

Sorbonne Nouvelle Paris 3
2016 Semester 1
BA in Politics and French

General

My exchange was the best six months of my life. I would highly recommend going on an exchange anywhere, but particularly Paris if you're wanting a French experience! Like any city, there are pro's and con's which I thought would be helpful to run through.

Positives

The city

Even after months of living in multiple parts of Paris, there's still so many places and things I didn't get to see, which I think is a good sign; you will never be bored here. Anything you want, Paris has it; more museums and galleries than you could ever see, shopping, lots of different cool areas to eat and explore, heaps of parks, the Seine. Something is always on; every week from day one there were international parties, weekend trips, markets and festivals, short play screenings in someone's arty loft. I had heard Paris was 'dirty' but I didn't find that at all, it's a beautiful city you can't help but fall in love with.

Student networks/ support

As soon as you arrive in Paris and sign up to uni you get all these emails from different student networks. ESN (Erasmus student network) is the main one, there is also a company called EIAP. Sign up to them, they are great ways to make both international and French friends. I went to ESN's 'welcome week' which had a different event every night; speed friending, a walking tour of part of the city, ice skating, pub night, clubbing night. After that both those organizations have weekly events like 'language cafes' and pub nights, and also organize picnics, trips, and other events. On one of my first weekends I went to les Chateaux in Loire Valley with EIAP and had a great time, there were also longer trips during the uni holidays. ESN also has deals with banks for exchange students which was great, the bank actually paid me to open an account with them (about 70 euros!).

There are also good buddy programmes; I signed up to two at university (you'll get emails about it) and one through ESN. One of my uni buddies became my best French friend, another was very helpful with my French, the third was somewhat bizarrely a French fireman.

Transport in Paris

Paris is so easy to get around - the metro is amazing. By the end of my time in Paris I'd be annoyed if there was a 4 minute wait for the next train; that's how quick it is. Get used to the RER sooner than later; superfast trains which run alongside the metro system and cut through the centre of the city, also going out to the airport and the suburbs.

Buy a Navigo pass; the usual one is 70 euros a month (note the months are strictly from the 1st - end of each month, so if you arrive on the 20th don't buy one until the next month) and is well worth it. It gives you unlimited travel on the metro, RER and buses. Alternatively you can get a student Navigo. These are 333 euros for an entire year so well worth doing if you are in Paris for a year or even 6 months, but if

there for just 3 or 4 full months like me (spent May and June travelling after uni ended in April) then just get the normal one which you can receive straight away with no hassle and paperwork.

The metro doesn't run very late (12 weekdays and 1.30 weekends) but taxis are priced similar to NZ. Just never call and order one, A) because it's almost impossible and B) if you do manage it they charge you from the moment you call until they get to your house, as I found out the hard way. I also never got round to signing up for the Velib (bike) system but wish I did; 30 euros per year and you can use them for short trips eg to uni, home from town, and put them back at a different stop.

Travel outside of Paris

Paris is the perfect travelling base. The main airport Charles de Gaulle (CDG) is 45 minutes on the metro from the centre of Paris, and two other airports (Orly and Beauvais) are also accessible by bus. Use skyscanner and GoEuro to compare prices, and take your pick of destination – eg one week a friend and I were fed up with uni and bought 20 euro flights to a random town in Italy that looked cool for the weekend and it was great.

The regional train network in France, SNCF, is also really good (if the workers aren't on strike..). Buy a Carte Jeune card (50 euro for the whole year) and you'll always have discounts of at least 25% off any ticket. I used it to travel all around France and it was really good.

Food and nightlife

These two areas deserve a special mention as they are just so good. Whilst I'm too scared to step on a pair of scales now, I wouldn't take back eating French food these past few months for anything. Once you've gotten used to the French pastries, bread and cheese, there is no turning back. There are cafes on every corner where all the French sit outside and enjoy life; Le Marais and Bastille in particular are really cool areas.

Nightlife: Paris really has it all, from countless little bars to huge clubs with slides, pools and firecrackers. The music can be a bit weird sometimes but it's all part of the fun. Unlike in Dunedin, people meet for drinks at about 10, clubs are empty at midnight but packed by 3, and most people stay out until the metro starts running again at 6am. Start sleep depriving yourself now to prepare.

Negatives

Disclaimer: I was always told people were unfriendly but didn't find this at all; whilst store sales people and transport workers can sometimes be unfriendly, the majority of people are really nice and will go out of their way to help you. Also I never felt unsafe in Paris even in light of the recent attacks last year. Pickpockets are definitely around so always kept your bag closed and nothing in your back pockets, but there was a big police presence and I never had any bad experiences personally.

Paperwork

France deserves its reputation for being hopelessly bureaucratic. Basically nothing is simple. Getting your Visa is straightforward, at the office in Wellington. Aside from that, get ready to have the patience of a saint. Getting a phone plan, opening a bank account, signing a flat, finding uni papers online and then enrolling for them (not online..), are all much more of a challenge than at home. In theory you can get housing assistance called the CAF from the French government, a very complicated process I gave up

on. Also the OFII: on some types of Visas, you are required to go through this process to validate your Visa; a compulsory medical exam, interview, pay a tax etc. I never completed this as was unable to make the appointments they kept giving me at last notice as I was travelling, and they were a nightmare to communicate with.

Try to do as much of the preparation as possible before you leave NZ, stay calm and don't panic when things don't go right. The OFII still send me vaguely menacing emails along with stacks of paperwork whilst ignoring my requests for help, and my French bank account is still open to the best of my knowledge. C'est la vie!

Accommodation and expense

Accommodation in Paris is expensive and hard to find, but is worth it to live in Paris. I lived in a flat with a friend for two months and then with a French family for the rest of the time, both were great. Options:

- Uni Residences
 - Very basic, usually no communal areas, grim buildings with big fences. In saying that they are very cheap – between 350-600 euro per month I think, and my friends there said it was fine, and worth saving the money on. You meet lots of people through the networks etc.
- Flatting
 - Best option if you can find it. Most flats in Paris are small, 3 bedrooms absolute max. Try not to use agencies, they charge a fortune in fees for doing not much. Join the facebook groups 'colocation a Paris' and 'COLOCATION // Sciences Po Exchange Students' (fancy uni nearby, you don't need to actually go there). Typical rent is 550-800 euros per month, charges included.
- La Cite
 - More about this in other people's write ups; it literally looks like Hogwarts and has cool facilities like a pool. Seems hard to get into; they told me they only accepted post grads but I met lots of undergrads living there so who knows. Apply and see what happens.

In terms of money generally, it's going to be an expensive semester. Don't convert prices into NZ dollars, it will only depress you. Two things are cheap; wine and baguette. This is a great starting point. The markets on Sundays are good for lots of cheap fruit and veges. I didn't keep track of how much I spent (purposeful decision) but it would have been close to \$15,000 all up including flights etc. In saying that, I travelled a lot, you could do it cheaper especially living in a residence.

Other

University

Whilst it's not a negative, it's certainly not great. In terms of technology and facilities it's nothing like Dunedin; it reminded me of a hospital and the libraries are pretty small with slow computers, no scanning or colour photocopying (bizarre, but there is a shop just across the road) and not enough power plugs.

Classes are around 1.5 or 2 hours long each, but are only once a week. I had to do 8 papers to get 4 Otago papers (2 Politics, 1 English and 1 French). Six were in English and two in French, designed

especially for exchange students. Both of these were really good: N4LFA1 (Langue française (avancé niveau 1) and BZA622 (Perfectionnement de l'expression orale en tandem).

The papers in English were 'Civilisation' papers and English lit, and were all interesting and pretty easy, although 8 papers still meant a lot of work for 4 Otago papers. Doing more papers in French would have been very hard I think. The good thing about the Sorbonne is that unlike the uni in Lyon, it's not super strict with attendance, you aren't going to get marked down for missing a few classes here and there. There is also a great team in the international office to help you, and I found all of the teachers really nice and very interested in New Zealand etc.

Mobile

I would recommend Free – I paid 20 euro a month for basically unlimited internet, texts and calls, which was great. You can go to their store and buy a SIM and a plan through machines, it's pretty straightforward, then you get an online account where you can pay per month etc. However, you have to cancel the plan by sending them a letter before you leave the country.

Summary

Would 100% recommend going on exchange, you'll never regret it! Feel free to get my details through Graeme and get in touch if you have any more questions. Must do's if you do go to Paris:

- Comptoir General, 10th arrondissement: best bar in Paris. Crazy mansion with tiger skins and a corner full of cacti, a wooden pirate ship bar, etc. Make friends with French people in the line!
- Falafel King in Le Marais – can't even explain how good the pita falafel is for 6 euro, just do it
- Restaurant on the roof of Le Centre Georges Pompidou – just get a drink unless you're a millionaire, amazing view of Paris
- Mix Club: international club, highlight is a big slide from entrance down to the actual club
- Le Marais and Bastille: coolest suburbs to wander around and eat in
- Sunday market at Bastille: biggest market in Paris and amazing
- Travel: would highly recommend Bordeaux, Nice, a small village called Eze near Nice, Cinque Terre in Italy, and Croatia (Sail Croatia is amazing)