

Part I - Activity Log

September 2015

When I first arrived ESSEC Business School, it was very exciting to meet many new students from all across the world. It was a bit hectic due to student registrations and sign-ups in front of the meeting chapel. I experienced my orientation week and met some new friends. Classes started soon, and there were activities after school for socializing in pubs or at halls. I went to an international dinner event at my dorm and tried so many different cuisines from all over the world. It was a great memory.

October 2015

Classes started for a while, and since I took marketing and management courses, there were quite some presentations required in classes. There were many different opinions and practices mentioned from different parts of the world in our group preparation for presentation. It was also quite interesting to see other students' presentation style and how they organize the power points. At the end of October, there is a week-long break as I didn't take any intensive course. Thus, I travelled to Italy and Prague. Italy is a food heaven with amazing pizza and tiramisu. However, it's good to travel with more people as Italy is not so safe after sunset. While for Prague, it is a very cute town and very safe. There are people still walking around in downtown at 11pm. Also, it has a significantly lower living expenses than Paris and Italy. I had a great time in both places.

November 2015

Many students have midterms in November and I had particularly many quizzes from my Beginner's French class. My professor required having a quiz every two weeks. It wasn't easy, but it was a great chance to learn French quickly, as there are many common usage French phrases included. Unfortunately, it was a month which the terrorist attack happened. Luckily, the school dorm is an hour from city center and all exchange students were safe at that time. However, some local students were affected as their friends and family were at the dangerous zone. It was a very depressing week and all students in ESSEC paid respect to the victims by giving 10 minutes of silence. The city was very quiet the next few days and not much people left their homes afterwards. However, the situation was getting better after that week. At the end of the month, I had to focus on my studies as there were many final exams coming up. Different classes had different exam schedules, and some of my professors organized the exam at the last lesson. It was the start of a studious period.

December 2015

There were exams in the first two weeks of the month, which I studied in my dorm and mostly had dinner gatherings with my friends since many of us would be leaving in December. I worked hard studying and learned many different marketing practices from my communication class. It was my favorite class and it was sad to end it so soon. After exams, I went to Champs-Élysées as there was a huge Christmas market there. Many French local food, such as cannelés, crêpes, cheese, chocolate were sold. Also, since the culture of Christmas markets were passed from Germany first, there were many German foods such as Frankfurt sausages, hot dogs and beers. The streets were decorated with Christmas lights along main streets in downtown and citizens helped lighted them up by cycling on special-modified bikes that provides kinetic energy for night lights in Paris. I had so much fun.

Part II - General Exchange Information

Visa Procedures

ESSEC Business School provided housing and proof of study for the visa application. To apply for visa, there are two procedures: email for academic interview and book online for visa application. It is good to email early for academic interview as they assign dates for you and only then visa application can be done afterwards. I recommend to read the French consulate website carefully and make sure to bring all the documents that they require. Also, students from Hong Kong do not need to apply for OFII form in the process, thus there was no need to apply for residence permit in France.

Orientation Activities

Due to personal reasons, I had to miss the first week of orientation week and headed straight for I-Experience week. We had different speakers every day that week and I recalled one of them was an astronaut. It was interesting to listen to them. Afterwards, we have group sessions which we were divided in classes. The teacher would ask us to know each other in our teams and which it is a good time to know some French local students. I met two great friends from this session. We were asked to investigate within ourselves to see who we really are, draw out what we think of this orientation week and also to give ideas for their schools for new courses.

International Services & Activities

I was not notified of much international services during my exchange. However, as I mentioned before, there were international dinners organized by the ESSEC local students occasionally. Also, there were many youth groups in Paris that can be seen on Facebook organizing winery trips, palace-visiting trips or even day trips in Paris. It is good to sign up for them and meet new people.

Accommodations

The residence I lived at is called Cergy Le Haut, which 90% of the exchange students lived at my dorm. My studio is clean and spacious, and having a small kitchen, washroom and study desk. There was nothing much to complain, however, sometimes there were noisy gatherings at the ground floor of the dorm after midnight. Also, be careful not to open doors for people at night, as it is possible to see some drunk students around in the accommodation. Moreover, I had a hard time to connect for the Internet in the dorm since the system does not accept routers bought locally. I would advice to bring your own router bought in Hong Kong, which usually works. If not, an RJ45 cable with an adaptor are needed if you are using mac.

Course Registration

It is one of the worst I have experienced, because their online course registration system always broke down and had to restart several rounds. It caused me to have missed my chance to register for courses that I desired, as classes filled up quickly. It is good to always check email and see their updates if anything problematic happened in the system. However, they sometimes don't even specify what problem occurred during the course registration, which easily causes confusion. It would be good to contact the host institution or HKUST exchange officers ahead if there are any confusion. Be really careful in the registration rounds.

Teaching and Assessment Methods

Each professor has different teaching methods. For most marketing and management courses, it is based on presentations and final exam assessments. Also, during the lecture, they provide many examples in classes and have half a class time spending on group discussions and case studies. It is during the case studies that you learn the most as you really do apply what you learned in class and professors will tell you which is answered wrong. I think this way of learning reinforces concept checking a lot and really helps you in application.

Sports & Recreation Facilities

There is a gym room, dance room and an indoor badminton court at school. There are many sports and dance classes each week after classes. They can be seen on the notice board outside the dance class room.

Cost/Expense

The basic expense will include food, phone card and accommodation fees. They are around (20x4+20+600) 700 euros per month at least. If other miscellaneous costs are added such as body wash detergents, cleaning clothes, the total would be at least around 800 euros per month. Extra expenses such as shopping and travelling costs will really depend on personal preferences.

Social Clubs/Networking

There are not much clubs at school that exchange students can or will join. It is usually the youth groups in Paris that organize events for networking, thus it is better to join the ESSEC exchange student group and there will be many feedbacks about socializing events.

Health & Safety

I am not so sure on this area, because I had not been sick very badly. But I knew there were some clinics around school that you can visit if you're sick. While for safety, there are night guards around at night in the accommodation, but there are none during the daytime. It is important to always lock your doors and don't open your doors easily at night.

Food

I have never tried food at school, I cooked all my breakfast, lunch and dinner myself. However, I heard there is a good deal at the school's canteen, with only 3 or 4 euros you can have a whole meal with drinks. The other restaurants around school are not cheap, range from 6-20 euros. It is the cheapest to cook by yourself.

Transportation

Transportation is the worst that I have ever experienced. The RER A(train to school) always delay and on some bad days, it might not even work. The school would provide a school bus instead or ask you to take other buses to school (if you live in Cergy le Haut). Also, the train always have problems and it is not unusual to get kicked out of the train on the way to downtown.

Climate

It is very, very dry in Paris, especially during winter. Be sure to have more cream and body lotion for yourself. It is very windy and somewhat humid. However, there are some sunny days occasionally, which the afternoon would be very warm and the morning and at night would be freezing cold.

Communication

It works best to connect your mobile phone to the school's Wifi for communication. Alternatively, there is a computer room on the second floor which you can use to send emails or connect with your classmates.

Cautionary Measures

It is good to bring an umbrella with you if you go out for a long time, or for travelling. Always keep an eye on your personal objects, especially don't take out your phone so easily in metros, since there are many thieves in train stations. Beware of any stranger that walks up to you on the street, it maybe a young girl asking you for signature, a black male trying to tie a bracelet to your hand or Gypsy woman asking you for money on the trains. They are people that wanted to steal money from you, and it is good to always travel with a friend if you're going to tourist hotspots in Paris.

Part III – Checklists to Bring

- ___ Electronics (laptop, charger, adaptor)
- ___ Clothes (Pyjamas, outer wear, underwear)
- ___ Toothbrush & toothpaste
- ___ Towel & toilet necessities
- ___ Environmentally friendly bag (for grocery shopping)
- ___ Hair Dryer
- ___ School necessities (folders, papers, stationery, calculators)
- ___ Socks
- ___ Sunglasses
- ___ Scarf, gloves
- ___ Beanie
- ___ Shoes (runners, slippers, snow shoes)
- ___ Small sized bathing & showering gel
- ___ Passport and travelling documents