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BASF, Ludwigshafen

Working at BASF

BASF, or *Badische Anilin- & Sodafabrik* as I came to learn, is the world's largest chemical producer established in 1865. One really feels this when working at the company's largest site in Ludwigshafen, the place where the company all started. As a part of BASF's huge network of employees, I worked in the research group of Dr. Helmut Witteler focusing on *functional polymers*. To describe the group's work in a succinct manner, the goal is to *add value to water*. More specifically, water-soluble polymers are synthesized to transform the properties of aqueous solutions, such as to make them suitable laundry detergent formulations. My project in particular focused on the synthesis of biodegradable polymers based on an amino acid.

Day to day, I worked in a laboratory on the south end of the 10 km² plant. BASF really prioritizes safety, so before undertaking any work I completed thorough safety training. Throughout my internship, I continuously updated myself on the hazards associated with the chemicals I was using. I also received training to operate various pieces of equipment. My favourite equipment to use was the SYSTAG Parallel Synthesis Workstation FlexyCUBE, which allowed for automated chemical synthesis. I was able to conduct reactions of approximately 160 g scale using this equipment and I later scaled up my reactions to >1 kg using larger equipment. These larger scale reactions are the largest reactions I've done to this day. However, you can feel that they are relatively small when you take a BASF site tour and see the truly large scale production plants. Tours run from the BASF Visitor Center every day in German and on Mondays in English.



Figure 1. Using the FlexyCUBE for automated synthesis.

In general, BASF is a great place to work at, with a vibrant intern community. Meeting other interns is facilitated by the Get2Together program for interns, which organizes a biweekly lunch at the various onsite canteens. Speaking of the canteens, these were a great place to have a daily convenient, hearty, and affordable lunch—an added benefit of working at BASF. Once the workday was complete, I noticed that almost everyone had a great sense of work-life balance, where they were able to leave their work *at work* and go home to enjoy time with their families. This is great for not overworking oneself and maintaining good mental health.

Everyday life

Preparation to live in Germany during the internship can get overwhelming, but there are a few things that I suggest to make it easier. For one, it's important to confirm whether you'll need a

work permit to carry out your internship. Since I would be in Germany for longer than 90 days, I applied for and received a Canadian Youth Mobility Visa. It is worthwhile to check whether your home country offers a similar thing. Make sure to apply for your visa well in advance so you're not stressed about doing so when you land in Germany. Secondly, opening a European bank account to receive payment from the company was super simple using Wise. I was able to open my account from Canada using photos of my documents. Throughout my time in Germany, Wise made it easy to constantly check my balance, make transfers to other people's accounts, and make purchases using the VISA debit card. Another helpful tip is to use www.wg-gesucht.de when searching for a place to live. I think it's beneficial to make your inquiries a little personal so that others know your situation better and may be more open to accepting you to the living space. Once you're in Germany, I would also suggest looking into obtaining a transportation pass or a BahnCard. I used the high-speed trains many times during my stay, so I opted to purchase a BahnCard 50 for youth, which was a good price for how much money it saved me.

Learning German

One thing I regret is not learning more German before I arrived in Germany. I had learned some basic phrases using Duolingo, but as you quickly find out, those basic expressions don't get you very far in your day-to-day life. Fortunately, many people know English in Germany, so you can usually find someone to help you out. However, I was frustrated that I couldn't ask simple questions at the supermarket or department store, and this motivated me to enrol in an online course from the Goethe Institute. DAAD offers a subsidy to take a German course, up to 250 EUR, so this helped a lot with the cost. Over 5 weeks, I quickly developed my knowledge of the German language, to the point that I could talk about my weekend in simple language. I would highly suggest asking your coworkers to practice your German with them, even if it seems daunting at first. They were more than happy to help me train my German and they are usually impressed when foreigners attempt to learn their language.



Figure 2. The Munich Christmas market.

Fun outside work

While the purpose of your time in Germany is to complete an internship, I believe it's just as important to make connections (hopefully for life) and build fun memories together. In the summer months, I had a great time going to the local outdoor pool with other interns or playing beach volleyball at the outdoor sports center. In the colder months, we would go for activities like laser tag or bowling. Towards Christmas, a popular activity is to go to the *Weihnachtsmärkte* (Christmas markets) and enjoy *glühwein* (mulled wine). No matter what your interests are, you can find fun things to do, whether in Germany or throughout Europe since travelling is much easier compared to my experiences in 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.