

I'm writing this at Doha airport eating a terrible excuse of a croissant. I have a 7 hour layover and am already missing the sights and sounds of Paris. If you take anything from this write up, embrace Paris for everything it has to offer. The bakeries on every corner, wine and baguettes by the Seine, stylish people walking stylish dogs, beautiful architecture and winding alleyways. Do all of this as you try not to cough and splutter as your lungs fill with the second hand smoke of a seemingly entire city of smokers and dodge the dog poo and urine that covers the pavements. Paris is a city of contradictions; it's dirtily beautiful and coldly welcoming. If you can find your place you are in for the most amazing few months of your life.

VISA

I am pretty lucky to have a UK passport and so did not need to get a VISA pre departure.

As for other official documents, I took certified copies of both my passports and birth certificates. I didn't need to use either, but have had friends who have needed copies of their birth certificates.

UNIVERSITY

Everything you have heard or read about French bureaucracy is probably true. It is illogical, archaic and never seems to work in your favour. In saying that, if you prepare yourself for the worst and turn up with your entire life in paper work to each and every appointment you have, you will be able to get through. Having read previous testimonials I was quite worried about getting things done but actually found if you work within the system it is manageable. As previously stated, the key is preparation.

Journée d'accueil

Make sure you can either make the journée d'accueil yourself, or you have a trustworthy friend who can understand French to take notes for you. They will throw information at you. Try to take it in – the most important points to note are when and where to sign up for your courses which you will have to do in person at the University. It's pretty overwhelming for your first day so don't despair.

Entrance test

The entrance test for us was held on the same day as the journée d'accueil. Most students got their professors to email confirming their level of French which meant that they did not have to take the test. For example, if, like me, you have completed FREN334 at the time of leaving you should be at intermediate level or somewhere around B2. This is the level you need to be able to take the specialist ERASMUS cultural papers (which you are going to want to take) so I suggest that you get your professor to email either the course coordinator or just yourself and you can show the test convener on the day.

Don't stress if this isn't an option – I didn't know that we could do this so had to take the test which wasn't too hard – comprehension and a written piece and managed to achieve the required level.

Inscription

This part is a little blurry so I wish I had taken notes. Inscription into your classes is in two phases. The first is with the department that you are registered with. It involves paying a small fee and getting your student ID which is vital for registering for individual classes. In past people's testimonials everyone talked about massive lines but I turned up just before opening times for everything and was always ok.

The next stage is signing up for your actual courses once you have your ID. I managed to do two ERASMUS cultural papers, the ERASMUS French paper, a tandem paper and a paper on the francophone world. I thoroughly enjoyed all my courses but would especially recommend the ERASMUS cultural papers as they are the best way of meeting other exchange students and that is where I made pretty much all of my friends on exchange.

A note on papers – take things that will interest you. I really enjoyed all of my papers. I took the ERASMUS *art français* and *approches sociologiques françaises*. Art français did not require too much work – a written and oral exposé on two different pieces of French art which sounds daunting but was definitely achievable. Approches sociologiques françaises was fantastic – our professor did not always turn up and had a more 'holistic' view of testing and preferred to talk to us for the whole two hours.

I would also recommend the tandem course which is a BET course. BET courses are basically offered as a supplementary course and is more skills based for example yoga or swimming. You still get credits for them. The tandem course consisted of pairs of native French and English speakers and the courses were aimed at everyone achieving confidence at a conversational level in their foreign language. It was a great way to meet native French students who were otherwise quite hard to break into.

I also took a DFLE course. DFLE is basically the equivalent of TESOL – so you learn the theory of teaching French as a foreign language. My course was on the francophone world and really cool so I would recommend that. I was originally enrolled in Literature but was glad I made the change as heard that is very intensive.

ACCOMMODATION

I was very lucky and stayed with a Parisien family who I knew through a family friend. They were amazing and I really got an insight into French life and it helped my level of French enormously because they only spoke to me in French. I paid 600 Euros a month which I know is pretty steep but included most of my meals, electricity, wifi etc and the experience was 100% worth it as I meet so many interesting people through them.

I think staying with a family is a really good option if you want a snapshot into French life but in saying that I don't know if I would have done it had I not had a connection with the family. Some people I know who have been homestays have had pretty bad experiences if the family is only money driven and it can be pretty isolating if you end up with a family you don't get on with. But that would be a small minority.

Flatting is another good option but be prepared to pay a lot and its also hard to sort before you get there. CROUS is another option and my friend stayed in one dormitory which was very well equipped and set up and probably a good option if you like your own space at the end of the day but also it is hard to meet people.

MONEY

I took over a BNZ cash passport with me which was incredibly useful and super easy. I also opened a bank account with *societe generale* but in hindsight wished I hadn't. The set up itself was a nightmare with a lot of paperwork, there was an ATM withdrawal limit and closing it was also a nightmare. I still don't really know if I have closed it but managed to withdraw all my money.

The one useful thing a bank account is good for is your RIB number which you need to get a social security number to complete your registration for university. I never actually did this step though and quite a few of my friends didn't either. If you did want an RIB, I know you can open a *compte nickel* with any tabac. There is no paperwork to open it and it is instantaneous. I would be wary about putting any money into it as I did some online research and are extremely unreliable but if you just needed an RIB number this could be the ticket.

In terms of how much I spent, I don't know. I went with around NZD \$15,000 as that is what had been recommended by past students. I also got studylink while I was going. That covered me pretty well for life in Paris and a fair bit of travel, and I came back with some still saved. As a forewarning – life in Paris is extremely expensive. The sooner you come to terms with this, the better your experience will be. Try not to convert back into NZ prices. A budget is a good idea but also be flexible. Try and remember you will probably only live in Paris once.

PHONE

I bought a LYCA sim from a local shop and did monthly prepay topups. 15E bought unlimited texts and calls to sims in France as well as 3GB data which was pretty good and suited me well. The only downside is that there are some dead spots with data in some parts of the city and there is no international roaming.

I know Free does another good deal with international calling and roaming.

TRANSPORT

First of all, download CityMapper. It is an amazing app which makes travel so easy for the Rookie, especially in Paris with multiple metro lines.

Otherwise, I mainly walked everywhere which was great for easing the guilt over a diet of croissants. Paris is actually quite a compact city and can be walked from end to end within a couple of hours. Walking was also the best way to really see the city and I tried to walk a different way home from University each day and would often stumble across something new.

I would buy booklets of 10 individual metro tickets for when I went out at night or last minute catchups when walking would take too long. But this worked out way cheaper for me than getting a weekly or monthly Navigo pass.

In saying that, I did get a Navigo pass as I had to make a few trips to the airport and it worked out cheaper to load the pass up than buy individual tickets to the airport. The passes are good in that you pay a fixed price and get unlimited travel for the week.

In terms of night transport, the metros stop running around midnight during the week and a bit later on the weekends. After this the Noticilien night bus service runs. Having read a few testimonials which warned against using them as a female at night I was a little wary but they are always full with lots of people and if you have your wits about you they are fine. They are so much cheaper than an Uber. Obviously judge each individual situation at the time and never do something you feel uncomfortable with but I never felt threatened in my time.

PRACTICAL ADVICE

Give everything a go. Paris has so much to offer in terms of food, museums, fashion and parks. I will include a few of my favourites but the best thing about Paris is discovering it all for yourself.

- Parks – Paris parks are the best place to eat lunch and people watch. Better in warmer weather. My favourites – Parc Buttes Chaumont and Parc Monceau.
- Boulangeries – Grenier du pain Abesses – go early in the morning to get the croissants just out of the oven and eat them on the steps of the Sacré-Cœur overlooking the city. Also Du Pain et Des Idées has the most amazing pastries. I would recommend any of the escargoes.
- Bars – Faust bar under one of the bridges on the Seine is cool for its novelty. L’Arc Paris is cool on Thursdays for its House of Dolls evenings – girls get in for free, have free food and unlimited drink until midnight so take your girl friends there. Otherwise you can’t really beat drinking on the banks of the Seine with baguettes and cheese.
- Neighbourhoods – Montmartre and Le Marais, no question.
- Food – L’As du Falafel is pretty unbeatable for falafel. There are often long lines but they move fast. Au Petit Grec is a great crepes place not far from the University on Rue Mouffetard which is an amazing market street. The crepes are to die for!

Other than that, do some exploring. There are a couple of kiwi cafes dotted around the city if homesickness ever hits. The time will absolutely fly by so make the most of it.