Do you have helpful tips on the Visa or residence permit application, opening a bank account, on travelling, on finding housing?

There are ways to avoid the hassle of getting a residence permit, if your internship is only slightly over the 90-day visa-free limit. Officially, my internship length was 92 days. However, I had plans to travel to London, which is outside the Schengen area, for 4-days, which reduced my total stay in the Schengen Area to only 88 days.

The N26 online bank is very convenient to setup and use. Once you register on the N26 website, it takes around 2 weeks for the physical card to arrive, after which you can complete their online verification process. The online verification requires a German home address and cell phone number, so you should complete this step once you settle down in Germany. In addition, TransferWise is another great service to transfer money into your N26 bank account, from your foreign bank account.

I used the Aldi Talk mobile plan from the Aldi grocery store. You can ask the cashier for a Sim Card Starter Pack, which comes with a sim card and 10 euros of prepaid credits. You will need to activate your sim card online with a German home address and some identification documents. The first part of this process requires completing a form that is entirely in German, so you can either ask a friend, or use Google Translate. I recommend buying an extra 5-10 euros of prepaid credits when you get the Starter Pack so that you can immediately get the 5.5 GB 28-day data plan for 15 euros. This is a great deal if you need to use data a lot, such as if you plan on travelling a lot. Your plan should also work in most EU countries outside Germany, however in my experience this excludes Switzerland.

I found cheap bundle deals for Deutsche Bahn and FlixBus tickets in the summer of 2018. I was able to get 5 FlixBus tickets for 99 euros, and 4 Deutsche Bahn Flexi-fare tickets for 100 euros. I expect that there will be similar deals every year, so definitely keep an eye out for those for those!

What is your impression of research in Germany?

I found research in Germany to be a very relaxing experience. In contrast to the long hours that graduate students are typically observed to work in North America, the graduate students that my friends and I met in our labs in Germany appeared to have great work-life balance. In fact, it is unusual to see people working after 17:00 on a typical weekday, and the lab I worked at closed on weekends. You also get to meet some very interesting people in your labs. My supervisor, for example, plays guitar for a heavy metal band in his free time. My supervisor and lab members were very friendly and they greatly supported me during my 3-months stay in Berlin.

What did you find particularly interesting about your research?

My project focused on an application for self-driving cars. In particular, my task was to design a neural network for predicting, or extrapolating, future frames based on previous frames of some input video. The technique developed from this research project can be modified to work with more complex sensor data, which are mounted on self-driving cars, and then using this information to predict road conditions in the near future. Using these predictions, we hope that the self-driving car can react against any foreseeable dangers. This research is interesting because it is motivated by the current technological landscape. As self-driving cars become more and more commonplace, we need to take the necessary measures to ensure their safe operation on our roads.

Describe a typical day of your internship.

I head to the S-Bahn station at 9:00 for a 40-minute ride to work on the outskirts of Berlin. I begin working on my computer in the same room as my co-worker who is also from the DAAD RISE program. Right before noon, I head to my supervisor's office to update him on my progress and ask him some questions about the task that I'm currently working on. Between 11:30 and 1:00, I head out to have lunch, either alone or with my coworkers. There are several choices that I rotate between: 3-euro MENSA café pasta, Vietnamese restaurant, Subway sandwiches, Chinese buffet, Korean restaurant, or food from the grocery store, in order of frequency. I come back from lunch, make coffee in the communal kitchen, and continue working until around 17:00, but I usually stay longer to wait for a simulation to finish, and start on a new one to run overnight.

Highlights of your stay (both personal and academic).

I was able to travel around Europe with my friends from Canada and around the world on weekends. I tried to go to a different place each week. In fact, I only stayed in Berlin, my host city, on two weekends, and I wish that I explored more of the city in hindsight. I went to London, Regensburg (for a hackathon), Swiss Alps, Hamburg, Copenhagen, Heidelberg (for the conference), Amsterdam, and Munich.

About halfway through my internship, I came across a key insight about the structure of my neural network that I could use to move forward with the rest of my project. It was a great feeling to be able to arrive at a tangible checkpoint because I was constantly uncertain about whether any progress was being made throughout the first month of my work.

What is your impression of Germany in general?

Germany is a beautiful country, and I had the most amazing summer of my life travelling to visit its many cities and landscapes with the friends that I made during my time there. It is not difficult to get by with just speaking English. However, I believe that in order to get the full experience from your stay in Germany, it is necessary to learn German.

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