

## RISE Germany 2019 Individual Report

My mindset for wanting to intern in Germany might have been different from that of other RISE interns because my objective was not to travel all over Europe, but to buy cacti and succulent seeds, since I had heard that there were many cacti and succulent seed providers in Europe. Nevertheless, I did travel quite a lot in the end! I travelled to Zurich, Milan, Paris, Amsterdam, and various Germany cities. I enjoyed sightseeing and experiencing different European cultures, but I think I may have overestimated my stamina. Travel fatigue often reduced my productivity at work as well as my alertness and I even dropped my phone down the stairs one day after coming home from a trip. So, although it is tempting to plan weekly weekend trips well ahead of time, I would suggest first getting to know one's limit and to make sure to always rest up before another trip. Furthermore, it is always better to travel in groups than alone, which I learnt the hard way, after having been harassed and almost robbed when I travelled alone. So as always, safety first! Also, always watch one's belongings and be aware and mindful of one's surroundings. Some important things to keep in mind while travelling are that most washrooms in train stations in Europe cost 0.5 cents to 1 euro and water is usually never free in restaurants and is oftentimes more expensive than beer. On the plus side, alcohol is very cheap in Germany!

Overall Germany is a great country to visit, it has amazing culture, friendly and welcoming people, relatively cheap housing depending on the city, and very cheap phone plans. Knowing a bit of German beforehand is useful but not essential. I blindly came to Germany not knowing a single word of German, took a language course offered by the RISE program, still did not learn or remember much of what I had learnt, and still managed to get by three months in Germany. Although taking the language course is not mandatory, I would suggest taking it primarily to make some RISE friends. Being in a completely foreign country, I was lucky to have North American friends: 3 other RISE interns in my internship city as well as RISE interns that I had met in my Marburg language course. I had some trouble while checking-in at the airport for my flight to Germany because I was going to be staying in Germany for over 90 days and had not applied for a VISA prior to departure. However, in the end I did not have to change my return trip to under 90 days after having shown the airport personnel my RISE Germany internship documents proving that I was going to be in Germany for an internship and not just for travel purposes. I set up a VISA appointment through email a couple weeks into my internship and was able to get an appointment the upcoming week. I planned on getting a youth mobility visa and had prepared all the necessary documents prior to arriving, but in the end all I needed were three documents and I was issued a Grenzübertrittsbescheinigung, a border crossing certificate, in under thirty minutes. Many RISE interns choose to set up an N26 bank account since all you need to set one up is a mobile phone and a German address where they send the card to. I chose to set up a bank account at Sparkasse since I was not completely sure if there were N26 ATMs in my internship city. Setting up a bank account in person was more tedious because most banks only set up bank accounts on certain days via an appointment and most customer service representatives do not speak much English. Hence, I asked my supervisor on the first day I arrived in my internship city to accompany me to a local Sparkasse. It took us three tries at different Sparkasse branches until we were able to book an appointment for me the following week. My supervisor accompanied me to my appointment, and we were able to set up a free student account for me in about 45 minutes. I got my card in about 5 business days. I did not have much trouble finding housing as there is a student dormitory that is a 6-minute walk away where I worked and that always

has available rooms. However, since a lot of my friends had trouble finding housing, I think that finding housing should be the priority for any potential RISE intern.

I thought it was quite unusual that in German universities, the academic year is split into two semesters: winter and summer. So, most German students were still in school during the time that I was interning. I worked at a university building situated right next to a computer science museum and was quite impressed with how much the German government actively stimulates innovation in computer and automotive technology. My office building was an “old” building awaiting to be replaced by a new building that is still under construction, but I thought that building was quite modern, compared to the ones at my home university. A lot of people only share the glory parts of their internship with others, but for me at least, it was not all sunshine and rainbows. I was not prepared to be the youngest student in the lab working on my own project independently, without any co-workers, in a large office room that almost always empty. My supervisor only worked part-time because of his young toddler, so I did not work closely with my supervisor like I had expected. On most days, I walked into an empty dark office room, turned on my PC, and started working on the tasks that I had created for myself the previous day. I originally thought that I would be programming in Python, a programming language that I was already quite familiar with, but instead started off my internship by self-learning C++, while my supervisor was away sick. I also did not know that I would be spending most of my working hours self-learning, fixing installation bugs, and finding workarounds for incompatible software and hardware issues. I expected to be working more on data science and machine learning tasks, instead of software systems. In short, my working environment and research tasks were not what I had anticipated them to be, but these challenges motivated me to reach out to the masters students at my workplace who were more experienced and knowledgeable and ask for help and advice whenever they were available. On the days when these students weren't working, I did my best to find solutions to the problems I encountered and thus gained more independent thinking and adaptability skills. Interestingly, I had the opportunity to learn how to design and 3D print items, something which I had always wanted to try out. I 3D printed items for my research project and random items for fun! All in all, the RISE program was an amazing opportunity that broadened my perspective on research and personal life. I not only met a lot of interesting people, but I also learnt how to cope, adapt, as well as have fun abroad.

**“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.”**