an exchange semester abroad you should jump on the opportunity. This is great for those of you who don't get to travel much, and for those who thrive on it.

This is a summary of our fall semester in Vienna. We must say, this semester is cold, with temps dropping to minus 10 and below, so if you don't handle the cold very well, or aren't taking full advantage of winter sport opportunities in Austria, you should really travel to Vienna in the springtime.

The Semester and courses:

Semester courses run from late September to late January, however, exchange students have many intense courses lasting only one week, this means that many students actually can finish the semester by Christmas (late December) and leave time for travel, or return home sooner.

Business Courses:

You should choose courses well in advance and have several backup options. Spots are on a first come first serve basis, and are taken within an hour from the time registration starts. Quite often there will be cancellations, but in this case you're better off being an early bird.

Unfortunately the exchange program in WU doesn't make you feel unique in any way- they have hundreds of students (mostly in early 20's) and often undergraduates sign up for graduate courses, which dramatically lowers course level. You should really investigate every teacher and topic before registering for a course, as many teachers and students have below average command of English. However, some teachers come from the US and are quite good. Course level varies dramatically as do grades. The University doesn't grade teachers or courses. There are exceptions, but we were not impressed by the academic level of the school.

Language courses:

German- the courses offered by WU are short and tend to have many students so you can't learn much. If you actually want to learn German you should take some classes in Israel before travelling (at TAU, or at the Goethe institute in Tel Aviv) and you can sign up to pre-semester courses at WU, starting mid September. These courses and the OK program (introduction to Vienna and to other exchange students) fill up quickly, so you must sign up in advance. No credit is gained by taking German. If you want to learn

German in Vienna, the best place is Vienna University Deutschkurse- it's cheap and of high quality, however spots fill up very quickly.

If you know some German and hope to improve it while studying here, you will need to make friends who are Austrian, and that is not always easy. The people are less outspoken and somewhat closed in, and it isn't easy to approach the locals if you don't know anyone already. One may also want to take advantage of the Tandem Language Learning program, but it is not guaranteed that you will get a partner at all and if you do, that he/she will be that effective.

Other languages- WU offers an abundance of terrific courses for other languages. You will not get credit for this, but this is a free fun way to improve your skills in French, English, Italian, and many more. Many offer pre-semester intense refresher courses, starting mid September.

Arriving and living in Vienna

Visa and flat

Unless you are a European citizen you will need a D-Visa to stay in Vienna for under 6 months. If you want to work (up to 19 hours per week) or stay longer you need a residence permit. The actual Visa is issued in the embassy within a few hours, but getting the documents isn't always easy, some of what you'll need is insurance for the whole stay, proof of money in your bank account and a contract for an apartment for the whole time (this is only easy if you get a room in the dorm). It is cheaper to live out of the first 9 districts, but other than the 18th and 19th close to the city, this isn't recommended, unless you're short for cash. Neta took the dorm in the 7th district (our favorite in town) without roomies for 485E a month (all expenses covered); Billie took a shared flat in the 3rd district for 380E (all expenses covered). Shared flats can be cheaper, prettier (big windows etc.) but more complicated to find.

Transportation

The public transport in Vienna is wonderful. If you're under 27, Vienna is cheaper for everything. In this case you'll qualify for a semester student transport card and you should get it. Otherwise there are many options to get around, including the public bicycle, which is free.

Culture and leisure

Culture is a major reason to come to this city; you have wonderful concerts, opera and museums (none of which are cheap if you're over 27). The Christmas markets are beautiful and great fun. Food and drinks in Vienna are good and inexpensive (compared to Tel Aviv), the nightlife however, is not much to write home about.

Winter sports and summer outdoor sports are widely available, and you can really get top quality of nearly everything you want to do. This isn't cheap, but worth it if you're into this kind of stuff. Make sure your insurance can be expanded from Vienna to cover you when you head out to nature. The student body (ESN) arranges a snowboarding trip to Zell Am See during both semester- we loved it!!!

Travel

Vienna has 6 borders with other countries; a roundtrip to Bratislava is only 14E by train and a roundtrip bus to Prague 28E! This is great if you want to cross country Europe, but may be more fun if you come during a warmer season. There are many cheap airlines to take you across Europe. Traveling in Austria by train is convenient, but is only cheap if you're under 27, or spend 120E on a train discount card.

Summary

Both of us were happy we had taken an exchange semester and tried to take full advantage of all we could. However, we felt extremely lucky to have each other. The program isn't a good place to meet new friends, unless you take the OK program before, or take a shared room in the dorms, and participate in all their activities. Since most of the exchange students are very young, this won't suit all of you and should be taken into account. Moreover, the academic level of the school is not the best of what TAU has to offer as far as exchange options.

We recommend Vienna to those of you who are interested in travelling Europe extensively (better during spring), young and into dorm lifestyle and activities, highly interested in art and culture, extremely into winter sports or intense outdoor activities.