Practical Information

Resources
Where did you find good information on:
The host university: the abroad advisor, other students, online
Social events: classmates
Movies/shows/concerts: google
Maps/tourist information: googlemaps was my savior in finding things.

International Office at Host University
What type of reception did you have upon arrival?
My buddy picked me up on my day of arrival to help me navigate. They had an orientation for students which was quite boring and not the most helpful. The most helpful part was a tour of the campus.

Did you receive (or were you offered) a buddy?
Received a buddy upon request

Were there orientation activities?
Just the tour and they had a weekly meeting for students called "Stammtisch" which was nice and lasted all semester

How was the international office staff?
Very friendly! I wish I had used them more.

Academics

The University
Is there a centralized campus?
There are 2 campuses.

Where do students hang out?
In cafes or at student residences

Are there accessible computer labs, wifi, libraries, etc?
Yes to all 3 though I never used the library.

Courses
How was the course enrollment process?
Definitely required the help of a buddy unless you are fluent in German.

How were the classes structured (mostly lecture? discussions?)?
Some lecture, some discussion, some exercises. All were smaller in size.

Was homework given? If so, how often? How much?
Rarely. Just to study for exams.

What types of exams were given? How do they compare to those at Cornell?
Written or multiple choice. Usually less lengthy and easier than Cornell exams.

How are the courses graded? (e.g., flat, curved?)
Flat

On what criteria are grades based? (e.g., tests? papers? group projects?)
Depends on the class, all three methods are used.

Were you allowed to take your exams early? If so, what was the process?
You can take your exams early if you are leaving before the exam. Professors are fairly flexible, just go talk to them.

Life Abroad

Language
Did you have any language problems with faculty? With other students? In daily life?
Not problems, more just embarrassment that I didn't know the language very well. I spoke mostly English.

Would you recommend taking a language course before departing?
Yes, but it's definitely not necessary

Was a "crash course" in the host language offered at the university? Was it useful?
Yes, it was helpful in learning the basics. I had no knowledge of German. Most people spoke decent English but it was nice to have a little bit of German for when there were difficulties.
Banking
Would you recommend opening a local account? If so, which do you recommend?
I recommend a student account at Erste bank. There was no open or closing fee. And you avoid charges at ATMs. I transferred money from the US into that account to use.

Housing
Did your host university arrange your housing? If not, how did you find housing?
In the orientation packet (before arrival) they tell you who to apply through (OeAD).

What type of housing (apartment? home stay? dorm?)? Would you recommend it?
Apartment, it was very nice. I had a single with my own kitchenette and bathroom. I would recommend it, but it can be hard to meet people if you’re not living with anyone else. Luckily people in my building were friendly and social. You can always meet friends at school, also.

How much did you pay for housing? How did you pay for rent and utilities?
395 euros per month. I did not have to pay extra for utilities. I used my Austrian account and just went to the bank when I needed to pay. You received a slip in the mail and you take it to a bank to pay it.

Where did you eat? Was there a meal plan?
Restaurants, kebab stands, everywhere! There is a cafeteria at school but you honestly don’t usually spend that much time on campus unless you have a weeklong seminar with long hours. Food there isn’t bad. But restaurants and such are so much better to try! You can find fairly cheap eats if you look online/in travel books. I also cooked for myself quite a bit.

Transportation
What modes of public transportation are available? How much do they cost?
UBahn (metro), Bus, street trams. You can buy a semester pass for 128.50 euros. I wouldn’t recommend buying single tickets because I used the public transport all the time. The system is great. You can also rent public bikes.

How/where do you pay for tickets? Are there monthly or commuter passes?
You buy semester passes at the major U-bahn stations. You can pay cash or credit. You can buy weekly tickets or daily tickets or single rides for guests at any station. A pass covers all forms of public transport (not bikes, you have to register to use those at the bike stations).

Communication
How did you call home? What was the cost? Did you use Skype?
Skyped a lot, video chat is free. I also called from Skype which isn’t that expensive. I used my phone when I needed to get ahold of someone at home but couldn’t be at my computer.

Did you buy a cell phone? If so, what type of plan and/or provider do you recommend?
I bought an Austrian cell phone to talk to friends there. I used Telering. I bought a cell phone at a call shop then bought minutes at Telering. It was useful to talk to other people in Vienna, but expensive to call home.

How long does it take to receive mail? To send mail? What is the cost?
I didn’t send mail and it took a package from my sister about a week and a half to get to me.

Social activities
Did you meet students from the host country?
A few, but more other exchange students.

Did you get involved in any social organizations or clubs?
No, they weren’t advertised well if there are many.

Throughout the semester were there any special activities arranged for exchange students?
Stammtisch every Wednesday. Also fun outings were organized and trips through the ESN (Erasmus student network). The school organized some picnics, etc.

What do local students do for fun?
Go to cafes, go to clubs, when weather is nice go to parks, shopping, etc.

Shopping
Where did you buy groceries, toiletries, house wares, and other items?
Zielpunkt and BIPA since they were closest to my apartment. I also bought groceries at Naschmarkt, an outdoor market.

How do the prices compare to the United States? Did you use cash or credit/debit cards?
Euros are generally more expensive but it’s not so bad. Cash in grocery stores is easier. They don’t usually accept Visa or other major cards, only local Austrian cards.

Are there outdoor markets? If so, do you recommend them?
Yes, Naschmarkt is great! Great food and fresh produce.

What are general store hours?
Things close at 6 generally and nothing is open on Sunday! Except for a few stores randomly around the city but they are hard to find.

Were there any items that were not available?
I could find most things I wanted. They only have the natural peanut butter though.
Health and Safety

How safe did you feel in your host location?
Very safe, it is obviously uncomfortable to walk alone in foreign places so I tried to stay with a buddy at night.

What advice do you have for future students regarding their health and safety?
Bring some cold medicine and Tylenol, etc. because it is hard to obtain medicine without a prescription there.

What resources were available in case you needed medical attention?
I went to an English speaking doctor when I was sick. I would go to the school if my friend hadn’t referred me to one.

Travel

Where did you travel while abroad?

Is there a student travel agency or other organization to assist with making travel plans?
ESN makes trips but I traveled all on my own just visiting friends from Cornell who were abroad or going with friend from Vienna.

Did the host university organize any trips?
Only through classes

How much did you spend on traveling abroad?
I’m unsure of an exact amount but a lot because it was something I wanted to do while I had the chance. Flights weren’t too expensive in most cases but were not cheap by any means unless you traveled through Bratislava on Ryanair which I found inconvenient so I avoided.

Overall exchange experience

Did you get a good picture of the country? The local and school culture?
I feel that I did get a good feel for the culture. The school was odd to me after coming from Cornell it seemed very disorganized.

How did the exchange experience affect you from a cultural and social viewpoint?
It was interesting to meet people from so many different backgrounds. It changed the way I think about the U.S. and it made me feel uncultured seeing people who can fluently speak 5 languages where many Americans speak only English. It made me take a step back to compare the various similarities and, even more, the differences between the U.S. and Europe in general.

What influence do you think the experience had/will have over future career possibilities?
I would love to have a job that allows me to travel and would definitely consider a position abroad now.

Conclusion

Studying abroad made me appreciate new experiences. I’ve realized you need to come away from what you know and fully immerse yourself in a new culture to really experience it. My semester in Vienna made me want to travel and learn new things. I’ve also redefined “learning” as before I generally associated that term with school whereas now I feel I have learned far more from my cultural experience than I did from schooling during my abroad semester.