

Experience Report

Aditya Burla, India

Trainee at Paul Scherrer Institute (PSI), Villigen, Switzerland.

From 05 Aug 2019 to 25 Oct 2019



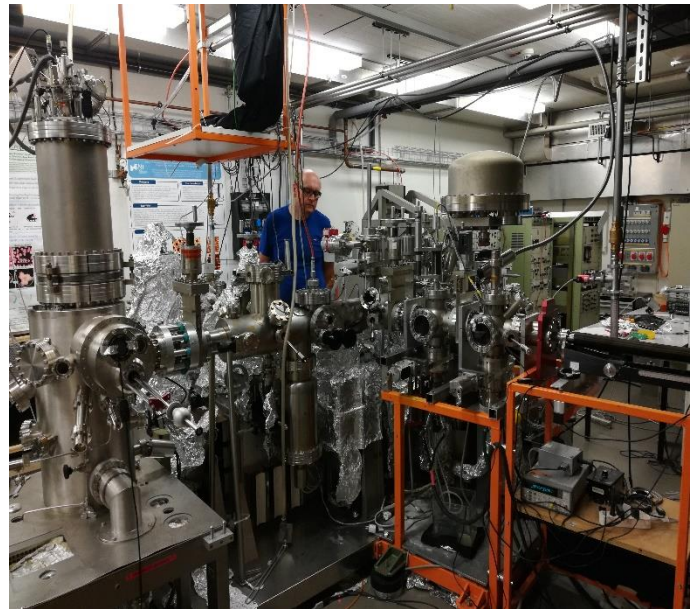
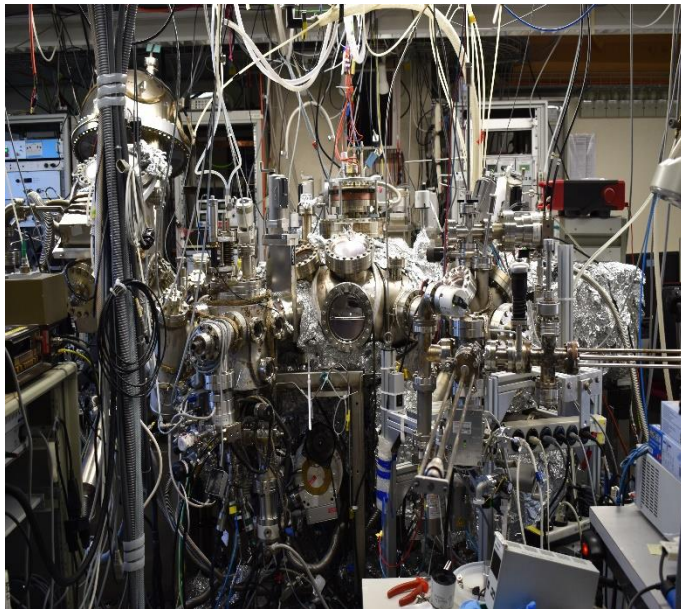
To begin with, I had dreamed of doing internship abroad since my first year of the Bachelors program. On doing a lot of research about internships abroad I came to know about IAESTE. Instantly, I registered with the local committee at Manipal, India. That decision was probably the best decision I took in my life so far. Then I applied to a series of internships in various European countries such as Spain, Germany, Poland and Switzerland. Unfortunately, all of them were rejected as I had no prior technical experience. These rejections taught me that my resume doesn't have enough weight hence, I started to develop my resume by doing project works and attending technical workshops and conferences. I had an offer from PSI to work in the Surface Science lab on Ultra High Vacuum System. Being a Metallurgical and Materials Engineering student I always had a very high interest on surfaces and interfaces. As my areas of interest fall in the same I had applied and later I was interviewed by Dr. Thomas Jung who was my Project Guide over there. I successfully passed the interview and I received a contract from PSI.

My internship at PSI was the first time I left India and was the first time I took a flight. It was overwhelming at first as no one in my family had any experience with visa proceedings. IAESTE Manipal LC and IAESTE Switzerland helped me a lot in this and made it easier for me. I had done lot of research on various things in Switzerland before my arrival which helped me a lot for the smooth transition from India. The accommodation provided in the guest house was very good with all the required facilities. My roommate was a very friendly guy from Northern Ireland. We used to have lot of fun watching Champions League. I used to cook my meals everyday which brought out my cooking skills which many of my colleagues and friends appreciated a lot. The internship helped me a lot personally as it gave me the confidence that I can successfully live in a completely different environment. I am proud of myself for living on my own for three months in a different country and making lots of new friends across the world.



(From left to right) Paul Scherrer Institute – Villigen (Image Source: www.psi.ch/), Guest House.

The internship gave me a new perception towards research. My colleagues Mehdi Heydari and Markus Kropf assisted me in every possible way to understand and work independently on the multi-chamber ultra-high vacuum system.



(From left to right) Multi-Chamber Ultra High Vacuum System at PSI and University of Basel.

My project guide Dr. Thomas Jung was always present for me to clear any of my questions regarding surface science and my project report. They were all very happy to help. As Dr. Thomas Jung is also a Professor at the University of Basel, I was fortunate to meet his research group (Dr. Aisha Ahsan, Dr. Rejaul Sk and Anupam Prasoan) working over there. In the very less time spent with them, they made everything very comfortable for me. One thing that I learnt from my colleagues at PSI and University of Basel is the way research should be directed. My entire perception towards research in changed after working with them. The major difference between working in India and working in Switzerland is the availability of sophisticated equipment and advanced machinery which I can operate and get hands on experience.



Group Picture during my Farewell Dinner in Basel.

Culturally I would say India and Switzerland are similar in terms of people of various ethnicities and usage of different languages. During one of the IAESTE weekends (Cheese & Choc Weekend) I had the opportunity to visit Cailler Chocolate Factory at Broc and a traditional Swiss cheese factory in Gruyeres. The visit brought me closer to the Swiss culture and it was also the first time I had the Cheese Fondue.



(From left to right) Chocolates at Cailler Factory, Cheese factory workers playing Alphorn wearing traditional clothes and shelves of cheese.

The Geneva weekend was a different experience. From being at the United Nations to the Philippe Patek Clock museum and the Breguet watch store, it was truly an awesome experience from which I understood why the Swiss watches are so famous.



(From left to right) United Nations European Headquarters, one of the conference halls and traditional watch carving machine at Breguet.

The International Zurich weekend was first weekend that I had attended. It was lot of fun walking around the streets of Zurich and getting to know different places and of course the IAESTE dance at ETH Zurich was a memorable one. My favourite weekend was the Zermatt weekend. I was so excited to be there as it was my first experience with snow. Though the hikes were very difficult (six hours hike) the views from the top are worth it. Having a bite of Toblerone while enjoying the view of the might Matterhorn was simply astounding. During my stay for three months in Switzerland I had been to around six hikes. For a person who never went on hiking this is definitely a big thing.



(From left to right) Inside the Glacier Palace, The Matterhorn from Zermatt, our squad having fun with Toblerones.

Also I had the opportunity to visit world class institutions such as ETH Zurich and EPFL during their open days. I had a lot of exposure to the ongoing research in my field over there. I wish I can be a part of those in the near future. I had travelled to Paris with my IAESTE friends which was an amazing experience. This trip was on bucket list since I was a child. We had lot of fun on the streets of Paris, eating macarons and éclairs, dressing up as Parisians and of course lots of pictures for Instagram.



(From left ot right) Enjoying an Éclair, Eiffel Tower at Night and central fountain at the Palace gardens in Versailles.

Switzerland and India are different in many ways. One can travel from St. Gallen to Geneva in 4 hours (i.e. almost from eastern to the western part of Switzerland) whereas I would reach to the next major city in the same state in India (Yeah India is very huge compared to Switzerland). I am very much used to the hustling cities with lot of vehicles and people. However, when I arrived at PSI it was very silent and calm. I really like the pollution free and peaceful life at the guesthouse. It was a bit of struggle during the initial days to adjust to the timings as we have same daytime throughout the year. Experiencing longer days and having dinner before sunset was a new experience. After reaching India the things that I missed the most are the amazing views of Switzerland and the calmness that I experienced in the Guest house. I must say that Swiss people and other friends from IAESTE have been very lovely and supporting to me throughout my internship. I had no problem in settling in or adjusting to the new conditions in Switzerland.

My experience with IAESTE was excellent. Due to some technical error the insurance company asked to take up a different plan apart from the one suggested to me. I was worried and I had approached the IAESTE team and they resolved the issue. Though this might not be a huge issue, for a person who came from the different part of the world and facing such issues will be a lot of mental stress. IAESTE Switzerland acted timely and resolved the conflict within few days. I'm glad that my internship was through IAESTE as they helped me in every aspect of my internship. I will definitely suggest anyone to try out IAESTE internships as they are paid and the team provides great support during the internship.

To conclude I would like to say to all the students trying to get IAESTE internship to keep on trying even if your application is rejected once (you never know what experience awaits you). So come to IAESTE to work, to explore and to discover.