

How to keep in touch while studying abroad in Germany

A comprehensive guide to saving money on broadband deals and mobile phone costs while you're studying abroad.

Researched and compiled by Ofcom accredited broadband, TV and phone comparison site www.cable.co.uk

If you're intending on studying in Germany, and you plan on keeping in touch with those back home, you'll need to be thinking about finding a German ISP or a mobile contract. We've put together a handy guide to help you navigate the labyrinth of providers and services.

Broadband providers in Germany

Until the industry was privatised in 1995, Deutsche Telekom was the monopoly ISP, and it remains the dominant figure despite a number of other ISPs coming into the market since the turn of the millennium.

Other providers cater to customers' varying needs. For ultrafast connections KabelBW offers 150Mbps speeds, which should be more than enough to satisfy your browsing and downloading needs. If you're keeping a closer eye on your finances (and what student isn't?), 1&1 offers a fairly reasonable package that comes with a modem, phone line, a decent connection speed.

Another consideration is contract length, which is important for those not looking to make a long-term commitment. Brilliantly, 1&1 offers a number of tariffs that do not have a minimum run time, so you can drop them when you leave the country.

Mobile providers in Germany

If you've decided to go for a mobile phone contract while you're in Germany you'll need to know who the key providers are. If you want to use your current phone during your time in Germany, then that's possible (meaning you can opt for the cheaper SIM only deals) assuming you're coming from within Europe and your phone operates on the GSM network. It is also worth noting that your phone will need to be unlocked if you want to use it with a new provider.

T-Mobile, which is owned by Deutsche Telekom, is one of the principle operators in the country and a familiar face to those traveling from the UK. It offers a number of deals similar to those found in Britain, including SIM-only and pre-pay phones.

At the cheaper end of the spectrum is E-plus, which offers low flat rates for a variety of packages that range from occasional to frequent use – but with 12 different providers to choose from, you're sure to find a suitable deal.

Getting a broadband or phone contract in Germany

Opening a bank account (girokonto) is relatively straightforward, and will help you when you try to take out a mobile or broadband contract. You'll need to bring your passport, documents showing that you're a student and proof of registration (meldebescheinigung). Once this is done, you should find getting a broadband or mobile contract easy.

Roaming charges

If you want to keep your UK contract then you'll need to know the roaming charges of your provider. Plans are in place to scrap roaming within the EU from July 2014, but in the mean time it's worth looking into how much it would cost to use your phone abroad as it may turn out to be cheaper than you thought, especially if you're still in the middle of your contract.

It's best to assess how you plan on using your phone while you're away to ensure you're getting the best value for money.

Consumer rights in the Germany

The Verbraucherschutzminister (a minister of the German cabinet) is responsible for consumer rights and protection in the country, which follows wider EU law. As such, you'll find the same level of protection there that you benefit from in the UK, with legislation in place to prevent misleading sales, poor quality products and services or hidden charges.

If you've got a complaint that can't be resolved with the provider, go to your nearest Consumer Protection Agency (Verbraucherzentrale) for help and advice.

Local information

The terms that have fallen into common usage in the UK may not have made it quite as far as Germany, and visa versa. You don't want to be left red faced in the Deutsche Telekom shop attempting to explain what a dongle is while the attendant hurriedly calls for security, so we've come up with some points to remember.

00 44: The prefix for calling the UK from Italy. Replaces the first zero of any UK number called (for example, to call the University of Leeds from Italy, dial 00 44 113 243 1751)

Breitband: Broadband

Faser-Breitband: Fibre broadband

Festnetz: Landline

Handy: The German word for mobile phone.

Manage your data

Use Wi-Fi where possible

As well as in the home, there are many public places that offer free Wi-Fi – so try and use them. It is worth keeping your eyes open for charges for Wi-Fi hotspot access, which kind of defeats the purpose, but these should be signposted before allowing you to connect.

Know what you're opening

Opening an email is not a particular data heavy activity, opening an email with 400 images of your Aunt Flo's trip to Benidorm attached is. Make sure you know what you're opening to reserve as much of your allowance as possible until you're safely in a Wi-Fi safety net.

Bundle up

It's worth having a chat with your current mobile provider to see if it offers any good international rates to your current bundle. These can commonly be added mid-contract and can save you a small fortune if you plan on calling from abroad.

Know what it's costing you

It's worth keeping your eyes on the exchange rate so you know what you're spending and how much value you're getting. At one point Germany had the 12th most expensive mobile rate in Europe, mainly because it had such high cost of call transfers between providers. Some popular exchange rate services include Reuters, XE and Oanda, so keep your eye on them.

Useful Links

Reuters: <http://www.reuters.com/finance/currencies>

XE: <http://www.xe.com>

Oanda: <http://www.oanda.com/currency/converter/>

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