

DAAD Rise Professional Testimonial 2018

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Hello! You are probably reading this because you are interested in applying for the DAAD Rise Professional program but want to know a little more about what you are getting yourself into. With that in mind, I figured it would be useful to write this report as both a logistical tool for future scholars and a personal anecdote about the experience of living and working in Germany as a young professional.

Lets start with the logistical part. As an overview, I am a Canadian who is completing a Ph.D. at Cornell University in the US, so my situation may be a little less common than others. Still, navigating through what is the correct procedure for getting a Visa was rather confusing so I felt it useful to state it here. In short, if you are a Canadian studying in the US, the easiest way to get a Visa is to apply for the Youth Mobility Visa by mail from the US, and have the German Consulate return your passport to a contact in Canada, who can then mail it back to you in the US. It sounds complicated, but it is much easier than your other alternatives. If you don't believe me, this whole process took me less than two weeks. This is a huge bonus when you compare it to waiting for months for an interview at the Consulate in the US. Of course, the downside is you do not have a passport for a few weeks, but that is hardly an inconvenience overall.

How about finding housing? For some locations it may be easier than others. I was in Berlin, where housing is rather difficult to lock down if you are not quick, and this process can be exasperated by the language barrier. My advice is to just be persistent and send out as many requests as possible. I did not find my flat until I was already in Berlin and was staying in an Airbnb for my first two weeks. This actually proved to be helpful in the end because it allowed me to see apartments in person, rather than agreeing to a lease over email. In the end, I found a really nice flat in a very nice area of Berlin. Lastly, what about banking? Use N26, end of discussion. It's all in english and takes about 10 minutes to sign up. Easy!

Now on to the fun stuff. I should preface this part by disclosing that this is now my second summer living in Germany, the first being through the DAAD Rise program for undergraduate students. Therefore, it's hard for me not to compare my experiences. However, that might actually be more useful here. As an undergraduate, I was staying in the small city of Kaiserslautern, performing research at a university under the guidance of a Ph.D. student, and this was my first experience abroad. In contrast, as a Ph.D. student I was staying in Berlin, performing research at a small startup company with more independent work, and returning to Europe for the fifth time. So what did I learn from coming here the second time? Well, pretty

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much that it was completely different than the last time. What does that mean for you? That you'll probably have your own, idiosyncratic experience. However, there were some similarities between my two experiences, and those are the things I believe are worth highlighting here for you because you will probably experience these things too.

First, take the opportunity to travel in some capacity. If you're in a small city, take trains or buses. If you're in a big city, you can fly all over Europe. Do weekend trips, travel before your internship, travel after. It doesn't matter how, just take the chance. I'm sure every testimonial will say this so I'll try to put it in a different light. It is very unlikely that again in your life you will have the freedom of being an intern, get paid while living in a different country, and be so close to so many unexplored, easily accessible places. If you look at a flight and say to yourself, "200€ and a 3 hour flight, that's too much money and too long for a weekend trip," consider how much that will cost or how long that will take if you decide to make that trip later in your life. From Toronto to Berlin you are looking at about 800€ and 10 hours. If you are neither Canadian or American, you also have the hassle of getting a Schengen Visa. Money can be made later in your life, but the freedom might not be there again.

Second, you'll almost certainly feel confused, uncomfortable, or lost at one point or another during your stay. Don't let that deter you or scare you. Embrace that feeling because it's part of what makes this experience so impactful. If you've lived in the same country your whole life, you get used to what you consider "normal." The truth is that your normal is far from normal for the rest of the world. Once you begin to realize that you gain that perspective and that empathy that many people lack, but is probably the most important skill you can have in such an interconnected modern world. I will have lived in Germany for seven months by the time I leave my internship and I still learn new things about Germany, things that I carry with me and use everywhere I go. Take every uncomfortable and strange opportunity to learn new things and grow as a person.

Lastly, take the chance to meet, travel with, or even just have conversations with people. There are so many people that I have met on my travels that I'm not necessarily good friends with or likely to ever see again for that matter, but they are people I remember because of how impactful those interactions were. Whether it was a weekend trip with another DAAD Rise Pro intern, a day exploring a city with another traveller you met at a hostel, meeting up with an old friend in a random city, or a conversation with a local at a coffee shop, those are the experiences that you will look back on most fondly. Seeing famous landmarks around Germany and Europe is cool, but the company makes the experience.

With that comment I think I'll end here. Hopefully you decide to apply for this program, because it is well worth it, both professionally and personally. Best wishes!

- *Andrew Ruttinger*