

Final Report
DAAD RISE Germany 2021
Ba Vu Tran

Faculty of Engineering, Lakehead University, Canada

“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.”

Greetings to future RISE interns!

I am a senior at Lakehead University, Canada, majoring in Electrical Engineering. I spent ten weeks in summer 2021 participating in a research project at Electronics & Drives, a power electronics research center at Reutlingen University. During my time in Germany, I have accumulated some experience that I would like to share with future interns for a better preparation before arriving in Germany for your internship.

Visa

The tip is to plan well ahead. If you need a visa, book an appointment on the corresponding German Consulate's website as soon as you have an estimated day of receiving the letter of award (the most critical document). You also need a proof of insurance. If the official insurance policy arrives late, a letter from the RISE Germany office confirming you are covered as a part of your scholarship is sufficient. Visas for DAAD-scholarship holders are typically issued quickly and free of charge. I got mine within a week, so it should not take too much time in your case.

Housing

I was lucky enough to be assisted in finding housing by an international mobility coordinator at my host university. Unfortunately, my duration of stay was ten weeks, not long enough to be qualified to stay in the university's dormitory. Instead, I was advised with two options: renting a room by a private landlord or applying for housing on the website of GWG - Wohnungsgesellschaft Reutlingen. The latter option was much cheaper, but since I did not receive any offer from GWG, I had no choice but to take the offer from the private landlord. The rent was €480 (~ CA\$ 700) per month, a bit more expensive than the rent I typically paid when I was living in Toronto, around CA\$ 550. The tip here is not to put all your eggs in one basket; look around and get as many offers as possible.

Bank account

Opening a bank account in Germany is quite challenging, especially if your status is a visitor (staying less than three months). Therefore, I would recommend exchanging some cash before you go to Germany. Nevertheless, it's relatively easy to withdraw money at ATMs with a fee of roughly CA\$ 5 per transaction. Most of the convenience stores and supermarkets in my area do accept credit/debit cards so there should not be any problem using your cards from home.

Covid Vaccination & Travelling

I was doing my internship in Germany when the COVID pandemic situation was improving around the world. Being fully vaccinated and wearing a mask are very important to keep yourself and other people safe. I would recommend contacting the local pharmacy to obtain the EU vaccination certificate to make it easier to travel around Europe. I visited Paris before I came back home, and the EU vaccination certificate issued based on my Canadian one appeared to be very useful. QR codes on certificates were being scanned to grant entry at almost all public places so obtaining EU vaccination is necessary if you plan to travel around.

Sim Card & Public Transportation

You can buy EU sim cards on Amazon from home for around CA\$ 30 a month and activate once you arrive in Germany. Having data on your phone is very important when there is no wifi nearby to check bus/train schedules and do translation, especially if you don't speak German and are not familiar with German public transportation.

When I first arrived in Reutlingen, I was surprised that the bus schedule on Google Map was not complete. Every region has its own app used for purchasing tickets for public transportation. In my case, it was the Naldo app. On this app, you can type in the starting point and your destination. It will show you the route and options to buy an e-ticket right on your phone. Then, you only need to show the e-ticket to the driver whenever you get on the bus. A single ticket was €4.60, which you can travel all day, while a single ticket was € 2.70.

A typical day

I would get up around 7:30 am then have some literature review to prepare for the day. After that, I would take a bus to the power electronics lab, approximately 30 min. Once I arrive at the lab, I would discuss any possible tasks for that day with my supervisor. My everyday tasks were conducting measurements, preparing the bill of materials for ordering, designing printed circuit boards (PCBs), assembling and troubleshooting PCBs, providing guidance to master's students on operating some highly specialized equipment, and lab housekeeping. Finally, my supervisor and I would typically leave around 5:30 pm. I would stop by a nearby supermarket for grocery shopping then go home.

Impressions of Germany and working environment

I was amazed that almost all the people I have talked to were kind and could speak English very well. This saved me once when I first arrived at Stuttgart central station and had difficulty determining the train platform to reach Reutlingen. I was also very impressed with the equipment in the lab. There were plenty, and some of them were state-of-the-art equipment. In addition, my supervisor and all professors I have met at the lab were very understanding, caring and highly supportive to students' success.

Recommending RISE

I would definitely recommend the RISE Germany program to anyone who has an interest. The experience and knowledge that I've accumulated during my internship have benefited my research topics and graduate studies. Moreover, it's a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to learn about other cultures, look at a problem from a different standpoint, and keep up with the latest technology, which is essential in science and engineering.

I would like to take this opportunity to show my sincere appreciation to the DAAD RISE Germany office, especially Ms. Daniela Wiesen, who has always been there to provide guidance and tremendous support to RISE interns.