

BiBa: First Semester Handbook

BiBa Team

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1 Introduction

Welcome to the BiBa program at Otto-von-Guericke University Magdeburg! This guide provides essential information on housing, visas, city registration, university life, and more to help you smoothly transition to student life in Germany.

If you have any issues concerning your arrival in Germany feel free to contact us:

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2 Applying for Visa

2.1 Visa Process

- Processing time varies depending on country; apply early to avoid delays.
- Health insurance is mandatory; a 3-month travel insurance policy is required for entry.
- A blocked account is required as proof of sufficient financial means to cover living expenses while studying in Germany.

For more information on Visa applications, visit:

- <https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/en/visaservice/buergerservice/faq/08-studentenvisum-606690>

2.2 Residence Permit (Aufenthaltstitel)

Within three months of arrival, students must apply for a residence permit to legally stay in Germany during the validity of their student visa. This permit ensures continued residency and compliance with immigration regulations.

You must schedule an appointment at the Ausländerbehörde (Foreigner's Office) to apply for a residence permit. It is advisable to book an appointment as early as possible, as processing times can be lengthy.

For more information visit: https://www.ovgu.de/unimagdeburg/en/International/Incoming+_Ways+to+the+University/International+Students/Organizing+Your+Stay/Foreigners_+Authority-p-54296.html

Useful Things to Know When Applying for a Visa

- You have to have a letter of admission from the university
- Living costs: either a blocked account (Sperrkonto), a scholarship or a declaration of commitment (someone from Germany who vouches to support you financially).

- Speaking German during an embassy appointment: since our program does not require German skills it is probably not relevant.
- City registration can only be done after you have a contract for your current residence in the city of your residence.
- To apply for the residence permit a contract of the apartment and city registration is also required.

3 Coming to Magdeburg

- Arrival via Airports: If you are flying in, you will likely land in Berlin, Munich, or Frankfurt am Main.
- Final Destination via train: Magdeburg Hbf (Hauptbahnhof, main station).
- Travel time: Ride from Berlin takes about 2 hours with a regional train (marked with RB for Regionalbahn or RE for Regional-Express), usually the RE 1 train. From other airports the ride will take about 3-4 hours with the long-distance trains (IC or ICE). Using only regional trains from these airports can take around 7 hours or more. Delays are common, so check your itinerary and plan accordingly.
- Ticket Costs: IC and ICE can cost up to 150 € from bigger airports, if you are booking for the same day, so make sure to visit Deutsche Bahn web page or download the DB app and check the routes and prices. Buying tickets for IC and ICE trains in advance is cheaper.

ATTENTION: The "Deutschland-Ticket", that you get as a student through the university is NOT valid on IC or ICE trains. If you try to use an IC or ICE train with the Deutschland-Ticket you will incur a hefty fine!

- Deutschlandticket: After enrollment, you will have access to the Deutschland-Ticket, allowing free travel on regional trains and local public transport. As of July 2025 you can access the Deutschlandticket via easyGo app (visit this page for detailed instructions).

4 Apartment Search

Finding accommodation can be challenging, so here are a few points to consider:

- University does not automatically provide housing! There are student dorms available, but they are limited and you have to apply for them (more about the dorms here: 4.1).
- The time required to find a suitable apartment varies depending on your preferences. Even if you are flexible, securing a place may still take a few weeks.
- Consider arranging **temporary housing** (such as a hotel, Airbnb, or short-term rental) until you find a long-term option.

- While searching from abroad is very tricky, you can still try to book visitation appointments via email.
- Please consult the official university Q&A, it covers a lot of important points, as well as this resource from IKUS, and this one from DAAD.
- Most of the available apartments on the market are not furnished and do not come with a kitchen. Finding furniture second-hand is possible, a whole kitchen can be tricky. Make sure to tick the “Einbauküche” (EBK for short) box while searching for apartments with an in-built kitchen.
- Common terms related to renting an apartment in Germany:
 - **Mieter** (Tenant) – The person renting and living in the apartment.
 - **Vermieter** (Landlord) – The person or a company renting out the accommodation.
 - **Hauptmieter** (Primary Tenant) – The individual who signs the lease agreement directly with the landlord and may sublet rooms to others.
 - **Untermieter** (Subtenant) – A person renting a room from the Hauptmieter rather than directly from the landlord.
 - **Kaution** (deposit) - is money you give the landlord when renting an apartment. It's for safety, in case you damage something or don't pay rent. If everything is fine when you move out, you get it back. Usually, the deposit is up to 3 months' rent (not including utilities). NEVER pay the deposit in cash, always use bank transfer!
 - **Selbstauskunft** (tenant self-disclosure form) - is a form you fill out when renting an apartment in Germany. You write personal info like your job, income, and if you have debts. The landlord uses it to decide if you are a reliable tenant. You can easily find examples by using google and searching for "Mieterselbstauskunft".
 - **Kaltmiete** (base rent) - is the basic rent for an apartment in Germany. It only includes the cost for the space itself – no utilities like heating, water, or electricity are included.
 - **Warmmiete** (rent including utilities) - Warmmiete is the total monthly rent in Germany that includes the basic rent (Kaltmiete) plus some utilities, like heating and water. It does not include electricity, internet, or TV fees – you usually pay those separately.
 - **Nebenkosten** (utilities) - Nebenkosten are the extra costs you pay in addition to the basic rent (Kaltmiete) in Germany. They usually include things like heating, water, garbage collection, and building maintenance. Together with Kaltmiete, they make up the Warmmiete.
- Scams: Germany is generally a safe country, but rental scams have been on the rise in recent years. Some of the most common rental scams are:
 - **Fake apartments** — scammers post ads for apartments that don't exist.
 - **Advance payment requests** — asking for deposit or rent before you see the apartment.

- **No contract or fake contract** — giving you a false rental agreement or none at all.
- **Unrealistically low rent** — prices much lower than market to lure you in.
- **Pressure to decide fast** — scammers rush you to pay quickly.
- **Requests for personal data** — asking for sensitive info to steal identity.
- **Reservation fee** - asking for a reservation fee or apartment showing fee
- **Deposit in cash** - asking for the deposit to be paid in cash. Deposits should always be paid by bank transfer.

4.1 Student Dorms (Studentenwohnheime)

Student dormitories are a housing option provided by the university, typically located on campus or in direct vicinity. They usually offer furnished rooms, equipped with private or shared bathrooms and kitchens.

IMPORTANT: To apply for student housing you require a certificate of enrollment. You can contact wohnung@studentenwerk-magdeburg.de and ask them for advice or alternatives. Some websites for applying for student dormitories are:

- Studentenwerk Magdeburg
- Campus Tower

4.2 Shared Flats and Private Rentals

You can also choose to rent a room in a shared apartment (Wohngemeinschaften, common abbreviation: WG) either privately or in a student dorm.

Some websites to apply for private WGs are:

- <https://www.wg-gesucht.de/>
- <https://www.wobau-magdeburg.de/studenten-wg-wohnung>
- <https://www.kleinanzeigen.de/s-auf-zeit-wg/magdeburg/wg-zimmer/k0c19912227>
- Social media also can be a source of rental ads, but be sure to check your sources.

If you are considering to rent an apartment as a group, there are generally two options, how this can work. Either all parties rent equally and all are considered primary tenants (Hauptmieter), or one person acts as a primary tenant while others are considered the sub-tenants (Untermieter). The second option has to be approved by the landlord, since a lot of them do not allow sub-tenants. The primary tenant is responsible to fulfil the requirements set by landlord and to enforce these rules with the sub-tenants.

4.3 SCHUFA

SCHUFA: some landlords may request you to provide a SCHUFA (similar to credit score). SCHUFAs are not available for foreigners, when they first come to Germany. If a landlord requires SCHUFA, contact them, explaining your situation and ask for alternatives. Possible alternatives:

- A proof of income
- A reference letter from your current bank (German or from your country)
- A person vouching for you with an official proof of income (Bürgschaft) (a common option for students, done through parents)

Not all the landlords require SCHUFA. You can search for apartments through Genossenschaften (German for “Association”, like WOBAU, 1893, MWG etc. (full lists available through IKUS, Studentenwerk or FAQ)). They also handle housing for low-income people, so they usually don’t require SCHUFA. Student housing (from the university) also does not require SCHUFA. Private ones may ask for SCHUFA or alternatives.

More information: <https://hallogermany.com/blog/schufa-for-free>

4.4 City Registration (Anmeldung)

You must register your address at the Bürgerbüro (City Registration Office) within two weeks of when you move in. You will need to make an appointment. For the appointment you will need your passport as well as a rental agreement and a Wohnungsgeberbestätigung (Landlord confirmation). If you move, you must re-register at Bürgerbüro. You will receive a Meldebescheinigung (confirmation of registration) with your address. Appointments can be booked here: <https://terminvergabe.magdeburg.de/select2?md=2>

- City registration is required for:
 - Receiving any official correspondence¹.
 - Opening a bank account
 - Applying for a residence permit
 - Health insurance

For more information visit: https://www.ovgu.de/International/Incoming+_Wege+an+die+UniversitÃ¤t/Internationale+Studieninteressierte/Organisation+des+Aufenthalts/BÃijrgerbÃijro.html

Helpful Online Resources:

- SimpleGermany YouTube Channel

¹In case you are moving, consider applying for Nachsendeauftrag (change of address order). This was your correspondence will be automatically forwarded to you new address and/or senders will be informed about the address change.

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WRGwFJvi0IU>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UoQvU3mNS5s>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0hbrkq2sh4U>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bH1a3pZ3sTg>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QIZ0eIX5hGk>
- <https://www.studying-in-germany.org/renting-in-germany/>
- <https://n26.com/en-de/blog/how-to-rent-an-apartment-in-germany>

4.5 Rundfunkbeitrag (Licence fee)

You will receive a bill for a radio licence fee (Rundfunkbeitrag), which should be paid per apartment, not per person. You are required to pay it and there are several paying rhythms. If there are several persons in the apartment, officially only one person should pay the Licence Fee.

You will need to register your apartment online. The registration as well as more detailed information can be found here.

5 Healthcare and Insurance

Health insurance is mandatory for all students in Germany. You must have valid health insurance to enroll at the university and apply for a residence permit.

There are two main types of health insurance available: public and private. In case of the private insurance, you can use an insurance from your own country as long as it is also applicable in Germany.

For more information on healthcare and insurance, visit:

- DAAD page for general information
- IKUS page

For your application and for subsequent re-registration you will have to provide university with the confirmation of the health insurance. Most public insurance providers (Krankenkassen) will automatically provide the university with this document.

6 German Language

You should have at least an A1 level of German by the time you arrive or when your semester starts for your BiBa studies.

Familiarity with the language will help you navigate everyday situations and feel more comfortable in a German-speaking environment. With an A1-A2 level, you will be able to handle common interactions, such as shopping, asking for directions, and basic conversations.

There are a variety of language learning opportunities you can take advantage of.

6.1 Websites and Online Resources

- Deutsche Welle – Deutsch lernen: Interactive exercises, videos, podcasts and courses for beginners.
- Goethe-Institut – Kostenlos Deutsch üben: Lots of exercises, apps and videos for A1-A2 levels.
- DeutschAkademie – Online-Deutschkurs: over 25,000 free grammar and vocabulary exercises.
- Deutsch.info: self-study platform with audios, videos and interactive exercises.
- Leicht Deutsch Lernen: simple lessons and audio stories for beginners.
- Sprachschule Aktiv – Kostenlos Deutsch lernen: PDFs, grammar exercises and online courses for A1-A2 level.
- DeutschlernerBlog: articles, tests and practical videos for all levels.
- LEOs Wörterbuch: a publicly available dictionary with a grammar and usage usually explained in community sections.

7 General structure of education

Students in the BiBa program follow a structured curriculum that includes both technical subjects and language courses. The course structure and timetable is usually explained in detail during the introduction week at the beginning of the semester.

Make sure to check out an overview of the modules and "regular" study plan (Regelstudienplan), which describes an ideal timeline of the study courses, if completed in the regular study time, which takes 7 semesters.

- There are lectures and exercises (Vorlesung and Übung respectively). To take part in the examinations you usually have to fulfill the requirements for the course that are communicated in the first lecture, exercise or on the course website. Lectures do not depend on the size of the class, it also can be a small event.
- There are mandatory courses (Pflichtfach) and also elective courses (Wahlpflichtfach) that you can choose based on your interests. Electives are denoted with WPF in the Regelstudienplan.
- There are also seminars, that are smaller, more interactive and have different requirements and commonly no standard exam, assessment is usually based on a report, either oral or written, or both.
- Every course awards 5 or 10 CP, depending on the time and effort needed to successfully complete it. One CP typically represent 30 hours of work.

- There are graded (Note) and ungraded (Schein) exams. Graded exams contribute to the final grade and bring CPs, while ungraded bring only CPs. Check the study plan for which courses may be taken without a grade.
- Grades range from 1.0 to 5.0. 1.0 means exceptional performance, 5 is a failing grade. 4.0 is the minimum passing grade. For a graded exam you have three tries to pass it, while the ungraded can be repeated more. If you fail the graded exam for the third time, you will be exmatriculated and your ability to study degree programs involving this subject will be limited.
- More detailed information on regulations and study plan can be found on the BiBa program page.

8 Pre-courses

To help incoming students transition smoothly into their studies, the faculty student council FARAFIN offers pre-courses in programming and mathematics. We encourage you to participate, as they provide some basic knowledge for the first semester lectures if you do not have a reliable background in these subjects. For more details, visit the FARAFIN web page for incoming students or contact them via e-mail: post@farafin.de. We will also post information about the pre-courses in our messaging group and will send an email with all the details.

9 Hobbies

9.1 Sports

The University Sports Center (SPOZ) offers a variety of sports courses for a fee of 10 € per semester. Registration is usually open during the first weeks of lectures and takes place online. Since the number of spots for each course is limited, it is important to register on time.

Participating in sports courses can also be a great opportunity to practice German through interaction with others. More information and course registration can be found [here](#).

9.2 Music

University has several options for musically inclined students, like Acafin at the Faculty of Computer Science or university-wide UniBigBand. More information can be found [here](#).

9.3 Other opportunities

There are many student initiatives at the OVGU and we encourage you to explore them. Some of them can be found [here](#).