

Through the RISE program I was awarded the incredible opportunity to spend two and a half months working, learning, and traveling in Germany. I had been fortunate enough to have had the chance to travel abroad extensively in Europe and South America prior to my summer experience. However, this was my first time in Germany and the longest period I have ever spent abroad. I soon appreciated the value of actually living immersed in a different culture for an extended period of time. It really gave me the chance to get to know the German people and way of life.

My time spent in Germany began with the two week language course in Berlin offered through the RISE program. Without any prior knowledge of the language, I was very grateful for the opportunity to pick up a bit of German before I started my internship in a smaller town of 180,000 people. Through the language program, I was also able to stay with a host family in Berlin, which was a great introduction to the German way of life. Although my land lady spoke very good English, I wish I had learned some German prior to my arrival so that I could have practiced my language skills. Nevertheless, the two week German crash course taught me enough to get by on a daily basis. I also really appreciated the chance to live in Berlin, which is an amazing city filled with extraordinary culture and history. Every afternoon, I took advantage of my free time to explore the city and quickly fall in love with it. Additionally, I was able to meet a wonderful group of RISE students through the course, who were later dispersed throughout Germany for their internships.

After the course, I headed two and half hours north of Berlin to the coastal town of Rostock. The opportunity to spend two months working in the Neurbiological Laboratory at the University of Rostock was an unforgettable experience. Primarily, I assisted one of the PhD students with his project concerning gene regulation during the differentiation of the human neural progenitor cell line ReNcell VM. Through the course of my internship, I not only learned new technical skills, such as quantitative reverse transcriptase PCR, but I also

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gained familiarity with the significance of the Wnt signalling pathways in neural development. I always looked forward to attending lab meetings where my coworkers shared their research interests and the scientific significance of their work.

Unfortunately, in science, experiments do not always go as planned and I experienced some significant technical difficulties with my project. Therefore I was not able to accomplish as much as I would have liked to during the two month period. A lot of times I felt like my time could have been used more productively, but it was difficult getting involved in other projects. It seemed like my PhD student was unsure of what to do with the availability of extra help. Although my internship was not ideal from the research perspective, I was still able to learn a lot about the lab's scientific interest. It was also interesting to work in a much larger laboratory than I am used to being at. It was a completely different work atmosphere and a rewarding professional experience.

Furthermore, my time spent in Germany was an incredible cultural experience. My coworkers made a collective effort to integrate me into the lab environment. They were all incredibly welcoming and made adapting to life in Rostock almost effortless. From picking me up at the train station to taking me to the beach, they helped me transition with ease. Working abroad really gave me the opportunity to delve into the German way of life. Even some seemingly insignificant conversations comparing American and German idiosyncrasies over lunch contributed to my image of the country and its wonderful people.

Additionally, it was great to have a network of other RISE interns in Germany with whom I could travel. We were able to take full advantage of Germany's broad rail network to explore the country's beautiful cities and natural wonders. Additionally, our travels took us outside of the country which, for me, included Prague and Copenhagen. I found that our PhD students were very encouraging and accommodating in our efforts to see as much as possible during our stay. I took a trip almost every weekend during my two and a half months spent in Germany.

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Overall, I had an unsurpassable experience in Germany through the RISE program that allowed me to grow on a scientific and personal level. I feel like working abroad is the best way to travel and really become familiar with a new culture, without being too much of an economical burden.

I agree that my report and accompanying pictures are used by the DAAD in printed materials, presentations and on the website in order to inform funding organizations, sponsors, and students about the RISE program.