

The German-American Partnership Program
Huron High School
Uhland Gymnasium
Ann Arbor Public Schools
The Goethe Institute

Introduction

This program is continually being changed in its details, but the basic structure has remained the same since the 1960s: for two or three weeks, we host a group of teenagers from our German sister city, Tübingen. They stay with Huron High School families, attend classes at Huron, and generally experience American culture. Then a group of Huron High School students visits Germany several weeks later, and stays with those families for three weeks, attending classes there at our partner school, Uhland Gymnasium.

What is G.A.P.P.?

The German-American Partnership Program is funded in part by the U.S. federal government, in part the German federal government, and in part by grants from businesses. Our program also receives support from AAPS teachers who donate ‘paid time off’ days to work in the program. It provides us with health and liability insurances, obtains lower airfares for us, and gives us special privileges regarding the manner in which our airline tickets are booked.

Being a Host

We will pick up our Germans at Detroit Metro Airport; we can carpool so that not everyone has to drive there. Help your German acclimate to local time by keeping her or him awake until a normal bedtime.

Hosting a foreign teenager for three weeks can be a fun experience. This program is designed to be flexible, to fit in the different needs and schedules of our modern busy families. You are not expected to clear your schedule and entertain your German student for three weeks! Your German student is here to learn about, and be part of, daily life here. Helping with meal preparation, going grocery shopping together, and doing whatever your family would normally be doing are the kinds of experiences which you can provide. Doing yard work together can be a fun experience: raking leaves, shoveling snow, or mowing the lawn.

Please be aware that your exchange partner – the student you host in Ann Arbor, and who hosts you in Tübingen – might be a few years older or younger than you (students in grades 9 through 12 participate). The students in the group from Huron, and in the group from Uhland Gymnasium, include both boys and girls. Depending on how many of each are in the groups, there is sometimes a need for students to host a student of the opposite gender.

There will be some officially schedule and organized fun activities, but individuals and families have often created some informal plans, too. As a group, the hosting families can organize some events, and the students (both the Americans and the Germans) are usually pretty good at finding ways to get together and entertain themselves.

In terms of rules, your visiting student is expected to follow whatever guidelines you give: it's your house – they're your rules. Clear communication helps: make sure that your student understands curfews, times and places to meet for rides, pickups, drop-offs, etc.; warning: some teenagers will nod in agreement, even when they haven't really understood what you're saying. It helps to ask the student to repeat important times ("we'll meet at the corner of Liberty and State at four o'clock"). Think about "unspoken" rules, which you may need to explain a new person. Help the student understand routines and chores within your family.

Along with "culture shock," there are the individual differences from family to family. Some Huron High School parents require their children to be home by a specified time in the evening, and to check in periodically, to let the parents know where they are. Other parents allow students to go "out" with no curfew at all. It will be important to let your visiting student know exactly what your expectations are.

Transportation can require some organizing. You might help your guest understand the AATA. They will expect to ride a public bus often, because that's what they do in Tübingen.

In terms of cultural differences, German families often keep all doors in the house closed, and knock before entering a room. This can lead to socially awkward situations!

Brainstorming for activities, individual or group, planned or unplanned:

- Tigers Comerica Park
- Pizza

- Greenfield Village
- Henry Ford Museum
- I-Max
- Briarwood
- Cobblestone Farm
- Concerts
- Plays
- Spectator sports: Huron, U of M, and EMU
- Playing basketball
- Volleyball
- Swimming, Bowling, Hiking, Canoeing
- Farmer's market
- Dearborn assembly plant
- U of M stadium and football program and facilities
- Capital in Lansing
- Progressive dinner
- Mini-golf
- ice-skating, sledding
- Soccer
- Softball

Travel to Tübingen

We fly from Detroit Metro Airport. How will you get there? Usually families drop off students, but we can arrange rides if parents need to be elsewhere.

It's a long flight, and there are ways to minimize the effects of "jet-lag": drink lots of water before, during and after the flight, because air travel dehydrates; avoid sugar, alcohol, caffeine, and tobacco before, during, and after the flight. Get as much sleep as possible on the airplane. When you get to Germany, go to bed at the "normal" time there, even if you have to work hard to stay awake for an extra couple of hours, or even if you have to go to bed when you're not tired and sleepy. If you wake up in the middle of the night, try to make yourself go back to sleep. This will help you reset your body's biorhythms to the local time.

The exact amount of luggage you can bring will be limited. Learn to pack very light!

Things to bring:

- shoes/sandals which are good for lots of walking
- swim suit if you like
- at least one sweatshirt or sweater or light jacket (days will be warm, but evenings can be chilly)
- prescription medications and written copy of prescription
- mostly casual clothes, but at least one nice outfit; you will be perceived as representing Huron High School, the city of Ann Arbor, and the United States: dress appropriately, so as not to offend; German washing machines can be aggressive, so don't bring delicate or dry-clean-only clothes

Things to leave at home:

- clothing that could be perceived as military
- short shorts (modesty!)
- anything questionable printed across the front of your t-shirt
- clothing with too much U.S. flag imagery
- no “tank tops” for guys, i.e., no hairy armpits

Be careful with:

- anything electrical that plugs into a wall outlet; even the ones marked ‘international’ can misfire
- aerosol or things under pressure (pump spray instead?); they can explode in suitcases at high altitudes

In general, think about packing light. You’ll have access to a washing machine, so you do not need three weeks’ worth of clothes. Wear something nice on the days of our flights; customs and airline officials will treat you better. Leave extra room in your suitcase to bring home souvenirs. Bring a few gifts for your host family – remember that much of what we have here in the USA is already available in Germany, so a gift should be something local, that they won’t have over there: a CD of Huron bands / choirs / orchestras, a book about Michigan or Ann Arbor, a local hand-made product (corn cob jelly, venison jerky, Michigan wine). Packing light will also make your traveling easier; think in terms of one suitcase to check in, and one small carry-on bag. Throw a few essentials into the carry-on, in case you can’t get back to your suitcase right away. German washing machines are a little different than ours, so to be safe, wash in cool/cold water. Boys, get your hair cut as short as you can stand it: it’s less work to wash, dry, and comb. Girls, think about “low-maintenance” styles.

From the time the airplane leaves Detroit Metro airport, until it lands there again three weeks later, you will have 24/7 access to one of the trip’s chaperones. One of them will always be available by telephone for emergencies.

If you do not have a currently valid U.S. Passport, apply for it immediately. If you wait until the last minute, your participation in the trip could be cancelled, because the passports may not arrive in time for your departure.

Bringing Money on Your Trip to Tübingen

Students and parents usually have two questions: how much money should I bring with me to Germany? And how should I bring it?

To the first question, there is no uniform answer. Consider your spending habits: do you like to shop? You can easily drop hundreds of dollars. Are you self-disciplined and know how to live on a budget? You can get by with very little money in that case.

Consider the following: are you self-disciplined enough to make a bread-and-butter sandwich before you leave the house for a snack, or would you rather buy a quick snack downtown? Will you send lots of postcards at a dollar each? Do you like to go to movies, concerts, or dances? Do you plan on buying gifts to bring back to friends or family in the US, and a few souvenirs for yourself?

For the second question, how to bring the money, there are several options:

- ATM cards will work over there, just as they do here, for a small extra fee.
- Credit cards work, too, but there are more cash-only stores; the Discover cards is rarely usable there.
- Traveler's checks have become in some ways obsolete. They are free to AAA members, but you have to work to avoid cashing fees over there.
- You can bring US cash and exchange it over there.
- You can buy Euros in cash here at a bank or some travel agencies, but will pay for the exchange.

I rely mainly on the first two options, because they will get the best exchange rates; but each option has its advantages and disadvantages. Also think about a secure wallet or money-belt, if you are carrying large amounts of cash.

Being a Guest in a German Home

You will have a very enjoyable experience in Tübingen, if you get along well with your host family. Do your best to be very polite, saying *Bitte* or *Danke* at every chance. Keep asking questions until you understand what plans the family is making for you. Remember to keep doors closed, knock before entering, and be very careful with that bathroom or toilet door! Lock it!

You will certainly want to go out to movies or other activities, but do not treat your host family like a hotel, merely a place to sleep and eat. Take time to talk with the different members of the family, get to know them, and do some of the things they like to do. Act as if you are interested in the family's activities and hobbies. Ask about their lives, and listen to their answers.

The host family might be interested in talking about politics; don't be surprised if they know the names of all fifteen members of our president's cabinet! Be ready to discuss whatever you might know about politics in a friendly and polite way. Express your opinions in diplomatic and moderate ways – don't use words like “hate” or “stupid” – we are participating a larger context of international dialogue.

If you invited for “coffee and cake,” realize that this is more than food; it is an invitation to converse – if you really don't want coffee and cake, say, “No, thanks, but I'll sit and talk with you for a while.” Be as flexible as possible in terms of eating what is served. Don't expect the German family to drive you places as American families do; they tend to use buses or bicycles more often. Keep your clothes, suitcase, and other belongings as neat as possible. Consult with your German family before planning to be out late. Ask about landline usage; some European landline plans are monthly flat rates, others are per call; this will affect the frequency or infrequency with which you use the family's landline.

Attending School

While in Tübingen, you will attend classes at Uhland Gymnasium. You will not have a full schedule, because we will take you out of class for other activities. While you are in school, please participate as much as possible, especially in English classes, where you can help a lot.

Taking Care of Yourself

Getting enough sleep, and eating regular nutritious food, will make you feel better, and you will have more fun when you feel better. Help each other in the group; network.

Staying in Communication

You can bring your smartphone with you, and even if you don't have service in Europe, you can use it as a wifi device. The German word for wifi is ‘W-LAN’ and free wifi is not quite as common in Europe as it is in America.

We'll use email, and apps like WhatsApp, to keep everyone informed on a realtime basis. We can also have a FaceBook page if people want.

You can get European service added to your smartphone before you leave for

Germany, but it's not necessary. You can also simply buy an inexpensive 'burner' phone – like a flip phone – over there, but that's also not necessary.

“The Rules”

You will be operating under two different sets of circumstances: when you are part of an “official activity” with our exchange group, and when you are enjoying “free time” with (or under the supervision of) your German host family.

I. All AAPS and Huron High School rules apply at all times.

II. When you are with, or under the supervision of, your host family, then you are to integrate yourself, as much as is reasonable, into that family and its patterns. If you feel that something is unreasonable, speak with Herr Smith, or one of the other chaperones. You are responsible for doing everything in your power to maintain friendly and diplomatic relations with your hosts.

III. During activities with the group, you are to be at the appointed places at the appointed times – don't make others wait for you! There will be fines – one Euro for every minute you are late – according to Herr Smith's watch. Be polite and considerate to everybody.

IV. Be safe: do not walk or explore alone outside of the area around your host family's house, or after dark. Be wise.

Consequences for violation of these rules includes spending your evenings and free time with the adult chaperones, and, in extreme cases, being shipped back to Ann Arbor early.

“Legal Fine Print”

The initial payment of “earnest money” becomes non-refundable on the date indicated on the form you signed. The airline ticket is your personal property, issued by Lufthansa Airlines, and forms a contract between you and them. The AAPS reserves the right to cancel, at any time, for any reason or for no reason, the GAPP exchange as an official AAPS activity. The AAPS requires parents to purchase trip cancellation insurance. If such cancellation occurs, the trip can continue as a private venture, but parents, and not AAPS personnel, must function as chaperones.

What will this cost?

We work to keep the price for this program as low as possible. The exact price obviously varies from year to year; the majority of the price to the student is airfare, because we do not use hotels or restaurants. The remainder of the cost is administration and overhead. Hosting a German student is the “sweat equity” which Huron students and their families invest into the program.

If you are unable to host, and still want to be part of the program, you will need to help us find a family who can host on your behalf: a surrogate host.

Communication

Please check email and text messages constantly. There will be a steady stream of program information.