

# Guideline for internships abroad



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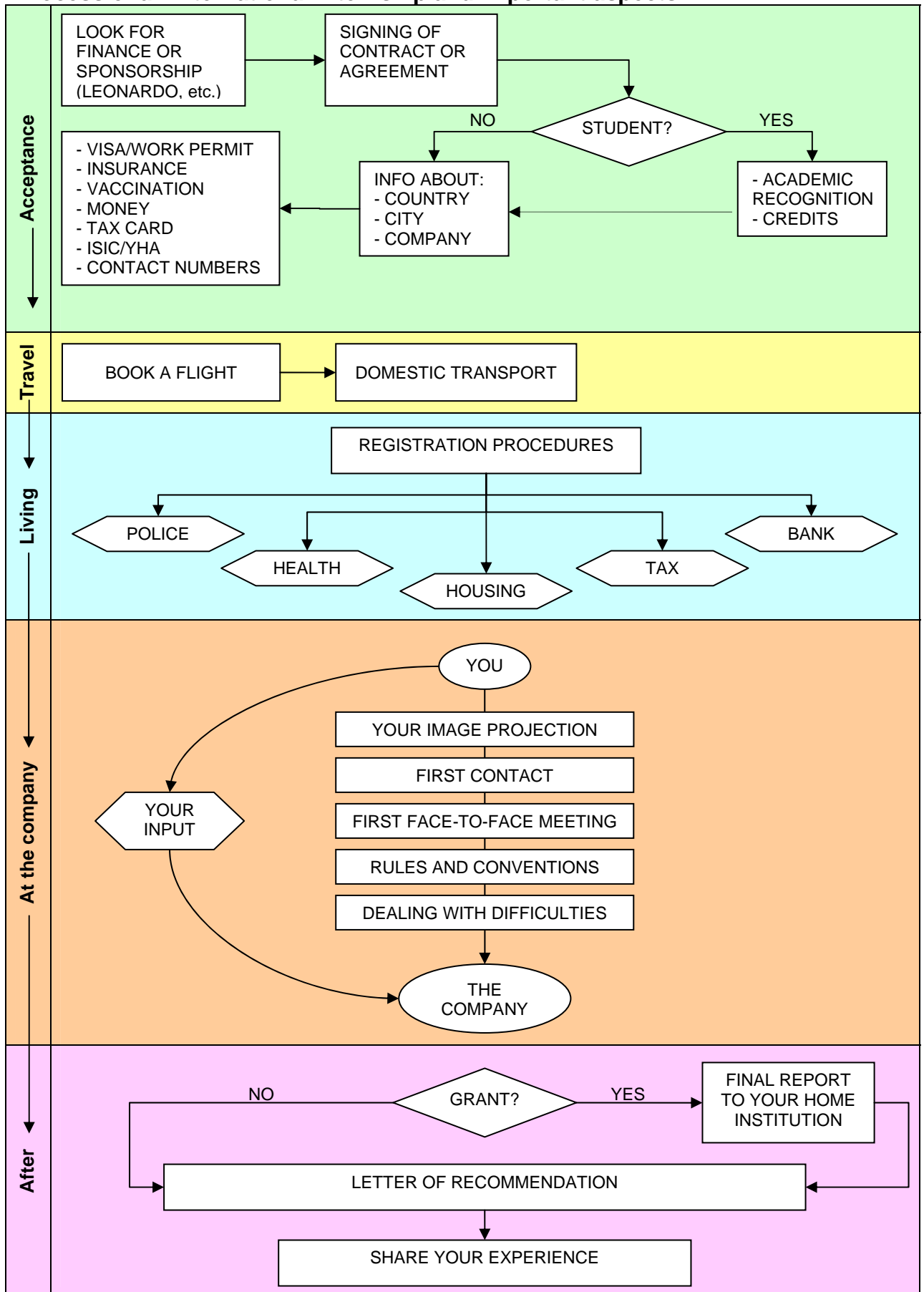


**Congratulations**, you have been accepted for an internship abroad! You have made the right choice: statistics show that employment seekers who have been abroad will get a better job in a shorter time. Now it is time to make important preparations. This brochure will help you to manage the process from when you are accepted for an internship abroad until your successful completion of this experience with writing of the final report. Following these suggestions

will help you to make the best of your working time abroad.

The flow chart on the next page shows the whole process and the different aspects.

## Process of an international internship and important aspects:



## 1. First arrangements

### 1.1. After being accepted



After being accepted be sure to formalise this agreement in a proper **contract**. Even if it is an unpaid position, ask your host organisation for a contract where things like remuneration or other allowances (e.g. free lunches or transport), your weekly working time and the exact starting and finishing dates are written down. If your host organisation is not used to this practice, you can show them a model of a contract for orientation.

#### *🔗 Useful links*

##### **Sample contract**

<http://www.practical-training.de/leonardo> (English version → students → application)

### 1.2. Financing the internship abroad

When doing an international internship you will have higher expenses, because you have to move to another country, pay for temporary housing, additional insurance etc. This is not easy to handle especially when your host organisation cannot offer you a salary. A number of scholarships and programmes exist to finance a stay abroad.

Please see your internship coordinator or the **international office at your university** for more information because these programmes are often organised locally!

A good example is **the Leonardo da Vinci** programme, which exists all over Europe and gives grants to students doing international internships.

#### *🔗 Useful links*

##### **Leonardo da Vinci**

[http://ec.europa.eu/education/programmes/leonardo/index\\_en.html](http://ec.europa.eu/education/programmes/leonardo/index_en.html)

##### **Overview of other funding programs of the European Union**

[http://ec.europa.eu/education/programmes/programmes\\_en.html](http://ec.europa.eu/education/programmes/programmes_en.html)

## 2. Preparations prior to departure

### 2.1. Preparations regarding your university

If your international internship is part of your study programme, enquire about the regulations, e.g. how long it has to be, what the task should be or how many **credit points** you need to earn. Many departments have a special person in charge of this, with whom you can discuss the details of your internship. Furthermore, they may be the right person to hand in your final reports to after your internship. If your department does not employ anybody for this task, you can find details of the length of your internship in your examination regulations and you can ask a professor for help and information.

If you are a recent graduate doing an international internship to gain work experience, it will definitely count as the perfect start to your career.

In any case, remember to keep regular contact with every person and/or institution involved in your experience.

### 2.2. Information about the destination country



Going abroad is always an exciting experience and you will not be confronted just with a new culture and a different way of living, but also with a different bureaucracy. Buying a travel guide for your destination country is advisable. Furthermore, you should familiarise with the visa regulations (see also 2.4.) and special safety regulations and prepare for this, e.g. apply for a visa/work permit.

Also enquire about the **social, religious and political situations** and consider what behaviour to avoid, which areas to stay away from or how to deal with money matters. Read up on illnesses and diseases in your destination country and see a doctor about vaccination.

As you will not go to your destination country as a tourist but as an employee, inform yourself about the '**working culture**', e.g. how to deal with hierarchy, punctuality, meeting deadlines etc.

Find out where your home country's **consulate/embassy** is located, e.g. in case you lose your passport or other important documents.

#### **Useful links**

##### **Travel guides**

<http://www.lonelyplanet.com>

<http://cityguide.travel-guides.com>

##### **Travel blogs**

<http://realtravel.com>

##### **International newspapers**

<http://www.onlinenewspapers.com>

##### **International maps**

<http://www.mapquest.com>

<http://maps.google.com>

### European Career orientation

<http://eco.ittralee.ie>

### Information about countries

<http://www.infoplease.com/countries.html>

### Travel vaccination overview

[http://www.netdoctor.co.uk/travel/vaccines\\_index.shtml](http://www.netdoctor.co.uk/travel/vaccines_index.shtml)

### Embassies worldwide

<http://www.embassyworld.com/>

## 2.3. Information about the destination city

House hunting is not easy when you are not in the destination city, where you could check the local housing market in person. You can ask your host organisation to help you find a **room** to stay. Bigger companies especially might own apartments, which they rent to their interns. If your host organisation does not have such options, they might be



able to recommend some links or newspapers that advertise accommodation. You can also try to contact the international office of the local university or student associations (e.g. AIESEC, AEGEE, ESN) to ask for the accommodation infrastructure. You could also ask former interns, they might know a good place to stay.

Inform yourself about the **different areas** of your destination city. If possible, choose a place to live near your host organisation or with good access to public transport.

If you cannot find proper accommodation before you arrive at the destination city, then look for a **hostel** or a hotel to stay in for the first few nights. Hostels usually offer basic rooms and facilities at a good price, and they are very often situated in central locations.

### Useful links

#### Housing in Europe

<http://europa.eu.int/ploteus/portal/home.jsp>

#### International accommodation network for Youth and Students

<http://www.casaswap.com>

#### City maps of Europe

<http://www.euroave.com/maps/>

#### Hostels worldwide

<http://www.hostels.com>

## 2.4. Important documents

Do not wait until the last week prior to departure. It might take several weeks or longer to get the documents below – check these in time!

- **Visa and work permit:**  
if you are an EU-citizen going to work in another European country, you do not need a work/residence permit (when staying three months or less), but note that some countries have their own regulations.
- **Valid passport / ID**
- **Insurance:**  
check the kind of insurance you will need for travelling and living abroad such as **health insurance**, **third party insurance** and **accident insurance** and compare the offers of several insurance suppliers. Some insurance companies offer a combined cover package, which includes all three types of insurance.
- **Tax card:**  
ask your host organisation if you will need one and where to get it. This may depend on the amount of money you earn.
- **Credit Card:**  
a debit card does not always work abroad, so a credit card will give you the flexibility for purchasing online or it may be helpful in difficult situations (e.g. for hospital treatment).
- **ISIC/YHA:**  
additionally you should think about buying an **international student identity card** (ISIC) with which you can save money e.g. at museums or cultural events. Check out the link to see where to get it. Furthermore, it is advisable to buy an **International youth hostel association card** (YHA) to save money on accommodation when travelling.

It is helpful to have photocopies of every document in case you lose one.

### *Useful links*

#### **Work permits/visa**

<http://www.anyworkanywhere.com/visaseupassport.html>

#### **International student ID**

<http://www.isic.org>

#### **International Youth Hostels**

<http://www.hihostels.com/>

## 2.5. Further preparations

Here we will just give you some ideas:

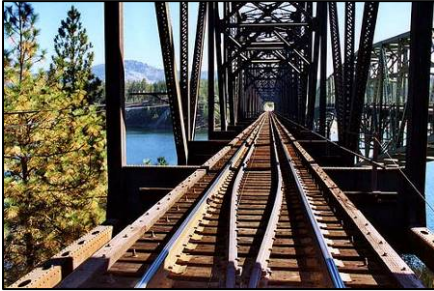
- make sure you have the **mobile phone numbers** of all contact persons before leaving home
- look for a person to rent your room in your home city while you are abroad
- notify your university, bank etc. about your **new address** (or your permanent home address)
- **packing:** appropriate suitcase, important documents, clothes for your work, adaptor...



### 3. At the destination

You should arrive early enough to settle in and get to know your way around the place. You should also find out how to get to the place of your internship.

#### 3.1. Travelling arrangements



Book your plane or your train/bus ticket in advance and also enquire about how much luggage is permitted. It is worth taking into consideration to book a more expensive flight, because often the luggage is limited to 20 kg on cheaper flights and shipping extra-luggage by post might cost more than choosing a more expensive plane ticket.

Ask your host organisation how to get from the airport/station to them/to your new living area. Be sure to make an appointment with your landlord/lady so that they know what time to expect you.

#### Useful links

##### Route planning

<http://www.viamichelin.com>

##### Cheap airlines

<http://www.whichbudget.com>

##### Bus connections

<http://www.eurolines.com>

##### Ride sharing

<http://www.liftpool.com>

#### 3.2. In the destination city

After arriving at your destination city and moving into your room it is time for some paper work and administrative things. Go to the **city council** or the **police station** to register for the length of your stay. If your host organisation will pay you, you might need a **tax card** for your destination country/city. Whether or not you need a tax card varies from country to country: in any case this would only apply if your monthly salary is above a certain amount. For enquiries about a tax card and where to get one (e.g. at the tax office or the city council) please contact your host organisation.

If your host organisation pays you, you will have to open a **bank account**. If your language skills are not sufficient to cope with this, ask a fellow worker to help you.

## 4. Dealing with the host organisation

You will have a lot of contact with your new employer before, during and after your internship - from the application, throughout your work experience in the company, up until your “thank-you-letter” after your return to your home country. You should make sure that all your contacts are strategically planned and carried out professionally. This will have an influence on your host institution’s decision to accept more interns from your home institution after you.

In many situations you have to get it right the first time as you only have “one shot”. Your superiors and co-workers will judge you on the way you take decisions, react to situations and deal with challenges. Below we have identified some key situations which might be central to your internship and provide some advice on how to prepare yourself for these situations.

### 4.1. Designing your image projection

Your internship is a unique learning experience on both the professional and the personal level.

You will be seen as an ambassador of your home country and home institution; you are the projected image of the country and culture which your co-workers will get to know through you. It is important that you are aware of this new function and display a positive attitude so as to make others want to know more about where you come from.



However, you are an individual with a large pool of potential aspects that you can choose to develop or not. During your internship you have the opportunity to try out a new social role for the limited stay abroad and evaluate it afterwards. This does not mean that you should change your personality but maybe enrich it by changing whatever you have never felt really happy with, do something you have always wanted to do but never dared to. For example, if you tend to be shy and the last one in a group to speak you could try out a different role, the person who brings up ideas and leads the discussion actively in a meeting. If so far you have felt most comfortable working on your own you could try out a new role as the active team worker who always tries to involve others in their work. Try it out – and evaluate carefully whether this new role works for you or not.

### 4.2. First contact (after being accepted)

After being accepted, remember that the employer and the sponsors will feel much better about their decision if you react to it by creating a successful contact.

Please write an **email message** showing enthusiasm and motivation as well as your skills and know-how. The written format gives you enough time to plan exactly what you want to communicate. It is important to practice clarity (avoid all ambiguity!) in a well-written email message divided into paragraphs with a balanced distribution of the information.

An alternative to writing an email message is to make a **phone call** so that you can have a first conversation. This is a key communicative situation for various reasons:

- A first phone-call may have the same effect as your picture on your CV. It may well speak of your personality, communication skills (turn-taking, language, fluency, topic development, etc.) and interest in getting things done well.
- It shows your ability to 'break the ice', which may be taken as a sign of independence and self-confidence.
- It is a signal of enthusiasm and motivation on your part.

Please keep in mind that you should be very well prepared for the phone call and know what you want to achieve with it.

Now is a good time to start keeping a diary, where you should keep a record of all the steps you take and include contacts you make, dates, contact names and numbers etc. Continue this diary throughout the internship and be sure not to forget key situations such as your first day in the company or your first contribution in a meeting. This record will help you at the end of the internship to produce your documentation and the first draft of your letter of recommendation.

### 4.3. First face-to-face meeting



Your first face-to-face meeting with your new employer is important in preparing the ground for your whole internship. Statistics show that many employers make up their minds about the quality and potential of a new employee within the first half hour and rarely change their opinions later. There are at least two situations which can be

practised in advance:

a) the **introduction**, where you, your supervisor and your new colleagues meet for the first time. You need to have a system to remember all the relevant pieces of information the supervisor is giving you: names and positions of people, key data of the organisation, names of who can help with what, etc.

b) **small-talk**, with the employer or your mentor, your new colleagues, etc. Do not underestimate the challenge of being able to start a conversation, especially during the first couple of days. There will be many situations (in the lift, waiting for your supervisor in the secretary's office, etc.) where it is essential to be able to keep the conversation going. It may even make sense to prepare conversation pieces in order to manage these situations.

#### 4.4. Finding out rules and conventions

It is usually assumed that in a new environment things will be done as we do them at home. However, this attitude is counterproductive as it often blinds us even to visible differences. It is important to strengthen our awareness of rules and conventions within and outside the new work place. The differences may not even have anything to do with the unknown national culture you are in but could be linked with the organisation's internal policy or "corporate culture" (e.g. strict "desk policies" in some banks and insurance companies) or to an unwritten rule that the co-workers have established to organise themselves (e.g. the first person to arrive will make coffee).



By observing the development of a typical working day around you, it is often possible to identify such differences, if you know which areas to look at:

- greetings
- personal space (distance)
- titles (Mr., Ms, Dr. etc.)
- first names, surnames
- breaks
- timetables
- deadlines
- shared kitchen
- shared food or drinks
- cleaning-up
- use of office equipment
- office "decoration"

And if you are unsure about anything, just ask. Your co-workers will probably appreciate your interest and help you to blend into the company.

#### 4.5. Added value through a foreign intern

Do not think of yourself as the "weakest link" in your new work environment. You, as a foreign intern, have a lot more to offer to your new employers than you think. You may not know a lot about your host institution and your host country, but you are bringing with you a large amount of interesting information and contacts. However, you need to start thinking about the "added value" that you can bring to the host organisation from the start and may have to organise some things in advance.

If it is done carefully and wisely, suggesting new ideas might be the best way to show your motivation, good preparation and your involvement in the project. You may serve as an organiser of knowledge transfer from your home institution to your host institution by comparing the different systems in use and carefully suggesting potential improvements through adopting a different

strategy. As a preparation for your internship you may even consider gathering information about a similar activity area of organisations in your home country before your departure. This will enable you to give your new employer useful information during your stay.

#### 4.6. Dealing with difficulties



Ok, something is going wrong, what can you do now? Should you wait for a while or react immediately, before the situation gets out of control?

First of all, do not think that you are a unique case. Reports by returnees show that almost every intern faces situations where they or their supervisor are very unhappy. You may for example feel that the tasks given

to you are not consistent with the objectives set by your academic coordinators or supervisors. You may have been treated unfairly, or you think that after the first month you have stopped learning new things and the company is exploiting you as “cheap labour” (e.g. doing photocopies all day). It will be a challenge to openly express your concerns to your supervisor, to the company or even to your home institution if they put much pressure on achieving the goals set down in the original agreement.

However, even if the process is painful you should address the problems by giving all persons involved a chance to deal with mismatches between expectations and reality. Often the situation is not beyond repair and open communication with all concerned can lead back to the path to a successful internship.

## 5. After the internship

You have successfully completed your internship, have learned a lot of new things, had the chance to put your theoretical knowledge into practice and got to know a working environment in a foreign country. We hope that you successfully managed “critical intercultural incidences” and went through a number of intercultural learning experiences.

It is helpful to ask your host company to write you a **letter of recommendation**. It will help you when you want to apply for a position in another country where it is usual to add a letter of reference to your application and you also might need this job reference as a document to hand in to your scholarship programme.

You should be prepared to write this reference, or at least the first draft of it, yourself. This is actually an advantage, because you can make sure that everything important is in it. Keeping a work diary from the start is vital as it will ensure you remember what was important throughout your internship.

Back home it is time to reflect on your experiences and to share them with other students who are also thinking of doing an internship abroad. Usually you have to write a **technical** and/or **experience report** for your university or for your scholarship programme. In those reports you write about your duties as an intern, intercultural experiences, practical hints on e.g. how to get a flat and useful things to consider and what to avoid in the specific destination country. Just think of questions you had yourself when starting the internship. Your experience report will be much appreciated by other students, who follow in your footsteps.

Now that you are an expert concerning international internships you can not only give practical tips to other students with your experience report, but at **alumni meetings** you can get in touch with people interested in your experience and with other former international interns. In some countries the “alumni-culture” is only starting while for example in the United States it is a well established tradition.

Staying in contact with your host company is a good idea, e.g. send your supervisor an email once in a while if you should want to work for this company again.



To draw these guidelines to a close, we highlight the most important things for you to keep in mind in a reminder list.

## Reminder list



- Getting in contact with possible host organisations
- Application
- Acceptance
- Work contract
- Scholarship or grant if your internship is unpaid
- Visa and work permit
- Valid passport/ID
- Health insurance, third party liability insurance and accident insurance
- Housing at the destination city
- Plane, bus or train ticket
- Interim tenant for your room at home
- Information about the destination country and city
- Awareness of intercultural differences
- Opening of a bank account
- Tax card
- Experience and technical report

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