

DAAD RISE Professional Internship Experience (2023)

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I was in the final year of my Ph.D. studies in electrical engineering at the University of Toronto in Canada when I decided to gain more international work experience by participating in the DAAD RISE Professional program. I was fortunate to receive an offer for a project at the Paul-Drude-Institut für Festkörperelektronik in Berlin, and I believe the timing of this internship was very good because I did not have to pause any experiments or ongoing work for my doctoral studies: I could finalize my thesis document and wait for feedback on it while participating in the internship. Overall, I found the experience to be very fulfilling, and I really enjoyed my stay in Germany. In this report, I would like to summarize my activities and provide a few tips based on my experience.

Preparation

Given my citizenship situation and the work permit waiver provided for this 90-days-long internship, it was fortunately easy for me to enter the country, but if I'd had to apply and wait for a visa, I would have faced significant challenges: when I started looking for information on visa requirements, the earliest available appointments at the consulate in Toronto were after the start date of my internship! Considering the processing time, it would have been impossible for me to start on time.

As for housing, I found it very difficult and tiring to secure accommodation in Berlin. After searching several websites, I ended up renting a fully furnished studio (1-room) apartment with a kitchen and bathroom, and with electricity, water, internet, etc. included. The apartment was at a very central location in the district of Mitte, a 3–5-min walk from Berlin's TV-tower. Since my workplace was also in this district, I could walk to work every day (a one-way trip took about 25–30 min), which I liked a lot because I could enjoy the views of the Museum Island, the Spree (river), and several of the city's attractions along the way. However, the apartment's location and rental conditions also meant that the rent was extremely high. Another potential downside was that several train lines passed close by, and since multiple S-Bahn lines and regional trains used these tracks, I could very frequently hear trains passing by. So, the neighbourhood was not exactly quiet, but I did not mind this because it (along with the tram and subway lines in the vicinity) also meant very easy access to public transportation and allowed me to quickly and conveniently reach destinations around the city.

I think the main takeaway from the above items is to start preparation early. I believe I would have found better or cheaper options for housing had I started my search earlier, and as mentioned before, possible issues with entering a foreign country can also be mitigated by taking action early.

Work

My project involved imaging of what are called surface acoustic waves. At the start of the internship, I had to learn to operate 1–2 pieces of equipment that I had not used before. Also, during the project I learned new concepts related to the device that I was testing, which was again different from the other topics that I had seen in my graduate research or courses. So, I found the work experience to be

valuable, partly because it exposed me to these new tools and areas, and partly because it helped me improve my teamwork, communication and other transferable skills.

Since I had taken several German language courses before this internship, I was not too worried about potential language problems (in fact, the opposite: I hoped to practise and improve my language skills), but I ended up not needing any German at work because of the international nature of the environment and the fact that most of my colleagues spoke English fluently (in some cases, better than German). Similarly, at other places in Berlin, most of the people I interacted with were able to communicate very well in English.



Sightseeing

Even though I have heard of other interns travelling to other European countries during weekends or holidays, I decided to limit my travels to within Germany and around Berlin (although I did visit a city in another country over a long weekend). Aside from visiting Heidelberg for the DAAD RISE meeting (which included several interesting events related to research and work), I also visited Munich, Hamburg and Potsdam (which is very close to Berlin). I mostly used trains for these trips and took advantage of the 49-euro/month Deutschland-Ticket providing access to all local public transportation and regional trains, which I found convenient. I also purchased a 3-month trial for a BahnCard 25 to get a 25% discount on intercity trains (these were not covered by the Deutschland-Ticket, but I used them a couple of times to save travel time between cities). Travelling by train has the added advantage that one could enjoy the scenery and landscapes along the way.



Within Berlin, I visited most of the museums on the Museum Island, as well as a few in other parts of the city. I also went to a few concerts, including one that took place in an open-air amphitheatre in a green, treed space and was the end-of-season event of the Berlin Philharmonic. Of course, I also tried not to miss the more famous landmarks of the city.

Overall, I enjoyed these sightseeing activities and would recommend exploring different cities or various parts of a city to those interested in travelling. For example, different neighbourhoods in Berlin have distinct architectural styles or new things to offer.

In summary, I really enjoyed, and benefitted from, my RISE Professional internship and would highly recommend this program to those interested in gaining international work experience.

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.