My Summer Fairy Tale in Germany with DAAD

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My name is Huu Quang Nhat Nguyen, and I took part in the DAAD RISE Professional program as a Software Engineer Intern at Petanux GmbH from May to August 2026 in Bonn, Germany. What started as a three-month internship became one of the most memorable experiences of my university life—a wonderful summer "fairy tale" filled with challenges, learning, people, and new places.

Before arriving in Germany, I had to prepare for my visa and accommodation. I traveled from Cincinnati to Chicago for my visa appointment, which initially felt intimidating because of the amount of paperwork involved. However, with the information provided by the official websites and careful preparation, the process went smoothly. For future RISE participants working at companies, I would recommend considering a National D visa, as it provides more flexibility for a longer stay than a Schengen visa. Finding accommodation was a greater challenge. Scams are a real concern, so I would strongly recommend never sending money before verifying an apartment. Having a cancellable Airbnb reservation can also be a useful backup when preparing for the visa application.

Once I arrived, Germany's transportation system quickly became one of my favorite things. The Deutschlandticket allowed me to travel around the country easily by regional trains and buses. I used it to explore Bonn, Cologne, Cochem, Munich, Heidelberg, and many other places. I also found Wise convenient for managing money between my American and German expenses, although carrying some cash was still necessary because some places only accept cash.

At Petanux, an AI startup developing computer-vision solutions for retail applications, I worked as a Software Engineer Intern. One of my major responsibilities involved testing the product. Since there was no established testing framework, I had to design my own approach. I tested the product page by page and feature by feature, beginning with the happiest user paths, moving through normal cases, and finally testing the most unhappy paths to uncover potential bugs and edge cases. I documented and reported the issues I found, worked with the team to understand their causes, and verified the fixes afterward. This experience taught me that software quality is not only about finding bugs, but also about thinking systematically from the user's perspective. I also gained practical experience in designing and conducting load tests independently, working with Linux servers and monitoring tools, and investigating technical issues in a structured way.

A typical workday started with a bus ride to the office, checking emails and codebase updates, and reporting my progress and blockers to my manager. I then pulled the latest

code from GitLab and worked on my assigned tasks. We usually had lunch together around 1 p.m., where conversations ranged from technology to everyday life. After lunch and a cup of coffee, I continued working until 5 p.m., aiming to complete meaningful progress that I could report the following day. After work, I returned home, exercised, cooked dinner, and prepared for the next day.

Working in Germany also gave me a new perspective on workplace culture. The startup environment at Petanux was much less hierarchical than environments I had experienced before. Even as an intern, I was encouraged to think independently, identify where I could contribute, and take responsibility for my work. This was challenging at first, but it pushed me to become more proactive and confident. I also noticed that the German workplace felt less focused on "hustling" and more focused on doing work carefully and reliably. Data privacy, especially in AI and technology, was another value that stood out to me.

Outside of work, I tried to experience Germany rather than simply live there. I took almost weekly solo trips, visited different cities, talked with strangers, and learned about local lifestyles. My trip to Munich was especially memorable: seeing the Alps for the first time, hiking around Eibsee, and experiencing the breathtaking landscape made it one of my favorite trips ever. The RISE conference in Heidelberg was another highlight, allowing me to meet students from across the US and Europe, exchange ideas, and build new connections. I also had the opportunity to visit DKFZ and see how technology and research are being used to fight cancer.

Looking back, my stay in Germany was much more than an internship. It taught me how to work independently, solve unfamiliar problems, communicate in an international environment, and experience a new culture with an open mind. If you have nothing planned for your summer, I would strongly recommend applying for RISE. You may arrive expecting only an internship, but you might leave with new skills, new friends, new perspectives, and your own summer fairy tale.