

My name is Puji, I am a master student of Southeast Asian Studies starting my study in October 2017. I enrolled to the Buddy Programme because as a new student coming from abroad not speaking and understanding German, I was overwhelmed by the numerous things that I had to deal with; registering to Burgeramt, getting a phone number, opening a bank account, getting to know HRZ, library, students' administration like email account, registering to courses, finding classrooms in campus Westend and Bockenheimer, and many more. Further, I still could not find accommodation until the 5th month of being in Frankfurt and being a student above 30 years old, it was more than a struggle to get good reliable insurance product.

I made myself a long list of information that I wanted to get from the Buddy Programme. Some of those are; which phone and internet provider is best, which bank will be easiest to open an account with, do I need credit card or debit card or both, how to get affordable accommodation, which transportation will take me to where, how to go to library and use my library card, how much does a normal meal cost, which winter jacket do I need to get (I am a tropical girl!), do I need a winter boots?, etc, etc. The list got nothing but longer each day. Till the reality cracked; my first appointed Buddy could no longer become my buddy because she just got a job! Sigh...sigh... I needed to wait for some time until someone would be available for me.

Then, one day, a new girl came and introduced herself as my Buddy! I was so happy to have her. I presented her my "getting longer and longer each day question list" to her. She did not have all answer and sometimes she did not even have any clue, but she was always there ready to find the answer with me. The best was that when we got stuck of not knowing anything, we would end up laughing and making jokes on problems that we could not solve.

What I like from the programme and having her as my Buddy is that even the programme and the Buddy could not solve every problem that I faced as new student in a new country, she and the Buddy programme eliminated my prejudices towards the Germans as a cold snobbish arrogant community. I met the warmest, kind hearted girl giving me warmth welcome and helps. Spending time with her helped me to bridge the differences between my culture and the Germans. Communicating with her turning my assumption and one side judgement into productive cross cultural discussion and understanding.

Having a supporting Buddy was very good for me because I had someone to share my new experiences and ask question related to both cultural and practical daily trouble shooting in my first months of life in Germany. She supported me with my immigration appointment, finding accommodation, showing me different buildings for classes, showing me how the transportation works, which Mensa has the best burger for what price.

There were lots of challenges that I faced (am facing still) as an international student here. Language is very essential (my program is in English but all study related information is in German most of the time without English translation) to get myself informed. It took me 10 weeks to open a bank account. Accommodation was not very easy to get (5 months!) plus it was not very easy to buy and transport furniture for the room. Health insurance for student above 30 years old is a big issue that I am still struggling until now because of lack of information [...]. Immigration feels always intimidating because they required sufficient German speaking person to come with me for appointment or only German is legally binding. Immigration office even emphasises that we are in Germany and only German is being used as means of communication...

My Buddy was very helpful with my first appointment with the Immigration office. She was there with me and translating everything for me. But I felt bad for her because I had (and am still having) many issues that I have to deal with. She is more than willing to help, but she does not have either knowledge nor capacities to do. Still, her encouragement really means a lot for me to keep my head above the water to survive my first semester. What will be very helpful for future international buddy according to me is the familiarity of some administrative works that International students have to deal upon arrival; immigration requirement, opening bank account, selecting phone and internet provider, etc. Every international students will have their unique issue for sure, but common understanding and knowledge including who to contact for further assistance will be very useful. Above all, thank you for assigning this girl to be my Buddy because she did help creating good first experience to start my student life in Germany. All yours and her hard work are really noticed and appreciated.

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