Finding the Internship:

As part of the Master of Science Epidemiology program at the LMU that I am enrolled in, students are required to complete 18 weeks of internship, and though it is possible to complete these 18 weeks in Munich, I decided to apply abroad. Barcelona’s Centre for Research in Environmental Epidemiology (CREAL) is a well known research centre specializing in environmental epidemiology, which is what originally captured my interest. The fact that the institution is in the awesome city of Barcelona just added extra incentive for me to apply to CREAL. Founded in 2005, CREAL has quickly become recognised as one of the leading environmental research institutions in Europe, with its participation in many international research projects. CREAL’s mission is to promote and develop advanced epidemiological research into the environmental factors that affect human health, in order to help prevent and control their harmful effects.
I found the internship on my own, by sending my CV to my current supervisor and stating my interest in her research. I found her contact information on the CREAL staff webpage at http://www.creal.cat/creal/quisom/en_index.html. After a short interview I was given the internship position, and I found that my supervisor and others working at CREAL were very helpful in organizing my arrival in Barcelona.

Arriving in Barcelona:

Moving to a new city is always stressful, and even more so if you don’t speak the language. This was the case for me, but despite the language barrier my arrival in Barcelona went relatively smoothly. If you are flying into Barcelona with a lot of luggage, try to avoid arriving late at night or early in the mornings because the trains to the city aren’t running yet. There is an option for a bus but it takes almost an hour. You can find all the information on Barcelona transit at http://www.tmb.cat/ca/home. Additionally, if you are planning to use the metro or buses frequently I would recommend either the 50/30 ticket giving you 50 rides in 30 days for 37€, or the T-Trimestre giving you unlimited travel for 90 days costing 135€.

Finding a place to live in Barcelona is not difficult (you can see many signs for rooms for rent) and also not too expensive (the same or cheaper than in Munich). Of all the people I met while living in Barcelona, no one seemed unhappy with the place they were living at. However, like any city with a university, it can be a challenge to find housing at the start of the semester (end of August / beginning of September).

The Internship:

My job during my internship was looking at drinking water quality with respect to changes in temperature and precipitation. I was given datasets on climate parameters (temperature and precipitation) as well as datasets on water quality parameters (nitrates, arsenic, pesticides, organic carbon etc.) in order to attempt to understand and predict how climate change will affect water quality. Climate change in terms of its effect on water quality was defined by
changes in temperature and precipitation. These variables are important as they affect hydrologic factors (limited dilution ability during low river flows, increased agricultural runoff during rainstorms), terrestrial factors (changes in vegetation and soil structure) and human resource demand factors (increased water use with increased population, increased demand for cooling capacity). My job was to analyse these various datasets to see if climate changes significantly alter water quality.

This was a great job for me since it allowed me to learn how to use different statistical software (STATA), as well as gain practical insight into how research is conducted in the field of environmental epidemiology.

Also, CREAL is a great place to work, with really friendly and knowledgeable staff, so whenever I had a question my co-workers were happy to help me out. Additionally CREAL is a very international institution, with people from the Netherlands, Germany, Canada, South America, the United States, Greece, Australia, and of course Spain. A lot of my co-workers had been living in Barcelona for a long time, so they were very welcoming and were more than happy to invite me and the other interns to join in all kinds of activities (like the CREAL beach volleyball team).

Playing in a beach volleyball tournament after work with my co-workers.
Impressions and Advice:

I did my internship in the summer, so many people from the CREAL office were away on vacation. The office had a relaxed feel, with people dressing very casually, regularly sporting shorts and flip-flops. The fact that our office windows looked directly onto the sunny beach, full of tourists enjoying the warm weather, was very tempting and sometimes made it hard to focus on work. After work we would often just cross the street and relax on the beach, and on weekends there were other beaches to explore and tons of places in the city to discover.

To say the least, summer in Barcelona is amazing. There is always something going on, parties in the streets, music festivals, free walking tours of the city, beach parties, outdoor movies... the list of things to do is endless. One useful website that shows all the main events happening in the city is http://www.porktie.com/ . The only possible downside to being in Barcelona in the summer is that there is no university, so there are no ERASMUS groups to join, but that in no way means it is hard to meet people. Generally people are very open and friendly, and will even put in the effort to attempt speaking English to those unable to speak Catalan or Spanish. Also, if you are coming to Barcelona and expecting to learn Spanish, don’t get your hopes up. Almost everyone speaks Catalan, all the time.

Some practical advice in terms of finances; the cost of living is generally cheaper than Munich. Rooms for rent are not too bad. I paid 300€ per month for a room around 20m² in the centre, on a direct metro line to my work. Groceries are also cheap, and going out for a dinner of tapas is also not too expensive and a good way to try different types of Spanish food.
For banking I was able to use my Deutsche Bank account, since there are many branches located throughout the city. There are also reasonable SIM cards with the main companies being Movistar and Vodafone. I had Vodafone pay-as-you-go for 8 cents per minute calling and 8 cents to send an SMS.

In conclusion, I would highly recommend Barcelona as a city to do an internship in if given the opportunity. Not only was I able to gain insights into my field of research, but I was also able to discover a new city and meet amazing people from all over the world. Also thank you to the Student und Arbeitsmarkt for helping me organize my applications for funding.