

Helpful Hints for Exchange Students in Vienna (fall 2000)

- **Before You Leave:**
 - **Visa/ Residency Permit:**
 - Visa: This is most likely what you will need. The rule is if you will be staying in Austria for more than 3 months and less than 6 months then you need only a Visa. Do this a couple of months before you leave. What you need:
 - The application form filled out as best you can (Schengen States just means EU territory). You can download and print this form from the Austrian Consulate website.
 - Proof of travel insurance: Some students bought this from STA for \$285 for 4 months of coverage. I chose to just use coverage from my parents' contract. Whichever you chose, make sure you have it, and send the receipt with your application.
 - Letter of Acceptance- The one that says your name and that you have been officially accepted for study, and it should be stamped and signed. Hold onto this tightly as you will have to use it for other administrative procedures once in Vienna.
 - A recent bank statement proving you have enough money for the time you'll be there or a letter from your parents saying that they will support you along with one of their recent bank statements. I sent a copy of my mutual funds account.
 - Your passport: don't worry you'll get it back!
 - You can send all of this in a Fed Ex envelope with another Fed Ex envelope inside for them to mail your passport back to you. Or, if you forget like I did, you can give them your credit card number to charge for the postage.
 - I would also advise that you stay on top of the progress of your visa being processed. If it is taking a while, you may want to call to check on the status of the Visa. I had to do this a couple of times, making sure to send them a fax of the exact information they needed. Don't be afraid to call and ask several times.
 - Most important: Make sure that you apply as far ahead as possible! I had a friend who arrived here without a visa and it was not pretty.
 - Finally, once you have your passport with Visa in hand, make sure you make a few copies of it, along with other important travel documents. I had a friend who had her passport and all ID stolen from a rented car—if she would

have had a copy of her Ids then it would have been much easier for her to receive a new passport.

- **Residency Permit**: This is a little more difficult and you only need it if you will be staying more than 6 months.

○ **European Rail Passes:**

- If you want to get a Eurail pass, make sure you buy it in the US because they are more expensive here and harder to find to buy. Make sure you figure out how much you want to travel so that you can buy the most appropriate pass. I bought a one month unlimited pass, but now wish I would have paid about \$100 more for the two month and have been able to travel at my leisure. For instance, I took a 4 day trip to Belgium and Luxembourg and ended up spending well over \$200 on rail tickets. I would suggest buying your Eurail from either STA travel or your personal travel agent. You can also check out the Eurail website to see the different types of passes.
- **Eurail Pass** covers 17 countries including Austria. If you are using it to travel before school starts you probably want to get a consecutive day pass even if you won't be traveling everyday. This one is cheaper if you will be traveling a lot in a short time. If you are using it to travel throughout the semester you probably want a flexipass. This way you can travel at selected times within 2 months. Tip: A friend of mine suggests getting a 10 days in 2 months pass. She bought 15 and it was too much because she only needed it for the long distance trips, because shorter trips are generally pretty cheap and not worth it.
- **Euro Pass** only covers 5 countries and does not include Austria. If you only want these 5 countries (Germany, Switzerland, France, Italy, & Spain) then you could add Austria as an associated country and it would be about \$50 cheaper than the Eurail Pass.
- **Vorteilscard**: This card gets you discounted travel in Austria or to any Austrian border. It cost only 250ATS and it gets you 50% discounted tickets in Austria. I would highly recommend this because it is likely you will make up the 250 ATS on one trip. You can apply for the card at Westbahnhof. They will give you a temporary one, and then you will receive a plastic one in the mail in a month or so. If you use it to buy a train ticket, make sure you have it with you when you are on the train, because the conductor will most likely ask and check it.
- **To Get to the Airport**: In my opinion, the fastest and most convenient route to get to the airport is to go to the Westbahnhof main station and catch a coach bus outside the station. A one-way trip will cost you 70 ATS, or 60ATS if you use your Vorteilscard. You can also take this if you want to get to Sudbahnhof.

- **Buying your Airplane ticket:** The Fall Semester begins around Oct 1 and the Spring Semester begins around Feb 26 and you'll probably have a 2 week course before that (very important to attend for registration) so you can arrive any time before that. You will pay rent for the entire month of Sept/Feb anyway. If you want to travel before school starts you can drop your stuff off in your room (maybe even as early as August/Jan) and then begin your travels from Vienna.
 - *Tip: The office at Haus Erasmus is open only Mon-Thurs from 9-5 (closed for lunch) and Fri 9-12. You cannot get your key any other time. If you arrive outside of these office hours the only way to get into your room is to have someone pick up your key for you ahead of time (Your buddy could do this for you if you trust him/her) It would be much easier to have your flight arrive so that you make it during office hours.*

- **Get in contact with your buddy:** The best way to find out who they are is to e-mail the buddy network itself: oei.international@wu-wien.ac.at Check out their web page at <http://oei.wu-wien.ac.at/international> Once you know who it is call them and talk to them about when you are coming in, make it very clear that you need them to pick you up at the airport and what time. I would call again the day before you leave and make sure you have solidified a meeting time at the airport. This proved to be an unfortunate introduction for me—I sat at the airport waiting by myself for nearly four hours, and had to find my own way to Haus Erasmus!

- **When You Arrive:**
 - Where to meet your buddy: The airport is not like the States because they won't meet you at the gate. Go get your baggage and go like you're leaving the airport then you'll see everyone waiting to meet their parties. If you can't carry your baggage on your own there are carts near the baggage claim and they take \$1 bills.

 - Changing Money: I would suggest having some dollars converted to schillings before you come to Vienna. It is always nice to have some local currency on you in case you need it. However, like all airports, it is possible to change some American dollars into schillings for a hefty charge. Once you are in the dorm, you will find a regular ATM at the Erste Bank one block down Westbahnstrasse to the right. You can have English instructions to make it easier to understand. For regular ATMs, make sure you see the neon blue and green striped sign above the machine and look for the actual machine being well labeled with Visa or American Express or Mastercard stickers. Otherwise, you may be unsuccessful because a lot of local bank machines only give cash for local accounts.
 - AMEX Traveler's Cheques: To avoid the hefty commissions charged on changing these you can either open a bank account

(you will need your police registration form to do this, *see After you are Settled*) and use them as your deposit or you can go to the American Express Office and change them (this is what I would recommend). The office is located on Kärntner Strasse. Take the U3 (orange) from Westbahnhof (*see Subway & Train Station*) to Stephansplatz, look for Kärntner Strasse when you come out and go down a little ways looking for the AMEX sign, it's on the left.

- Since you will be living in Austria for several months, many students, including myself, chose to open a local bank account. There are several reasons you may or may not want to do this. My primary reasoning was that my parents could easily wire money into my account, and I could access it at one of the many local Creditanstalt bank machines. However, it may be just as easy to access your money from a regular ATM cash card. Some students chose not to bother with this, and just use their account from home. If you would like to open a local account in Austria, there will be several promotions for it at the beginning of the semester. Student accounts are free, and the sign up can be conducted at the university. If you are interested, you will hear more about how to do this from the student organizations.
 - Remember to get contact phone numbers or emails for your bank at home. The ATM machines here will not give you a balance of funds, so you will need to keep track of your withdrawals or balance your books via online banking.
- Haus Erasmus:
- Telephone: If you don't get to the dorm within office hours your phone will only be able to call within the dorm (pick it up and dial the room number). You have to tell the person in the office to turn it on so you can dial outside numbers. If you can't get it turned on right away then make sure you have lots of coins because you will have to go to a pay phone. You can receive outside calls on your phone and your phone number will probably be 011-43-90111-then your room #. Once your phone is turned on, you must dial 0 to get an outside line. You will be charged even for local calls. To call the US, you would dial for example, 0-001-608-258-1234.
 - Paying Rent and Phone Bill: The administration in the dorm will only accept CASH payments for both the phone and the monthly rent. Some students opt to pay for all of their months upfront, but you can pay on the first of each month if you prefer instead. If you do not pay exactly on the first, they will be pretty lenient. The first month I was here, I completely forgot to pay my rent, and I got a notice in my mailbox saying it was late. I paid it a week or so later, and there was no problem. As far as I know, there is no actual fine

for late rent. For the phone bill, you will receive an invoice of all the calls you made in your mailbox. You will need to go through it with your roommate to see who is responsible for each call. A new feature with the phone system is that we have voice mail. While not everyone uses it, you may want to. The administration will give you directions on how to set up the account as well as access your messages. You have to pay 14 ATS per person per month whether or not you use this service.

- Laundry Facilities: Haus Erasmus is equipped with 4 washers and 4 dryers on the 9th floor. Each load will cost you 4x 5 ATS coins for both the washer and dryer. Be prepared to spend a lot of time doing laundry. Not only does it get busy with students, but the actual machine cycles take quite a long time—pay no attention to the time on the machine—one time it said there was 20 minutes left, but took 2 hours! The laundry room also has a free ironing board and iron to use at your convenience. If you prefer, it may be faster to go down one block to the corner of Kenyongasse and Westbahnstrasse and use the laundry facilities there but it may be more expensive.
 - Cooking facilities: Each floor in Haus Erasmus has a kitchen with sink, stove and burners to cook. You will also have a locker/closet in there to lock up your food or dishes. Cooking has become quite the pastime here, and the daily event that most everyone looks forward to. Have fun seeing other nationalities cook, and share recipes. Don't forget food or dishes in the kitchen or it may disappear quickly.
 - Haus Erasmus Bar: Yes, there is a bar in our dorm. Generally it is open during all evenings. It has cheap beer, ok music, pool tables, and a big screen TV.
 - Finally, the ninth floor of the dorm has a TV room that is OK, a ping-pong table, and separate rooms to study in. The ninth floor also has a tanning bed, if you are into paying for that kind of thing.
- **After You are Settled:**
 - Registering with the police: Go to the Tabak (Go out of Haus Erasmus to the left take a right at Westbahnstrasse (the Police station), it is just on the right) and ask for a Meldezettel (it costs 8 Schillings). Unless your German is perfect, you will have to ask the person in the dorm office help you fill it out. Then you will take it to the police station at 7 Kandlgasse. Kandlgasse is the street after Westbahnstrasse (from Haus Erasmus) take a right (it doesn't go left anyway) and the Police station is several blocks down. They are only open until 12 or 1pm. After you are registered, you will need to bring a copy of the registration to the dorm, and then also to the University for administration purposes.

- **Subway & Train Station:**
 - The Subway is called U Bahn (pronounced ooh bahn) and the closest stop to Haus Erasmus is Burgasse Stadhalle on the U6, the Brown line. Go out of the dorm to the left and walk through the little park toward the white canopies. You'll see the sign with a "U" on it. Passes are on the honor system but they do check randomly and the fine is around ATS 500 if you don't have one. The best thing to at first is buy weekly passes until the semester starts then you can get a semester pass for students.
 - *Tip: This line, U6, takes you to Wu Wien (the university). Get off at the Spittelau stop and look for the exit marked with the name of the University. Go across the bridge past the Spittelau Incinerator (you can't miss it!).*
 - Westbahnhof Train Station: (the U3, orange, subway line also comes in here) Go out of the dorm to the right and take a right at the first corner, then a left at the next corner, go down a couple blocks and you'll see it straight ahead.
 - *Tip: For night trains they say to buy reservations 8 hrs in advance or you may not be able to get a sleeping car, but we bought them 3-4 hrs before and it was okay. I think you may not be able to get it after 5pm.*
 - Südbahnhof Train Station: Take the # 18 tram which picks up under the white canopies. Take it toward Westbahnhof and the stop is called Südbahnhof. (15 min)
- **Getting Your Semester Subway Pass:**
 - 1. Go early because it gets more crowded as the semester beginning approaches.
 - 2. Bring your letter of acceptance, a little picture (you can get these made in a booth in the main building of the school next to the Byte Bar, it costs ATS 70 for 4 and ATS 100 for 8), passport, and money.
 - 3. Go to Erdberg (the last stop on the U3 line). Find the place where all the booths are and go to the lines to the far right, there is a form on a white piece of paper to fill out. This gives you the ID (this is free) that lets you buy the pass.
 - 4. Then you can get the pass from a number of stations (but you might as well do it there) and it costs ATS 1540. For this you'll need another form that is a ½ piece of glossy paper, kind of yellowish orange, and of course the ID you just got & the money (they take credit cards for this).
- **Groceries:**
 - Billa: These are everywhere. One is right behind Haus Erasmus. It is small but convenient. Cash only unless you have an Austrian bank account with cash card. You must weigh and tag your produce. Just put it on the scale and press the button with the corresponding picture and a sticker will print up. If you want to use a shopping cart, you have to insert a 5 or 10-shilling

coin, but you will get it back when you return the cart. Bags cost money so bring your own if you can.

- Merkur: Much bigger and will have more stuff that you will recognize. Maybe better prices too. They may take debit cards, but not credit cards. Same deal with carts and bags. Located at Lugner City, which is a sort of shopping mall. Go out of Haus Erasmus to the left, go 2 blocks down and take a left, go another 2 blocks and you should see it on the left.
- If you find yourself with hunger pains on the weekend, your only option for buying groceries is to go to Westbahnhof. It will be a little more expensive but still cheaper than going to a restaurant.

- **Toiletries:**

- Bipa: These are everywhere. For the closest, go out of Haus Erasmus to the left take a right on Westbahnstrasse (at the Police station), 1 block down on the left.
- There are also a few places in Lugner City (*see Merkur*) that sell toiletries.

- **Dishes & House ware Items:** You will need to buy your own dishes and pots and pans to cook dinner. There are 2 places I know of near Haus Erasmus

- Timbi: Located at Lugner City, once you go in it is to the left of Merkur (the supermarket). They sell voltage adapters, hair dryers, etc as well as dishes, cookware other household items.
 - *Tip: The cheapest way to do it is to go in with 3 other people and buy a packaged set of dishes that will come with just about everything you need for 4 people and you can split it up.*

- Vis á Vis: Small house ware place with lots of miscellaneous stuff, may have better prices on some things, but you kind of have to dig around. Go out of Haus Erasmus to the left and take a right on Westbahnstrasse (at the Police station), go down about 4-5 blocks to Hermannngasse and you'll see it on the right. (It's about a 10 min walk).

- **Linens, Towels, Pillows, etc...**OK, your room will come with a comforter and pillow. Unless you like cuddling up to germs from previous exchange students you will want to buy a duvet cover and pillow cover. I would suggest buying the duvet set, as well as sheets here in Vienna because the sizes are a bit different than from at home.

- Cheapest thing we found. Go out of Haus Erasmus to the left, take a right at the Police station go 1 block (to Erste Bank) and take a left you'll see it a little way down on the right (look for pillows and stuff in the window and an orange/red overhang).
- Reeters or Leiner: Take a left on Mariahilfstrasse and it's a ways down on the right, near the Virgin Megastore.

- **School Supplies:**

- I think the best place is the school copy shop located on campus (they should show it you when you take the campus tour during the 2 week orientation, if not ask anyone)
- **Working Out:**
 - Club Danube: Buy a discounted card from the office next door to the Buddy Network. It costs ATS 1800 for 4 ½ months and a little less if you will only go to the club before 3pm. The closest club is at Lugner City on the 3rd level. When you take it to the club you will need a little picture and your student ID (or chip card).
- **Shopping:**
 - Mariahilfstrasse: Long street with tons of shops. There are 3 McDonald's and a Pizza Hut also. Go out of the dorm to the right and take right at the corner, then a left at the next corner. Go down until you get to Westbahnhof and take a left.
 - Kärntner Strasse: This street also has plenty of great shops (*see AMEX Traveler's Cheques for directions*)
- **Misc.:**
 - Making Copies: Buy a copy card at the bookstore in the same building as the buddy network. (1 schilling per copy) Then you insert the card in any copy machine around campus to make your copies.
- **Restaurants:** We didn't eat out much because cooking in the kitchens became a social occasion but here are a couple of things I found:
 - Chilino's: the European Chili's for those of you who need a Mexican Food fix. Near Lugner City, the address is Vogelweidplatz 14.
 - Zanoni and Zanoni- ice cream place that is absolutely to die for! Take the U3 from Westbahnhof of to Stephansplatz, go past St. Stephens and you'll see it on the right corner. Keep your receipt and pay on your way out the door.
 - Centimeter II: A real good deal for huge portions of greasy Austrian food like schnitzels or spinach studels, etc. The atmosphere is really more like an Irish Pub. Try the meter of bier—you get eight or ten glasses of different beers to sample with friends. Make sure that you go early, or at least plan on spending a few hours there because it is very popular and the service is extremely slow. Take the 49 tram line for 4 stops.

Buddy Network Trips and Events

- The Buddy Network is an extremely helpful group of student volunteers. During your orientation, you will be introduced to a few students there, as well as see where their office is. Feel free to stop by and chat with them anytime, they really are nice and want to help.

- There are several trips they organized throughout the semester. I am sure that the trips will be different from spring semester, but this is what we experienced the past fall. Trips can be anything small from a cultural walk, or an organized party at a disco to a 4 day long ski weekend. I attended the following events, and would recommend going on each one:
 - Trip to Munich for Oktoberfest
 - Trip to Prague
 - Trip to Budapest
 - Ski trip to Austrian Alps
 - Heuringer
 - Winery and brewery tours

Well, I think all of this information should be a helpful start. Please do not rely on this info too much—the greatest experiences abroad are those that you have to figure out for yourself. Enjoy yourself—you will have the time of your life! I did and can't wait until I have the opportunity to go back. Tschuse!