

A Short Review of my travels in Germany

20 September 2024. Nat Sittirash.

How fair is the fare?

Berlin was where my trip in Germany began. I started from Berlin Brandenburg Airport. I purchased a train ticket from a ticket machine at the airport, where I had to select zones: A, B, or C, for my trip. As a first-time-traveler unfamiliar with the local tariff zones, I selected all of them. Additionally, I needed to choose the trip duration, so I opted for 2 hours. The ticket had to be validated at a validation machine before entering the platform, which felt a bit old school. However, the ticket was valid for the metro, buses, trams, ferries, regional trains, and some intercity trains. That's just awesome!



My waiting time was very short, just a few minutes before my train arrived. It was a double-decker train. The train platform was lower than the station platform. My journey to Berlin Hauptbahnhof (Berlin Central Train Station) took about 30 minutes.

My ticket expired when I left Berlin Hauptbahnhof. Bus tickets can be purchased onboard directly from the drivers, while tram tickets need to be bought from ticket machines located near tram stations. Tickets for buses, trams, and metro can also be purchased through the VBB application. However, since my destinations were walkable from the central station, I decided to explore the city on foot. I found it interesting that the vehicles are primarily designed in yellow and black.



What about accessibility? There are bus, tram, train, and metro stations near important areas such as Museum Island, Brandenburg Gate, Memorial To The Murdered Jews Of Europe, etc. These are popular tourist destinations, and the stations are located within walking distance. Getting around the city is very convenient, with clear lanes for pedestrians and bicyclists. Scooters share the same lanes with bicycles. Pedestrians are very disciplined and strictly follow traffic rules. No J-Walkers!

Is it comfortable? The vehicle interiors are similar to those in Stockholm. The individual seats give me a sense of privacy. I took the metro out to a suburban area, heading to a bus station. I found it challenging to buy a ticket from a machine, particularly when choosing the correct zone for my destination. I politely asked a random woman for help, and she was able to select the correct zone in just a few seconds! From the metro, I had to transfer to a commuter train before arriving at the bus station, and I did get a bit lost. I suppose the information signs are effective enough.



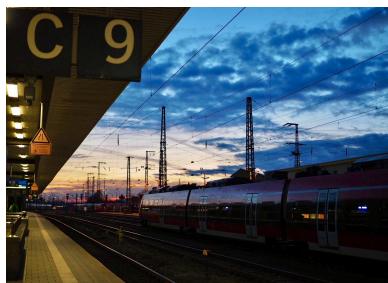
Me with Berlin commuter train (S-Bahn)



I love FlixBus! It is a low-cost bus service that operates across Europe. I think it's comparable to Greyhound in the U.S. and Australia. There are trains from Sweden to Hamburg via Copenhagen that continue into central Germany, using the EU rail corridors.

However, traveling by trains across countries in Europe can be expensive. That's why Flixbus was my best friend, it's just budget-friendly, especially for students. I took a FlixBus from Berlin to Nuremberg overnight, and in the early morning, I boarded an intercity express train to Augsburg to meet my friend who lives there.

Nuremberg Central Station was larger than I expected. There is a main corridor where passengers can walk to different platforms, and I believe there are around 9-10 platforms. It makes sense as trains to Munich must pass through Nuremberg first. I really enjoyed the views along the railroads that morning.



I booked all my tickets in advance, at least a few months ahead, except for public transport tickets for commuting around cities. I noticed that the ticket prices are not constant. The earlier I booked, the cheaper they were, especially for intercity trains and even for FlixBus. That did not surprise me, as I knew that this transit system operates in a dynamic environment influenced by societal and economic factors.

I searched into carpooling services like BlaBlaCar, trying to get to Augsburg without using the train. However, the service had some limitations for me, such as timing and the number of available passengers, pick-up location, etc. So, I decided to travel by train instead.

Punctuality was very impressive, as I arrived at my destinations within the planned timeframes, with acceptable delays of 5-10 minutes. That was especially important when I had to make a transfer. The real-time information signs and announcements (in both German and English) on the trains were very useful, I always knew my current location. However, I noticed that when there was a disruption, the cause was only announced in the local language and not in English.





Augsberg is a lovely city. It is where my friend lives just outside the city. We walked about three minutes to catch the tram to the city center. As I observed, traveling by tram is very common in the city. I walked along the street when trams passed by, yet I still felt safe, being aware of vehicles—trams, cars, and bicycles (I saw some e-scooters here)—on the road. This is likely due to the city's speed limit for all vehicles, for trams; 20-30 km/h. Locals were friendly to me, which was very impressive.

However, I heard from a Thai student I know, who studied at the same university in Stockholm, that she experienced racism in Berlin, and I felt sorry to hear about that. I haven't personally experienced racism in Europe, or maybe it is because I didn't perceive it that way?



Lots of locals spend time around the streets, drinking coffee, having lunch, shopping, and enjoying beer. Who can deny German beer?!

It shows they have a strong connection to their urban space. Spending time in Augsburg was a wonderful experience for me. I think this city is a seamless integration of public transport, shared public space, and urban mobility, where pedestrians feel safe on the footpaths. Even though there are no dedicated bicycle lanes, cyclists naturally share the streets with cars, buses, and trams.

The central area is reserved exclusively for pedestrians, with many narrow streets branching off from it. Walking around this area was a real delight, with live music from talented street performers (who seemed quite professionals).

Perhaps the street performers arrived on the e-scooters beside them?!





I spent a few days in Augsburg, and I was truly fascinated by it. Living in Stockholm has influenced me not to talk to strangers on the streets, as it is the norm there. However, in Augsburg, I greeted and chatted with the locals more than ever! I let my guard down, and this town broke my usual habit.

I was asked by an owner of a local business when shopping for some olives, “*Do you like Germany?*”, I answered, “*Yes, I do. I like Germany*”. “*Do you like Augsburg?*” was his next question. “*No, I don't like Augsburg*” I replied. His face frowned, and I quickly added “*I love it!*” A smile beamed on his face just before I walked away. That was the best moment I had with locals.

I continued my trip to Schwangue, Bavaria, and the best transport I used is my friend's car that comes with an excellent driver; my friend!

More photos from Germany

