

# Exchange Report

ESSEC Business School, France



Natalie Guo Yang  
BSc in ECOF, Year 3

# Bienvenue en France!

## Part 1 - Monthly Activity Log

### February

I arrived in Paris on the 13th of February, 2 weeks before the orientation. After settling down at Cergy – collecting proof of accommodation, buying a French SIM card, opening a bank account, I visited my Belgian friend in Antwerp, a hidden gem in Belgium for three days. During the few days before orientation, I roamed around Paris as well as meeting some friends from high school who are also on exchange in France. Finally came the official orientation where I met all other exchange students, that took place on the 27th of February. Some staff from ESSEC explained to us some administrative procedures that we're going to undergo, tips on getting around in Cergy and Paris, course registration and student life. At the end of February, I joined the boat trip - Bateau Mouche along La Seine, organised by MELT.



### March

At the beginning of March, there was one week reserved for intensive courses. Since I didn't take any intensive courses, I took a trip to Norway for five days with a friend from Hong Kong. We visited the capital Oslo, which does not have so much to offer during the freezing March to be honest, as well as Bergen, a lovely city blessed by breath-taking nature and peace. In Bergen we did a lot of hiking, among which the hike along Ulriken remains the most unforgettable one. We endured several sudden ice shower and a very slippery section near the summit but were eventually rewarded by an amazing panorama of Bergen.



Ulriken, Bergen



We returned to Paris on March 6<sup>th</sup>, two days before all classes started. Since the pace of studies was very slow at the beginning of the semester, plus I only had classed from Monday to Wednesday, I visited one French city each weekend (Le Mont Saint-Michel in Rennes, Lille, Strasbourg & Colmar), taking full advantage of the TGVmax subscription.



Mont Saint-Michel, Rennes



Colmar

## April

There was a long vacation at the beginning of April, from April 1<sup>st</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup>. With the same friend, we decided to discover the Sahara Desert in Morocco, a country in north Africa that passed visa free policy towards Chinese tourists not long ago. We first spent two nights in Madrid and from there we flew to Morocco, kicking off our amazing journey in the desert and exotic African cities. We first landed at Fez and took a desert tour from Fez to Marrakech. Riding camels, staring at the starry sky in the middle of Sahara, visiting the UNESCO heritage at Ouarzazate...it was definitely the highlight of my exchange.



After returning to France, my workload became a bit heavier as a wave of midterms were coming. During the weekends, I still found some for visiting other French cities (Bordeaux, Montpellier, Marseille). Bordeaux is the city famous for wine production and has a lot of historic highlights to offer. Thanks to Airbnb, I had the chance to witness how the life in a typical French family with two kids is like. In Montpellier, a very tranquil but a bit too quiet and boring city from my standard, I visited another high school friend on one-year exchange. The chaos and litters on the street of Marseille left me with a bad impression but I had some mind-opening discussions with my Airbnb host. We discussed the upcoming second round of French election. During the discussion, my host, who is a supporter of Mélenchon, a far-left candidate who failed in the first round, gave me some insights into the French society. She explained to me the political differences in different regions of France and her point of view on the impact that the two remaining candidates could make. Around the end of April, I finished all my midterms and spent a long weekend at Côte d'Azur (Cannes, Antibes, Nice, Èze, Monaco) with another high school friend, appreciating the impeccable coastline of French Riviera.



## May

May is the busiest month as we were approaching the deadlines of some finance projects. On the other hand, we didn't have a lot of classes as there were two public holidays on Monday, which left me with two five-day long holidays. At the beginning of the month, I made a decision to move to Paris from the student dorm in Cergy as life in Cergy, with an RER A that breaks down periodically, limited facilities and student activities, can be boring at times. I would study in my room and discover the charm of Paris after finishing my academic tasks. Sometimes at night, a friend of mine who has live in Paris for ten years would take me out and show me some lively areas or secret corners where I wouldn't dare to go alone.

During the first holiday, I went to Helsinki to visit my Finnish friend Eeva who enthusiastically received me, showed my around her city and introduced me to her Finnish friends with whom I had some very interesting and enlightening discussions. On the last day of my stay in Helsinki, Macron was elected president of the France. All of us were very happy with the result and went



to the top floor of the highest building in Helsinki to celebrate. During the second long weekend, I went to central Europe (Budapest, Vienna, Prague) with a friend. All three cities are stunningly beautiful and have their own charms. Returning to Paris from Prague, I decided to stop traveling for good and focus on my final exams. As three of my courses had final exams on the last session, the 29th of May, I had a very intense week at the end of May.



## June

The first nine days in June were reserved for final exams. I spent most of the time on revision. After the 10th of June most exchange students left France, while I decided to stay for one more month to take an advanced level French language exam.

## Part 2 - General Exchange Information

### 1. Visa Procedures

Students holding HKSAR or PRC passports have to acquire a visa for a stay longer than 90 days. Two appointments have to be made for the application. First, make an appointment with the visa section once you have all documents ready. Second, write an email specifying your university, exchange institution, exchange period, the date of your visa application, etc. to Campus France to make an academic interview. Usually they will try to arrange the academic interview an hour before the visa appointment.

Documents to provide can be found on the website of the French consulate.

<https://hongkong.consulfrance.org/Motif-du-voyage-etudes-pour-une-periode-de-plus-de-90-jours>

A few notes:

- French visa requires an insurance that covers the entire period of your stay in France. As HKUST will provide insurance for all exchange students, we don't have to arrange our own but only have to write an email to apply for a proof of insurance. The visa officer is very strict on dates. If your departure and return dates on the itinerary are not within the period of the insurance, you can always write to the school to ask for a change.
- Apply for an official transcript (for the academic interview) in advance as it takes one week to process.

## 2. Orientation Activities

ESSEC has an orientation information session for all exchange students at the end of February, in which they will introduce you to the life in ESSEC and provide you with useful tips on getting around in Cergy and Paris.

The student association MELT organised a boat trip along the Seine river, which is free for all. This would be your first opportunity to get to know other exchange students

## 3. International Services & Activities

Like HKUST, ESSEC also assigns a buddy to each exchange students in order to help them integrate into the campus life and life in France.

The student association MELT frequently organises parties. They will create Facebook events a few weeks in advance. Usually each party costs around 5 euros.

Other student groups (ESSEC Chine - Chinese students group, ESSEC Inde - Indian students group, etc.) may organise cultural events and career forums. Chinese students in ESSEC set up a WeChat group where useful information such as traffic disturbance, on-campus events, career talks and internship offers is exchanged every day.

## 4. Accommodations

### Accommodation offered by ESSEC

ALEGESSEC offers 3 residences for ESSEC students. Exchange students will receive emails with detailed information soon after receiving the acceptance letter.

- **Le Port:** located in Cergy Préfecture, approx. 10 mins walk from ESSEC; equipped with the newest facilities; +700 EUR/month; a lot of soirées and pre-drinking activities are organized there; surroundings: Place des Trois Fontaines right outside Gare de Cergy Préfecture, where there are many restaurants, fashion boutiques; a post office, a big shopping mall Les Trois Fontaines where there are even more restaurants, boutiques, supermarkets, pharmacies, mobile carrier branches, electronic products store, etc.
- **Les Hauts de Cergy:** located in Cergy Le Haut, two RER stations from Cergy Préfecture; the facilities are older; double studio 539 EUR/month & single studio +600 EUR/month; surroundings: UGC cinema outside Gare de Cergy Le Haut (only films in French available); 2 supermarkets Casino & Leader Price, pharmacies, fast food restaurants, a Japanese restaurant and 2 bakeries.
- **Les Linandes:** ~500 EUR/month, 30 mins by foot or 20 mins by bus from ESSEC.

### Accommodation in Paris

Consider living in Paris and appreciating its charms if you have classes only 2 or 3 days per week (which is very possible as each course has only one lecture per week)!

If you worry about making friends with other students, put your worries away as quite a few exchange students chose to live in Paris this semester. Besides, students usually hang out in Paris during the weekend and MELT will organize parties in central Paris.



If the advantages (liveliness, sightseeing, events, shows, more options of food, Asian supermarkets) outweigh the disadvantages (higher rent, long commute, less sleep in case of morning classes, unavailability in participating in group projects, difficulties in reaching out to school offices when in urgent need of certain documents, etc.) for you, continue reading 😊.

A few tips on looking for accommodation in Paris

1. Avoid 18/19/20<sup>ème</sup> arrondissement where many African immigrants are around as there is a higher risk of being robbed or stolen.  
Having lived in 4 locations (14<sup>th</sup>, 16<sup>th</sup>, 18<sup>th</sup>, Neuilly-sur-Seine) in Paris during the past two years and familiarized myself very well with Paris, I'd discourage upcoming students from choosing accommodation in the three quartiers mentioned in the very beginning. Speaking from my experience of living one month on Rue Marcadet in the 18<sup>th</sup> quartier, I never dared to go home after 11pm as black prostitutes roam on the street at night and groups of immigrants are making loud noises all the time.
2. Platforms:
  - a. **Xineurope** (Mandarin): a Chinese website where the Chinese living in France post housing information and selling second-hand products.  
<http://buy.xineurope.com/forum.php?mod=forumdisplay&fid=10&filter=typeid&typeid=20&cityid=1&cityid=1>
  - b. **Facebook groups:**  
**PARIS: Location appartement, Colocation, Sous-location** (mainly in French): a group where French people post leasing and sub-leasing information.  
**ESSEC** (mainly in French): sometimes ESSEC students post housing information on their own Facebook group.  
**Les Chinois en France** (mainly in Mandarin): a group set up by Chinese living in France
3. Alternatives:
  - a. **Student residences** in Paris (e.g.: Résidence Saint-Jacques)
  - b. **Foyer**: low-cost student hostels, usually with private rooms and shared bathrooms, kitchens & common space)
  - c. **'Au pair' opportunities**: e.g.: babysitting 2 hours per day or taking kids from school to home from Monday to Friday in exchange for free accommodation offered by the family.

## 5. Courses Registration

Exchange students will receive several emails from ESSEC before departure which explains the procedure very clearly. There are 3 rounds of registration (round 1 for exchange and double degree students, round 2 for BBA students and round 3 for all) and an add & drop period of one week (for exchange students only). Registration is on a 'first come first served' basis. Minimum ECTS for exchange students is 16 and maximum 30. Students can always contact the office responsible in the event of difficulties.

## 6. Teaching & Assessment Methods

Finance courses require students to read memos before classes and the lectures are usually based on PPT.

Marketing courses can be more engaging. According to what I heard from students taking luxury marketing, they have a project that requires them to visit a luxury store in Paris as a potential customer and interact with the sales personnel.

Similar to HKUST, the assessment methods range from assignment, exams, quizzes and projects. At the end of my Advanced French class, we were even asked to film a short video in French in a group of 3 to 4. I found it quite interesting and helpful to my oral skills.

## 7. Sports & Recreation Facilities

There are gyms in ESSEC as well as in student residences. Outside the on-campus gym, you can find information of sports activities from Monday to Friday and choose the ones you are interested in.

The student association *Bruno Desport* (search on Facebook) manages the sports teams in ESSEC. If interested, you can ask to join some sports teams. However, it's usually more difficult for exchange students to join as their stay in ESSEC is too short.

## 8. Finance & Banking

ESSEC has a partnership with Société Générale. With only 1 euro per year, ESSEC students can enjoy free housing insurance and be exempted from extra costs when using the VISA card in non-euro zone. Exchange students will receive an email from the student association MELT which explains in detail the privileges and procedures in opening an account.

While international credit card can always be used, having a French bank account would facilitate your spending a lot. For example, the French bank cards (referred to as *carte bleu* in French) have a contactless payment function (*sans contact*) for small amounts under 20 EUR. Put your card over the machine and the payment is done in a few seconds. If you want to make a subscription to certain local services such as TGVmax offered by SNCF, the company SNCF will ask for a European bank account number.

Also, the exchange rates offered by VISA or MasterCard are usually unfavourable compared with real time rates. Exchanging large amounts of euros when the rate is good and putting them into a French account can help you avoid exchange rate risk.

## 9. Social Clubs & Networking Opportunities

The on-campus bar Le Foy is the place where local students love to gather between classes and at night. It's a good opportunity to meet other exchange students and French students in Le Foy.

Student associations sometimes organise parties in Paris. Keep an eye on the Facebook group if you are keen on parties as you will normally need to reserve a place first.



Students tend to have a pre-drinking sessions or private soirées in Le Port, the residence near ESSEC. This is also a good chance to mingle with local students.

What's special this year is that ESSEC organised its 110th anniversary, Gala de l'ESSEC in the Château de Versailles. Last year the gala took place in a 5-star hotel. If you don't mind the price (120 euros for students) and are lucky enough to secure a ticket, it would be such a rewarding experience to experience the glamour of Versailles and meet with ESSEC alumni.

## 10. Health & Safety

An on-campus clinic by appointment. I've never been there myself but I don't think all the nurses speak good English. Therefore, it's advised to bring along a French student in case you need to go to the clinic.

## 11. Food

### In ESSEC

The canteen and café in ESSEC offer a very limited range of choices. Sandwiches in baguette, salad, fruit, pasta boxes and some African snacks can be found in the canteen. The café offers a wide range of coffee, a few kinds of viennoises (croissant, pain au chocolat, pain suisse & cinnamon rolls) and snacks.

There are many vending machines selling snacks and drinks around the campus.

### Around ESSEC

There is a Japanese restaurant and the sandwicherie *Pomme de Pain* right next to the main entrance. Walking a bit further, the shopping centre next to Gare de Cergy Préfecture, Les Trois Fontaines hosts a lot more restaurants offering fast food (pizza, burger, kebab), bakeries, French, Vietnamese and Chinese cuisine.

### In Paris

Cuisine from all over the world can be found in Paris. Specifically, you can find a lot of Japanese restaurants around Opéra, Chinese restaurants in the 3ème (metro Arts et Métiers, Châtelet), 13ème (stops along metro line 7 direction Mairie d'Ivry: Place d'Italie, Tolbiac, Porte d'Ivry, etc.) and 19ème arrondissement (metro Belleville).

However, cook by yourselves as much as possible as dining out can be extremely expensive in France.

For Chinese students who would like to buy Chinese/Asian ingredients, you can go to Chinese supermarkets in Paris. Large-scale ones can be found in the 13ème arr. while the ones in 3ème and 19ème arr. are relatively smaller.

## 12. Transportation

- **Only bus** outside metro *Denfert-Rochereau*
- Metro **Orlyval**

- **Between Paris and Beauvais Airport**

Beauvais airport mostly serves flights of Ryanair. An on-campus clinic by appointment. I've never been there myself but I don't think all the nurses speak good English. Therefore, it's advised to bring along a French student in case you need to go to the clinic.

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### To and from the airports in Paris

- **From CDG airport to Cergy**
  - Take **Bus 9518** from Terminal 3 to *Cergy Préfecture* (2 euros), then switch to RER A direction *Cergy Le Haut* (1.9 euros).
  - Take **RER B** from *Aéroport Charles de Gaulle 2 TGV* to *Châtelet-Les Halles*, then



- switch to **RER A** direction *Cergy Le Haut* (6.9 euros)
  - **Uber** (around 70 euros)
  - **Taxis** (very expensive)
  - **Blablacar** (low-cost car-sharing platform, price depends on drivers)
  - ESSEC may arrange pick-up service on certain days. Details will be sent by email.
- **Between Paris and CDG airport**  
Taking metro and **RER B** is the cheapest and most practical way. You can also look for a cheap drive from **Blablacar** if the departure time of the driver suits you.
  - **Between Paris and Orly airport**  
Buses from Porte Maillot to Beauvais can be purchased online or on the spot, which costs 15 euros. Again, you'd better look for cheaper drives on Blablacar.

### **Between Cergy and Paris**

RER A, the busiest and most unreliable line connecting Paris and Cergy. RER A is notorious for breaking down every two weeks, but alternative buses will be arranged.

### **Getting around in Paris**

Metros and buses are good to go. Download the application **RATP** that suggests you the route to take.

### **Travelling around France**

Since the beginning of 2017, SNCF has launched TGVmax which allows young people between 16 and 27 years old to travel around France for unlimited times at 79 euros per month, which is a great deal for those who wish to discover different region of France.

It requires a minimum engagement of 3 months if you live in France. However, you can always terminate the subscription before the third month with documents proving you are leaving France (attestation de fin d'études). You can reserve 6 tickets at most at one time.

I subscribed to TGVmax during the promotion period, so I fortunately spent only 1 euro for the first month of subscription and travelled around France (Paris, Lille, Strasbourg, Colmar, Rennes, Bordeaux, Montpellier, Marseille, Arles, Avignon, Nice, Antibes, Cannes, Èze, Monaco) by TGV for 3 months at 159 euros.

Students who live in Paris or visit Paris frequently are advised to purchase a Navigo card covering zone 1 to zone 5 at 73 euros per month. A Navigo Découvert can be purchased at every station but with an extra 5 euros. In order to save 5 euros, you have to go to the agency in La Défense with the proof of accommodation and passport. However, since the metro ticket from Cergy to La Défense costs 6.9 euros already, you can simply buy one at 78 euros. Keep in mind that you should stick your photo on the card to avoid 80 euros fine if checked by SNCF staff.

## **13. Climate**

It will be a bit cold from the end of February till mid-April in Paris, so make sure you bring along some warm clothes. The temperature starts to rise above 20 after May and can be as high as 37 degrees in June.

The climate in France is much drier than in Hong Kong, especially in winter, make sure you prepare some moisturising products.

## **14. Communication**

### **Mobile Plans**

In France, there are four major carriers: Orange, SFR, Free and Bouygues.

Orange provides the best coverage but is therefore the most expensive one.

Free and Bouygues both launched 19.99 EUR/month plan a few years ago. Free's package offers 100G of internet and unlimited calls, SMS/MMS while Bouygues offers fewer gigas of internet, 20G per month.

Since it's usually impossible to consume over 20G of internet data per month and Bouygues' coverage is only a little bit better than Free, feel free to choose either one of them.

### **Language Barrier**

At ESSEC, French students generally speak good English and are very friendly and chilled. You would make good friends without any language barriers on campus.

However, outside ESSEC, you must have been told many times that French people are incapable of English. Unfortunately, this is true except for people working in customer service such as waiters and sales assistants...

It's therefore advisable to learn some basic French such as 'bonjour', 'pardon', 'excusez-moi', 'merci' to show politeness and respect. You can always start by 'Bonjour, on peut parler anglais/vous parlez anglais? (Hello, can we speak English/do you speak English?)'. In this way French people will be more willing to help you.

Some students who don't speak French at all encountered some difficulties. For example, a Chinese girl was robbed of her iPhone in Paris. She called the police but was hung off as the French police don't understand English.

Efforts to learn French will always be appreciated. I never spoke English to the French as I've learned French for three years and get by perfectly in France. Contrary to what some students experienced, I've never felt discriminated but was oftentimes treated very well when a French found out that I can speak his language. I'm sure that even if you can't speak very well, saying a few words can make a difference and the France you see will also be different.

## **15. Cautionary measures**

It's well known that there are many pickpockets in Paris. Always mind your belongings and pay extra attention if your phone is in the pocket. I would advise girls to carry a handbag with a zip and always make sure the zip is in your sight when on the metro and in crowded public places.



Try not to look at your phone all the time as sometimes people can simply snatch it away.

Avoid walking alone and stay in group when going out at night, especially in chaotic quarters such as 18/19/20.

Pay attention to public announcement and notices in the metro station as it's very common that certain stations will be closed for a few days or RER A stops service after 10pm.

## **16. Other notes**

### **Discounted Flights at Cathay Pacific**

Cathay Pacific offers discounted tickets for exchange students (HK - Paris return tickets 6200 HKD). Make sure you reserve them well in advance as student tickets may be sold out near the departure date and that you also need return tickets for visa application.

### **Art Experience in Paris**

For art lovers, Paris is a perfect place for you! Opera Paris offers avant-première (before premium) tickets for young people at 10 euros. Check out its opera schedule and reserve tickets well in advance. I managed to watch Carmen at 10 euros. There are also a lot of musicals going on each year. You can always google it for details. At the end of April, I watched my favorite musical Notre-Dame de Paris in Nice, an amazing experience!

You can visit a lot of museums for free on the first Sunday of each month.

In French cinemas, VO (Version originale)/VOSTF (version originale sous-titre français) are films in their original language whereas VF (version française) are in French. Make sure you choose the right one for yourself.

### **Paris & France**

Finally, Paris cannot represent the whole France. Life in Paris is very different from that in other French cities. If your time allows and you're interested, I'd suggest that you visit some lovely French towns. You will definitely see another side of France :).

## **Part 3 - Items to Bring**

Passport  
Converter  
Charger  
Cables  
Laptop  
Credit card

Cash  
Winter and summer clothes  
Umbrella  
Sunglasses  
Stationeries  
Calculator

## Part 4 - Useful Links and Contacts

French consulate: <https://hongkong.consulfrance.org>  
Campus France: <http://campusfrance.org>  
Voyage SNCF: <https://www.voyages-sncf.com>  
TGVmax: <http://www.sncf.com/fr/tgv-max>  
RATP: <https://www.ratp.fr>  
Opera Paris: <https://www.operadeparis.fr>  
Spectacles: <https://www.ticketmaster.fr/fr/thematique/spectacle-et-comedie-musicale/sc>  
Xineurope: <http://www.xineurope.com>  
Bouygues Telecom: <https://www.bouyguestelecom.fr/forfaits-mobiles/forfaits-sans-engagement>  
Free Mobile: <http://mobile.free.fr>

ESSEC BBA Global Education: [bba-globaleducation@essec.edu](mailto:bba-globaleducation@essec.edu)

## Part 5 - Best Practices of Host University

### Strong alumni network

ESSEC has an extensive network of alumni, who can be of great help to students in seeking for their internships and full time jobs. Alumni can post internship or job offers on the career website of ESSEC. The information is exclusive to the ESSEC community. Since students can send their CV and cover letter directly to alumni, it's more likely to secure a first-round of interview by taking advantage of the alumni network. These career opportunities are also open to exchange students. I got a few interview invitations through its career platform.

### Exchange program and compulsory internships

At ESSEC, full time BBA students can exchange twice and can choose from either ESSEC's Singapore campus or partner institutions from all over the world. They are also required to complete a certain number of internships, the nature of which can be curriculum-related internships or volunteer service. The arrangement guarantees that students in ESSEC acquire an international exposure and professional experience before graduation.

Living in France, especially Paris is the most rewarding experience in my life. Not only have I

improved my French to a great extent, but also I've gained a deep understanding of the French society. Moreover, Paris attracts people from all walks of life and all nations. I feel extremely lucky to have some of the most beautiful encounters in this amazing city. If you have any questions about ESSEC, Paris, or traveling in France, please don't hesitate to send me an email. I'd be more than willing to share with you my insights and tips!