

GOING INTERNATIONAL

Abroad for the clinical practical year: Germany, Switzerland, USA – Looking beyond borders – an experience for life

By Elaaha Anwari



Elaaha Anwari,
Medical University of Vienna

My clinical training year experience in Frankfurt, Philadelphia, and Zurich

My reasons for doing a clinical training year abroad

The clinical practical year is an important step for medical students on their way to a professional career. It was clear to me that I wanted to use this time not only to deepen my medical knowledge, but also to broaden my personal horizons. That's why I decided to complete two tertials of my clinical training year abroad. This decision took me to Germany (Frankfurt am Main), Switzerland (Zurich), and the USA (Philadelphia).

As a native of Vienna and someone who has spent most of my life in Austria, this opportunity seemed ideal for me to learn about new medical approaches and immerse myself in foreign cultures at the same time. These experiences abroad have greatly expanded not only my professional competence but also my intercultural skills.

Preparation and organization

Organizing a clinical training year abroad requires a lot of preparation and planning. The application process varies from country to country:

Even though many clinics in Germany allocate their places via a clinical training year portal, as an Austrian medical student, it was relatively easy for me to obtain a place at short notice by sending direct email requests to the secretariat.

In Switzerland, on the other hand, junior assistant positions are often advertised years in advance. For example, I secured my position at the University Hospital in Zurich 2.5 years before it started.

Organization in the US is usually a little more complicated, as stays there are usually associated with high tuition fees. This made me all the more delighted to be able to complete my clinical training year there.

Important formalities such as visas, work permits, and insurance should be taken care of early on. If you plan to spend most of your clinical training year abroad, it is advisable to take out private health insurance for the entire period. This was essential for my stay in the USA, for example.

In Switzerland, if you are staying for more than 90 days, you must register with the authorities, which incurs a fee.

You also need to be up to date with your vaccinations, and in some countries, such as the USA, additional tests such as a tuberculosis test may be required.

Financing and scholarship opportunities in Austria

Financing a clinical training year abroad is a challenge that requires careful planning and preparation.

- Students who receive study grants have the option of applying for an additional “[grant for studying abroad](#).” This support can vary depending on the country and duration of the stay. It is important to note that the application must be submitted no later than three months after the start of the study abroad program.
- For students whose primary residence is in Lower Austria, there are special [funding opportunities for semesters and internships abroad](#). These grants can be used for periods of 3 to 12 months. A special rule applies to the clinical training year: stays at different locations, each shorter than three months, can be added together as long as the total duration is at least three months.
- The [ERASMUS+ program](#) also offers support for study and internship stays abroad.

Comparison of working conditions and teaching

In my opinion, it is always up to you how much you learn in the clinical training year, regardless of whether you are in Austria, Switzerland, or anywhere else in the world. The learning effect varied depending on the department and hospital: in some departments, I was able to benefit from excellent teaching without having to ask for it, while in others, more initiative was required. This often depended on the workload of the doctors.

In Germany, I had “clinical training year lessons” once a week on average, which was very helpful. In Switzerland, there were numerous training courses that expanded my knowledge. In the USA, too, great importance was attached to teaching, especially through regular rounds. Overall, I did not lack training opportunities in any of the three countries.

In the three countries I visited, working conditions were consistently good. However, it is important to note that working hours abroad were generally longer than what one is used to in Vienna. My days usually started early and often lasted until late afternoon. Another important point is that patient systems and billing with health insurance companies vary from hospital to hospital.

The language may take some getting used to, depending on the region or location. But the beauty of medicine is that we speak a common language worldwide: status and medical history are of central importance everywhere, no matter where you are in the world.

As students at MedUni Vienna, we are well prepared thanks to our practical training and can easily keep up with other students from different countries.

Everyday life and integration

I highly recommend the platform wg-gesucht.de for finding accommodation in Germany. I found a small apartment there for temporary rent. Depending on the location and amenities, monthly prices vary between €550 and €3,000. So there is something to suit every budget. Since I knew I would also be going to Switzerland and the USA, I opted for a minimalist and inexpensive solution.

In Switzerland, hospitals often provide accommodation for students. I lived in such a staff residence during my time in Zurich. The monthly rent was CHF 700, plus a cleaning fee of CHF 100. This solution was both practical and affordable, especially since junior assistants also receive a salary.

In the US, I shared an Airbnb in Philadelphia with a colleague who was also doing the rotation with me. Since the safety of residential areas in Philadelphia varies greatly, it was important for us to find well-located and safe accommodation, which, however, came with higher rental costs. We paid about \$1,100–1,200 per person per month.

I quickly made friends in all three countries, not least because of my living situation and my work at the hospital. The exchange was particularly intense in the USA, as there were many international students there.

To find out about local events and leisure activities, I used social media as well as local websites and apps. These were a great way to plan spontaneous activities and enjoy the cultural offerings in the various cities. In addition, I often received tips from colleagues, which helped me discover the best spots.

My time abroad taught me a tremendous amount about different countries and their cultures. From the local cuisine to the music scene, each country had its own charm. Even shopping often became a little adventure, as I was constantly discovering new products and peculiarities.

Advantages and disadvantages of a clinical training year abroad

Spending the clinical training year abroad offers numerous professional advantages. International experience is highly regarded on your resume and enables you to build a network that can pay off later. You have the opportunity to get to know different medical systems and working methods, so that you can incorporate the best aspects of the respective countries and hospitals into your own practice.

But even more than the professional advantages, personal development was the main focus for me. A stay abroad significantly promotes independence and adaptability. You learn to find your way in new and unfamiliar situations, which boosts your self-confidence.

However, there are also challenges that should not be underestimated: Homesickness is something you have to take into account. If video calls are not enough, it makes sense to plan short trips home and reserve days off work in advance. Within Europe, this is usually possible without any problems. The clinical training year abroad would not have been possible for me if I hadn't worked alongside my studies and applied for the grants described above. Be aware of this and plan ahead accordingly. To keep costs down, for example, it helped me to plan and prepare meals in advance.

Practical tips for future students

For anyone planning to spend the clinical training year abroad, I would like to offer some practical tips. The [website of the Medical University of Vienna](#) offers a lot of helpful information, as do the experience reports on the Going International website. Every university or clinic usually has an international office that can help with organizing and planning your stay abroad. It is therefore worth contacting these offices at an early stage.

A stay abroad requires thorough planning. I recommend looking into all possible funding options in good time and, if possible, sharing the experience with friends from your studies.

Reflection and conclusion

The decision to spend most of my clinical year abroad was one of the best I made during my studies. This time not only advanced my medical knowledge but also strengthened me personally. I learned to work in different medical systems and adapt to new situations. This experience broadened my horizons and gave me unforgettable memories. I can only warmly recommend everyone to take this step.

Cost table

Germany	
Description	Costs in Euro
Accommodation / month	600
Food and drink / month	300
Transportation (public transport) / month	50
Leisure activities, admissions, excursions / month	100
Sum / month	1050
Travel expenses: Train ticket (round-trip)	100
Total	1150

Switzerland

Description	Costs in Euro
Accommodation / month	750
Food and drink / month	500
Transportation (public transport) / month	100
Leisure activities, admissions, excursions / month	250
Sum / month	1600
Travel expenses: Train ticket (round-trip)	160
Total	1760

USA

Description	Costs in Euro
Accommodation / month	1100
Food and drink / month	400
Transportation (public transport) / month	0
Leisure activities, admissions, excursions / month	200
Sum / month	1700
Travel expenses: Plane ticket (round-trip)	900
Total	2600

Interesting websites

- [Going International Programs at Pennsylvania Hospital](#)
 - Here you can find more information about the rotation at Pennsylvania Hospital.
- [Financial aid for studying abroad](#)
 - If you receive financial aid for your studies, you can apply for additional funding for your clinical training year abroad.
- [Funding opportunities for semesters and internships abroad.](#)
 - If you are a resident of Lower Austria, you can apply for funding for your clinical training year abroad.
- [ERASMUS+ Program](#)
 - For German cities, for example, there is the possibility to apply for funding. You can find more information at the link.
- [wg-gesucht.de](#)
 - Here you can find shared apartments and apartments in Germany, among other places.
- [Website of the Medical University of Vienna:](#)
 - Here you can find more information about crediting the clinical training year at MedUni Vienna if you have completed the clinical training year abroad.

Photos
Frankfurt am Main



©Elaaha Anwari
It's always worth looking up –
Frankfurt at full height

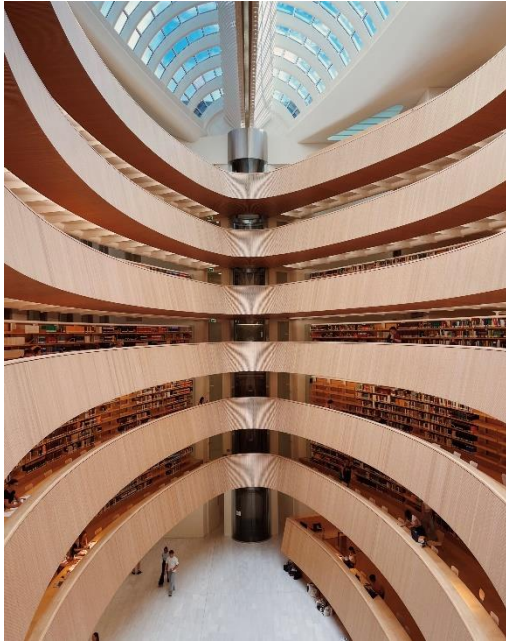


©Elaaha Anwari
Frankfurt's cityscape: historic facades
meet modern skyscrapers



©Elaaha Anwari
A picture-perfect day on the
banks of the Main

Zurich



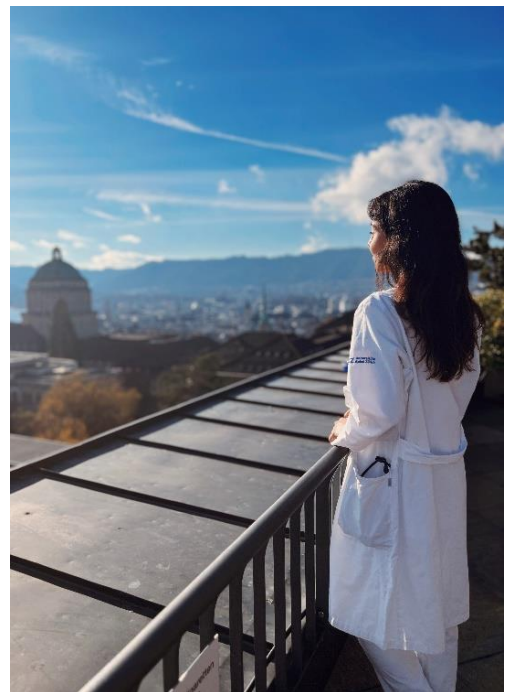
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©Elaaha Anwari
A break with a view.

Philadelphia



©Elaaha Anwari
In front of the historic Pennsylvania Hospital in Philadelphia.



©Elaaha Anwari
The impressive City Hall of Philly.



©Elaaha Anwari
A Philly classic: pretzel snack on the go.

Contact

If you have any questions about Elaaha Anwari's internship abroad, or if you have any questions for Elaaha Anwari personally, please contact the GI editorial team directly. Send us an email at: media@goinginternational.org

Do you have questions about working and continuing education or job hunting and careers? Then write to Ms. Seitz: office@goinginternational.org

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