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Banking

The most common banking options are Wise and N26, but I personally used Wise. I decided to use my regular credit card from my home bank the majority of the time, but I would recommend ordering the Wise card as well. Without the card, accessing Wise account funds is limited to purchases with the IBAN or by transferring the funds to a different account linked to a card.

Trains and Buses

Within Germany, the most helpful apps I used were the Deutsche Bahn app and VRN Go. Through the Deutsche Bahn app, train times are listed and the Deutschland49 pass can be purchased which is a €49/month ticket for all regional trains and buses within Germany. Even with the Deutschland49 ticket, a seat on the train isn't guaranteed and some busy trains will even require a reservation at a small fee.

The VRN Go app was what I used to view bus routes and times in Germany. Google or Apple maps will also show bus routes, but I found that using VRN Go was a lot easier and more accurate.

To travel to different countries, I used the Eurail app and I got the 15 days/2 month pass which was around €400. However, there are a lot of different options depending on how much travel is anticipated. This pass also covers ICE trains within Germany that aren't covered by the Deutschland49 and there are often other services like gondola or ferry rides that offer discounts to Eurail pass holders even if the pass itself does not cover that particular service. The Eurail pass is valid for transportation within or to a lot of neighboring countries to Germany, and once the pass is activated for a particular day, unlimited travel within that day is allowed.

In terms of reservations, with the Deutschland49 or Eurail pass, I only ever paid for the reservation if I was taking a train that went to a major city like Paris or Amsterdam. Otherwise there was almost always a seat and if there wasn't, I would just move cars or sit by the stairs or near the luggage area.

Flights

To go to other countries, there are often cheap flights through Ryanair or on Sky Scanner, and looking on those sites might give you ideas for trips to places you hadn't even considered. I mostly used trains, but I did take flights to avoid 12 or 14 hour train rides out of the country if I wasn't able to get much time off from the internship. If flights are planned far enough in advance, they can be a cheaper and faster alternative to taking a train.

Places to Stay while Traveling

During long trips, I stayed in hostels or Air BnBs. Hostels were usually the cheaper option for solo travel, but for group travel, sometimes splitting an air bnb was easier. Staying at hostels with a big group was also nice because there were usually rooms with 6 beds that we could have to ourselves. Hotels are also an option and sometimes cheaper, but hostels are usually in a central location and are a great way to meet new people to travel with.

Housing

Personally, finding housing was the hardest part of preparing for the internship. Some interns get lucky with university housing that is on the campus of their research, but a lot of interns are in apartments or Air BnBs. A lot of housing options will not respond to messages or ads, so I would recommend starting the housing search early since rent can get expensive as well.

Typical Internship Day

The first couple days of the internship were for getting used to the programs/software I would need and going over any safety training or protocols that would be needed for the rest of the internship. I was also able to register as a student during this time so I could use the campus facilities and eat at the cafeteria. Within the first couple days, I would recommend discussing how much time off you are allowed to make trip planning easier. The leniency for time off for travel is different for every internship, but most projects will allow for a couple long weekends. There are also a few German holidays in the Summer that could be used to travel as well.

After the introductory period, most days I would get to the lab around 9:00am and start working on whatever task I was given for that day or week. I had to do a lot of independent learning and some days were spent learning about the project and researching or watching tutorials on the tools/software I would have to use before even starting on my assigned task.

Lunch break was about an hour, and then I would go back to working until 5:00pm. Some internships were more task oriented and only cared if certain checkpoints were met by a certain time, while others were more hourly based and concerned with how much time was spent in the lab.

Overall, the work culture in Germany is much more relaxed and some labs would even have beer or coffee breaks in the middle of the day. The start and end times of the working day were pretty flexible and there was never an expectation to do work for the project outside of those hours.

Highlights

The most memorable part of the summer was getting to meet so many people. I got lucky with a city that had 13 other DAAD interns and it made it a lot more fun to plan trips and after work activities with each other. The Heidelberg conference was also a great time to meet other interns, and there was a discord channel to plan meetups with friends in other cities as well.

The opportunity to travel was also another significant highlight. Every weekend, I was able to travel to a new city or country and I think it helped me grow a lot in terms of responsibility, communication, and broadening my global perspective. Moving to another country for three months seemed daunting and isolating at first, but by trying to learn more about the different cultures around me and making efforts to connect with other interns and students at the lab, I was able to find comfort in the unfamiliar.

Another unique part of the summer was being able to participate in more niche research topics. From research on cosmic rays to blue carbon, all of the DAAD projects I heard about were so impactful and topics I wouldn't have the chance to pursue back home. Overall, it was really exciting to learn about such innovative topics and to learn how to use software that was new to me for my project.

This Summer, I grew from both a personal and academic standpoint, and I would definitely recommend DAAD Rise to anyone interested in international STEM research.