

## SURDZIAL: DAAD RISE Final Internship Report

I applied for the DAAD RISE program on a whim thinking I most certainly wouldn't get in. I had had a string of rejections from less prestigious REU experiences for the previous two years and was ready to submit myself to a summer of working at Starbucks. I figured it would at least be a good warm up for applying for other programs since the DAAD RISE application was due the earliest. I applied to a single project and left it, expecting the usual rejection email. Imagine my surprise when I got an email from the project supervisor saying I was their first choice and that they would love to have me in Germany with them this summer. To those looking to apply and feeling discouraged because you don't go to MIT or another "good" school, apply. Sure DAAD RISE has a lot of people from those schools, but there is no reason why people like me from a smaller, more career-oriented State university can't compete. My advice for potential applicants is to not underestimate the importance of the letter you have to write to each project supervisor. Be genuine, or be good at faking genuine excitement and interest.

The most valuable information I can give someone who has been accepted and is preparing for the summer in Germany is to talk to your advisor. I was incredibly lucky to get an advisor who was very responsive and willing to Zoom with me to discuss some confusion I was having with various paperwork I was filling out. If you don't like emailing or forget to check your email, you have to fix that because working with someone in a time zone with 9 hours of difference (for me in California) meant I had to be on time with my replies. When filling out the various paperwork I had to do for my institution I literally printed out the documents and wrote notes on where I was confused or unsure and emailed that annotated document to my advisor for feedback. For bank accounts I had no issues setting up a WISE account and getting a debit card to use in Germany. Though I have heard of some people having issues with WISE being a non German bank account, I'd recommend it over trying to contact an actual German bank while in North America as I have heard no success stories with that route. When it comes to apartments I was lucky enough to have one found for me by my research group, though I know others have found success on Airbnb and other apartment websites. It is probably a good idea to learn the essentials in German (aka all the words that Germans say in that high pitched "customer service" voice they always seem to do. Words like thank you, excuse me, bye, hello, and most importantly do you speak English). I personally went in knowing no German but got by decently well with Google translate and gestures. When in doubt, try to find someone your age to talk to as most young people know at least a little English.

Get in contact with other RISE interns. My year had a program-wide Discord server where people could connect, and from there I was able to make separate chats with people specifically in my region (North Rhine Westphalia group shout out!). We set up semi frequent picnics and dinners where everyone could come socialize and speak English freely (something you don't realize you miss until you can't do it). I was lucky to be stationed in Julich with something like 14 other interns, so we would often meet up after work to sit in the park and enjoy each other's company. I also found a core group of friends to travel with through the Discord.

When you arrive in Germany take advantage of any opportunity to travel. I know 2 hours by train may seem like a long trip or a waste of time at the beginning of your internship but by the end of it you will see a 4+ hour train ride one way and go "wow what a perfect day trip!". Look up German public holidays before you come to Germany and plan trips accordingly. Almost all of the public holidays were within the first two or three weeks of my internship and I either wasted or rushed plans to take advantage of them.

When planning weekend trips take advantage of budget airlines like Ryanair and the 49 euro Deutschland ticket. Many times for close countries like Belgium we would use our Deutschland ticket to travel up to the border and then buy tickets for other trains from there. Speaking of DB, also

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known as Deutsche Bahn or the bane of my existence, download the DB navigator app and put it on your home screen. This is the main travel planner you will use in Germany. The Deutschland ticket is the best travel pass and gives you access to all regional transport (NOT ICE or IC trains, buy those separately and in advance to avoid high prices), including buses, trains, and metro. The app offers a trip planner with up to date time schedules where you just have to put starting and ending destinations. No matter what others may tell you at home German trains do not run on time. You should always plan to use the train 1-2 time slots before the train that would normally get you to any important plans. There are frequent delays and cancellations that often add an hour plus to your travel time. There is no way to avoid it and my only advice is to travel with others so that you have support and can talk to someone when you inevitably have to wait an hour because your train got canceled or you just missed a connection because the previous train ran late.

As an organic chemist my research here was not that different from what I did at my lab job at my home university. The main difference is that I had to be much more vigilant of where I dispose of my waste as Germany has many more rules about waste than we do at home. A typical day for me looked like biking into the office at 8-9 am and grabbing a cup of coffee from the communal coffee maker in the full kitchen attached to my building. If there was a talk happening, discussing a group member's research progress or a new topic in biology or chemistry, I would attend that talk. After that I would work with my advisor on our project. Near the end of the project I was trusted to work on my own and set my own schedule. At lunch I would occasionally meet with other interns at the on campus cafeteria, but more often I would cook the beloved pesto pasta in the kitchen in my building and talk with other members of my research group. I'd continue with my work until I got to a good stopping point which could be at 3pm or could be at 6pm. Sometimes my research group would have after work barbeques or meet ups which I tried to go to as much as I could. After work I'd bike home and make dinner and often met with other interns for some after work activity, like coffee or ice cream.

RISE was an incredible experience and I am incredibly grateful I was chosen to participate. Though I visited so many incredible places, I have to say my highlight was the friends I made. I was incredibly lucky to be placed in one of the towns with a large number of interns in it. I made many lifelong friends. My closest friends happen to be people I randomly reached out to on Discord to take advantage of the last long weekend and take a spontaneous trip across Belgium near the start of my internship. We ended up traveling together for the rest of the summer. I traveled to ten different countries (Germany, Belgium, France, Luxembourg, England, Scotland, Netherlands, Austria, Spain, and Portugal for those curious) and really developed as a person. In the lab I learned how to be more professional and proficient. I learned what it is like to be a doctoral student, which will help me later when I decide whether or not I want to earn my Ph.D. I was able to conduct research in a field that was difficult to find in the US (natural product isolation from plant materials). Though I missed my sunny Southern California summers when it was raining sideways in July, I would not give up this experience for the world.

**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.**