

---

# ESSEC Business School Exchange Report

**Katherine Chung**

Year 4 Information Systems and Management I 2017 Fall

---



---

## August

I arrived in Paris on 3rd August and was settled in my friend's apartment. My friend's mother, Catherine, kindly prepared a delicious dinner for me. After staying in Paris for two days to settle my rental contract, I started my solo backpack trip. I first went to Bruges and Brussels in Belgium. Then, I went to Lisbon and Porto in Portugal. After that, I went to Barcelona to watch FC Barcelona vs. Real Madrid. I enjoyed the atmosphere a lot and it was great that I could watch Messi and Ronaldo playing in the same game. What's more, I was honestly very lucky as the terror attack happened just one day after I left Barcelona. I then went to Edinburgh to watch Edinburgh Tattoo and joined a four-day Highland tour. I also went to London before returning to Paris.



## September

Unlike HKUST, each course at ESSEC would only have a three-hour lesson every week. Since I only had lessons on every Wednesday and Thursday, I had plenty of time to explore the city. As my studio was in the 3rd arr near Le Marais, I liked visiting different bakeries and restaurants there. In addition, after getting my French bank account, I could subscribe the TGV Max ticket plan, which allowed me to have unlimited trips within France by paying 79 euro per month. Thus, I went to Lyon, Nice and Monaco. I also went to Cancale, where its oysters are very famous. It only cost me around 6 euro for a dozen of No.2 oysters and I could see the oysters ship directly from the sea! Besides travelling around France, I went to Germany with my friends.



---

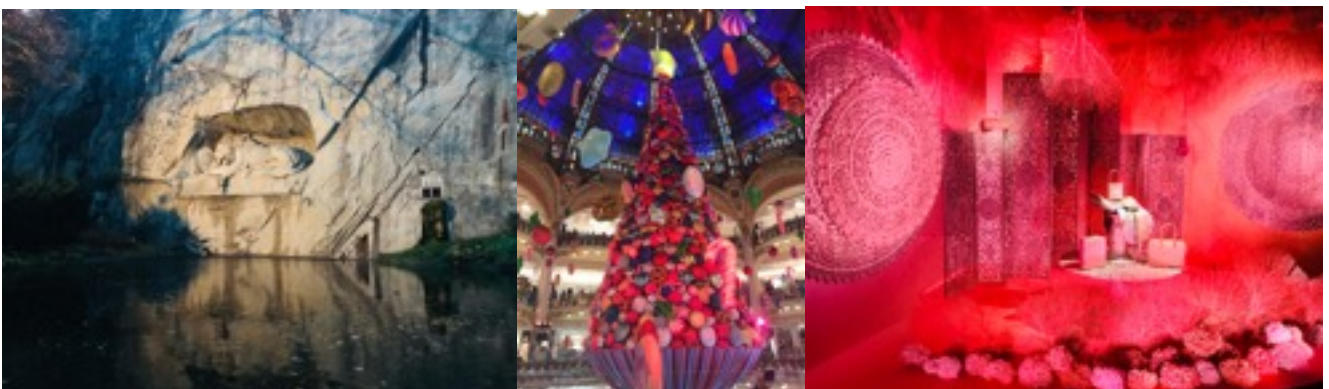
## October

Due to the rodent problem in my studio, I moved to a new apartment in the 15th arr which is next to Eiffel Tower this month. I went to Colmar, Annecy and Charmonix. The landscape of Annecy was breathtaking! Charmonix was also a pleasant surprise- in addition to its stunning Mont Blanc, Charmonix was a beautiful, clean and charming little town that has impressed me a lot. My family visited me in late October and we visited Paris, Lyon, Florence and Rome together. Before they came, I went to a hair salon in Paris where its hairstylists are Japanese hairstylists who wished to improve their skills.



## November

I went to Switzerland with my two exchange friends who studied in Canada. We visited Berne, Interlaken, Luzerne, Zermatt, Grindelwald and Basel. The views in Switzerland were magnificent. Our Airbnb owner kindly helped us prepare cheese raclette. I also visited Bordeaux and Avignon. Avignon is my favourite French city- it is a small and beautiful city full of history. It was the seat of Catholic popes and it was an eye-opening experience to visit the Palais des Papes. Thanks to the arrangement by my E-business class professor, I had the opportunity to visit Perfume Museum in Paris and went to Galeries Lafayette to study its Christmas installation. What's more, I also went to an Hermès exhibition called "Hermès à tire-d'aile - Les mondes de Leïla Menchari". It is inspiring to see how the luxury brand tells its brand stories by paying attention to every detail of the exhibition.



---

## December

December was the last month I spent in France. As all the classes had ended in November, I took the opportunity to visit different places in Paris before I left. I went to different Christmas markets in Paris. Each visitor was required to go through security check before entering the market, and therefore I did not worry much about the security.

To celebrate the 70th anniversary of the creation of the House of Dior, an exhibition was held in Paris. Christian Dior's Couturier du rêve exhibition was so popular that I had to wait for an hour before entering the exhibition. Despite the long wait, the exhibition was absolutely fantastic- it provided visitors with an opportunity to understand the brand universe and the stories behind this luxury brand.

Before I left Paris, my good friend Camille invited me to have a dinner with her family. I felt really great to be able to meet my friend in Paris and really touched by her family's hospitality. On the day of my departure, the car which I have booked online did not show up to pick me up to the airport. Having waited for fifteen minutes and could not contact the car driver ( the phone number on the receipt is just the car company's customer service hotline. Worse still, it was Saturday, so no one answered my call), I have decided to take a taxi. Yet, I could not see any taxi in the street. Panicked, I decided to walk around and found that there was a hotel nearby ( so grateful that I lived nearby Eiffel Tower). I explained my situation to a hotel staff and he helped me call a taxi instantly. He even helped me carry my luggages to the taxi when the taxi arrived. Although there were lots of accidents and dramas throughout my trip, I am very grateful for meeting many helpful and kindhearted French people to give me a hand.



---

## **Visa Procedures**

We are required to obtain a long-stay visa. I would recommend that you should start making an appointment once you have received the official admission letter from ESSEC. You will also need to do an academic interview and they will ask you questions such as why you would choose to study in France. Yet, it does not matter at all if you can speak French or not. You can finish both the academic interview as well as the Visa application on the same day, but you have to finish your academic interview first.

## **Orientation Activities**

It is compulsory to attend the Orientation Day. Staff from ESSEC briefly talked about what we should pay attention to, such as attendance requirement and there would be a Saturday every month that is reserved in case a make-up lesson is needed. We were reminded that we should not arrange any outbound trips during these Saturdays.

## **International Services and Accommodation**

You will be added into a Facebook group two or three months before the semester begins. Whenever there is any activity held, it will be posted in the Facebook group.

## **Accommodation**

I did not choose to live in ALGESSEC ; instead, I rented a place by myself. Renting a place in Paris is a long and tiring process, but I would say it was worth it as I could really live like a local during my exchange. I hope this part would be useful for students who would like to rent a place by themselves.

### *Why renting a place by myself*

Many people have asked me why I had chosen to rent a place by myself instead. First of all, I had noticed that in addition to the rent that we needed to pay every month, there were a lot of different charges for things such as admission, membership and administrative expenses, which in total was about 600 euro and it was non-refundable. Many friends of mine could rent a single room with walking distance to ESSEC with only 400 to 450 euro through Airbnb. In addition to this, as I preferred living in Paris because of its vibe, living on-campus was not the first option for me. Although I had Parisian friends who were extremely helpful and a friend of mine even helped me visit my place before I rented, it was still a long and tiring process.

### *How to search for a place to stay in Paris*

At first, I tried to apply for living in a foyer. Foyer is a kind of accommodation that usually serves young people and sometimes they do have a specific target ( for example, I have seen a foyer only accept people who are working in the culinary and hospitality field). Besides providing accommodation, some foyers would also provide meals and organize different activities to help residents get to know each other well as well as gain a better understanding of the French culture. I applied it in late April, and it was already too late as most of the foyers were already full( So remember to apply early as it is really competitive!). Kindly note that if you wish to apply for a foyer, you would usually need to

---

fill out an application form, sometimes would require you to answer some questions or even write an essay about questions such as why you would like to stay in the foyer and how you can contribute to the foyer. It is also a popular practice for foyers to have an interview with candidates before they are accepted as residents. Therefore, it would be difficult if you do not speak French since most application forms I have seen were in French.

For more information about foyers in Paris:

<https://www.paris.catholique.fr/-les-foyers-etudiants-.html>

Then, I have tried to look for a place through Airbnb. I would actually recommend you to use Airbnb to rent a place in Paris/ Cergy especially if you do not have much knowledge about the local rental rules and regulations. Airbnb would probably be the most efficient platform for students like us who would only rent a place for four to five months. However, while my friends managed to rent a single room in Cergy with about 400 euro, I have found that the rooms available in Paris are usually much more expensive than other platforms. Most importantly, I did book a studio in Paris Airbnb at first, but then the landlord cancelled my booking just two days before I needed to do the visa which required me to have my accommodation proof. The owner did not get any penalty since he cancelled it more than a month before my check-in date, but it indeed gave me much trouble.

Airbnb: <https://www.airbnb.com>

I then have tried to join different Facebook groups to look for a place to rent in Paris. There is a group called "Appart ESSEC" where students would publish posts about the rooms/ studios/ apartments that they would like to rent out. Note that usually it is very competitive and if you are invited to visit the place, you should make your decision very quickly. Once, I was invited to visit an apartment. I agreed to rent the apartment two hours after my visit and it was too late because the apartment was rented to another person already.

At the end, I found my first landlord through a Chinese platform called Xin Europe. Xin Europe is a website that provides a platform for Chinese living in France to interact. At the end, I managed to rent a 10m<sup>2</sup> studio in the 3rd arr with 550 euro per month.

Xin Europe: <http://buy.xineurope.com/forum.php?mod=forumdisplay&fid=10&filter=sortid&sortid=198&cityid=1&citysubid=216&cityid=1&citysubid=216>

Another way that I found very convenient is to join the *ESSEC Chine* WeChat group. You can ask a Chinese student studying in ESSEC to add you in the group. Since there are quite many Chinese students studying in ESSEC and they may need to go to exchange or will go to oversea for internship for a semester, they would usually seek tenants through the WeChat group.

---

Other websites that I have tried:

1. Paris Attitude: [www.parisattitude.com/Paris/Apartments](http://www.parisattitude.com/Paris/Apartments)

It is a user-friendly website which clearly lists all the items that are included in the room/ apartment/ studio. Nonetheless, you should note that the website does charge service fee for a few hundred euro if you successfully rent a place through the website.

2. Lodgis: [www.lodgis.com/en/](http://www.lodgis.com/en/)

You will need to pay before you can enjoy the service ( I remember it cost me less than HKD200). This website did help me connect with property owners or other people who are looking for roommates.

What you should pay attention to

- 1. The location of the apartment/ studio:** Location is crucial in terms of safety, convenience and neighbourhood. In terms of safety, I would say it is better to avoid living in the 18-20th arr. If you search online, you can easily find a lot of bloggers commenting the safety of each arr in Paris. Nevertheless, it is not that simple. For example, if your apartment happens to be located next to a store that sells alcohol till late night, you are expected to see some drunk people hanging out every time you go back home at night. For convenience, I would suggest that you should search in Google Map to see how long it will take for you to go from your place to ESSEC. It takes me exactly an hour to go from my apartment to ESSEC, so it was acceptable for me. In general, it will be less convenient if you stay in the 10th to 14th arr, it may be too far for you as it could take more than 1.5 hours for you to go to ESSEC. Neighbourhood is also crucial. You should pay close attention to the surroundings. For example, if you live in areas such as Chatlet, you may need to face the noise problem every night. If there are lots of restaurants, bars and supermarkets downstairs, there will be a higher chance of suffering from the rodent problem in your apartment.
- 2. The condition of the apartment/studio:** I have found that problems such as rodent problem, water leakage, collapse of ceiling are very common. These are the problems that you may not be able to notice even if you have visited the place before you rented .
- 3. If the landlord can provide you with a valid rental contract or other accommodation proof:** You will need to have a valid accommodation proof to apply for your student visa as well as open a bank account. Some people may sublet their apartment and therefore will not be able to provide you with a valid rental contract.
- 4. The facilities included in your room:** As mentioned, since some buildings in Paris could be really old, there may not be any elevators ( Imagine you need to carry all your luggages and climb up the stairs). In addition, you should also double check if there is any washing machine. What's more, if you rent a studio, a small room which was used as a maid's room and located on the top floor of a building, you should also ask if your studio will include toilet and shower inside your studio.

---

### Conclusion

To be honest, renting a place in Paris is indeed challenging. However, if I were offered the chance to choose once more, I would still choose to live in Paris. After all, I wouldn't go to different Sunday markets to shop for fresh ingredients or go to Jardin du Luxembourg for picnic had I chosen to live in Cergy instead. Besides, I enjoyed it very much when my neighbours would greet me "Bonjour!" or "Bonsoir!" every time they saw me. I am still very grateful that I have met many kind neighbours who offered to help me carry luggages and taught me what to do when there was a water leakage problem in my studio.

### **Course Registration**

ESSEC would send out an email that contains a user guide on how you can log in to their system as well as a list of courses that you can register. You should note that the courses listed are not final and they may cancel the courses later. There was one IS course that I would like to take, but it turned out that when it was time for course registration, I was told that eventually the course would not be opened in the semester. Thus, pay special attention to this as it affects the number of credits you can transfer at the end.

For courses such as Luxury Marketing, it is very popular and it will be full in one or two minutes after the registration period starts. Thus, it is important for your to mark down the course codes of all the courses that you would like to take in advance, so that you can copy and paste to the system very quickly when the registration starts.

### **Teaching and Assessment Methods**

ESSEC Business School is well-known for its expertise in the luxury industry. As one of the best business schools in Europe, ESSEC Business Schools hires a lot of experts from different industries as part-time professors. Yet, since most of them are not full-time professors, there could be problems such as not able to manage a class effectively, absent in class for quite many classes ( My professor in Leading & Managing Team was absent in four out of ten classes..) and changing their grading guidelines many times throughout the semester.



Course Name	Assessment Method(s)	Course Rating	Comment
<b>Leading and Managing Team</b> Professor: Mathieu BOUCHAERT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Reading report</li> <li>- Participation</li> <li>- Group presentation</li> </ul>	1/5	<p>This is a compulsory course for its full-time students, so it was great that I could meet many local students. Note that this course is delivered by many different professors at the same time. To me, my professor was very irresponsible and seem to have no preparation of the course at all. He was absent in four out of ten classes and changed his grading guidelines three times during the semester. In the second last class, we were told that we should prepare for a group presentation for the final class as the professor deemed that the previous assignments (though we had handed in already) were not sufficient to give us grades. We ended up have to prepare for a presentation in less than a week's time.</p>
<b>Big Data for Corporate Strategy</b> Professor: David GATIN	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Group presentation</li> <li>- Behaviour in class</li> <li>- Summary of last class</li> </ul>	2/5	<p>The workload is minimum as we only needed to prepare for a presentation throughout the semester. No assignments, no mid-term, no final exam. However, as it was the first time the professor delivered the course, he seemed to be very inexperienced. For example, he originally planned to randomly select three students to do a summary of what we have learnt in the previous class as part of the evaluation. Yet, he failed to notice that as we only had ten classes but we had more than 30 students in our class, there would be some students who would never be picked. At the end, he just gave out a 10 over 20 to students who had never been chosen to do the summary, which means these students could only get 50% of the marks in this part.</p>
<b>Inner Management</b> Professor: Eijah ARY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- A video on "Are you happy?"</li> <li>- Meditation journals</li> <li>- Random Kindness journals</li> <li>- An essay on if you think this course helps you become happier</li> </ul>	2/5	<p>This course should be called "Introduction to Meditation" instead. At first, I thought it would be a psychology course learning about how to make ourselves happy. Yet, this course in fact is only about meditation. We needed to submit meditation journals to describe the benefits we gained and challenges we encountered during meditation. In addition to this, we would need to do meditation for about 15 minutes in every class. Thus, do not enrol this class unless you are very interested in meditation since 95% of this course only focuses on talking about the benefits of meditation.</p>
<b>E-Business</b> Professor: Frederic RAVAUX	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Group presentation</li> </ul>	5/5	<p>I appreciate the effort made by this professor. We were asked to analyze the online presence of a luxury cosmetic brand. The professor has organized a visit to Le Grand Musée du Parfum, i.e. the perfume museum so as to facilitate our understanding of perfume. We were also given the opportunity to visit the head quarter of the luxury brand. The Digital Director of the brand introduced the brand and its current projects to us. This course did not offer much technical knowledge as I had expected, but it was definitely a good course that enabled students to know more about how luxury brands do e-business.</p>

<b>Managing Luxury Business</b> Professor: Anne-Flore MAMAN	- Group essay	4/5	As this is a crash course, it only took two whole days to complete the whole course. The professor is an expert in the luxury field. We were asked to visit retail stores of different luxury brands and observed the differences. It was quite interesting to me.
<b>Social Entrepreneurship</b> Professor: Jerome NASSIBOU	- Group project	5/5	The Social Entrepreneurship course is well-known. The professor is an experienced entrepreneur who has started up several social businesses, and therefore would also share his stories to us during the course. We were divided into different groups to try to come up with a business plan on a social business that we feel strongly about. The professor stressed that we have to be realistic and we need to ensure that our business plan would be feasible. I would definitely recommend this course.

## Health & Safety

Cergy honestly is not a very safe place. Throughout the semester there were many safety incidents occurred near ESSEC campus and ALEGESSEC residences. It was so serious that ALEGESSEC residents have sent a public letter to the school demanding for improvement in security. Below are the extracts of the incidents:

- Four of the MBA students were accosted walking home. Three were pushed on to the ground, beaten, and robbed. One was hospitalized. The students were followed all the way from the Cergy Prefecture station, but the police informed the victims that there were apparently no cameras in place in the entire prefecture that might have helped in the investigation.
- On another night, a student from Residence du Port was attacked in the park at 7:30 PM. Additionally, there are reports of a man who follows women students into the park and exposes himself. On a separate occasion, during daylight hours, three students were followed to Les Linandes, had their paths blocked and were cat-called until they managed to get away. On Friday morning at 8:30 AM, there was a student walking to class from Les Linandes who was attacked and robbed.
- Regularly, students can hear screams coming from the park late at night. At least twice, men who are unrelated to the school have tried to convince students to let them into the Residence du Port. Now we have even greater cause for concern: one of the du Port students who was robbed on Friday night had her dormitory keys and security access stolen – these criminals who have kicked, punched, and choked the students now have complete access to the dormitory, putting us at greater risk. We have not heard from the administration about this new threat or what measures are put in place to deactivate the compromised security chips.

Besides the incidents mentioned above, I have also heard of students being robbed soon after they have withdrawn money from an ATM; a girl was robbed and attacked with chili water not long after she has got off the bus in Cergy.

---

Since I have chosen to live in Paris and only had classes twice a week, I did not need to worry too much about the safety issue in Cergy. During my stay in Paris, as I chose to live in safe neighbourhoods, there were no problems at all when I needed to go back home in the midnight.

**Cautionary Measures:**

1. Choose where to stay wisely. If you plan to have a lot of classes ( which means you are expected to spend four to five days in ESSEC a week), then you should probably choose to live in Cergy. If I were you, I would choose to live near the school so that you do not need to go to the train station and then walk alone to your place at night. On the other hand, if you plan to travel a lot and will probably spend only two to three days at school every week, you may want to consider to live in Paris. Otherwise, it could be quite inconvenient as you will always need to ensure that you can return to Cergy before dark due to safety concerns, and it may take you 1 or even 1.5 hours to get back to Cergy from Paris.
2. Never withdraw money by using the ATM outside a bank. In France, there are two types of ATMs. One would be placed outside the bank and another would be inside the bank. It is always safer to withdraw money by using the ATM inside the bank. You should always pay attention if there are anyone (especially kids) look suspicious when you withdraw the money.
3. Pay particular attention when you take the train/metro. There are hundreds of different ways that you could lose your properties in a train/metro. An example is that a thief can quickly take your smartphone out of your hand and run to the platform when you are playing with your smartphone. When you want to chase after the thief, the train doors have already closed and you cannot do anything. Go google it and you will be surprised by how they can invented so many ways to steal people's money.

---

## Finance & Banking

*I will definitely not recommend you to open a bank account in Societe Generale. It is the worst bank ever.* I have opened a bank account in Societe Generale. If you choose to rent a place to live by yourself like what I did, make sure that your landlord can provide you with a valid rental contract. Otherwise, you may have trouble in providing the accommodation proof.

You should be careful when you close down your bank account. I went to Societe Generale in Cergy to ask for closing my account. I gave my bank card to the staff as well as a letter of requesting to close down my bank account and transferring the remaining value of my bank account to my bank account in Hong Kong. At that time, the staff reassured me that if there was any problem, he would contact me via email within one week. A month passed by, I noticed that my bank account has not yet been closed and that the bank was still trying to deduct money from my bank account. When I sent an email asking why, it took me a week to get a reply that the bank claimed that they had never received my letter. I was so shocked as I handed in the letter in person. At the end, it took me a few weeks to finally close down my account. Therefore, think twice before you want to open an account in Societe Generale and remember to double check if they have really closed your account because the bank agents obviously are not very professional and could make up many excuses to deny your requests.

I have to admit that as I am a huge foodie, I have spent quite a lot of my budget in food as I would visit different restaurants in Paris every week. You can always buy some quality ingredients from the market/supermarket in France. For your travel expenses, if you book your flight and train in advance, you can save a lot. In total, I have spent slightly more than 10,000 euro for my whole exchange, which included a whole month of solo trip.

Item	Cost ( Euro)
Accommodation ( 600 euro per month)	2400
Transportation	320
Living expenses ( Food, grocery)	1600
Travel expenses	5000
Flight tickets (Emirates)	1100
<b>Total</b>	<b>10420</b>

---

## Food

Paris is a food paradise! Especially when my first studio was located in the 3rd arr which was near to the famous Le Marais, there were a lot of outstanding restaurants and bakeries that made me want to visit every day.

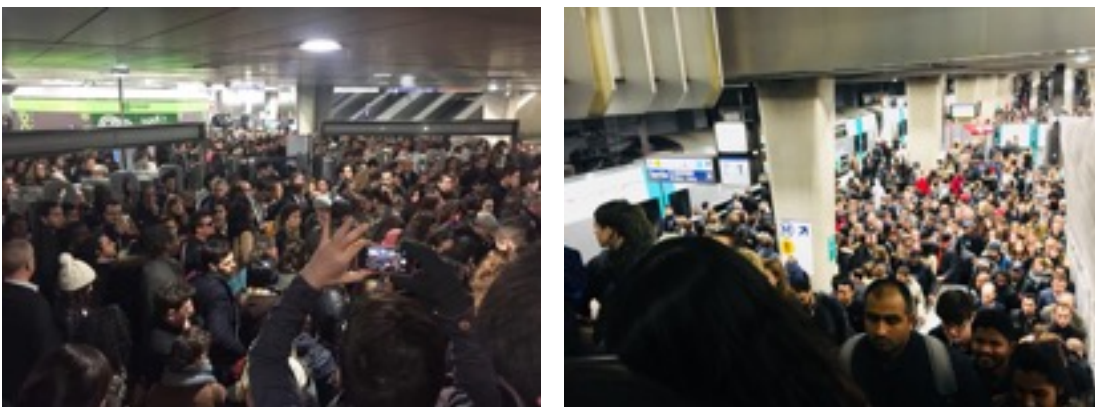
Paris is indeed a culturally diverse city. If you are homesick and would like to try some Asian food in Paris, you could easily find a lot of Chinese restaurants in the 3rd arr and 13th arr. For Japanese food especially ramen, there are also a lot of choices. But my favourite is the Vietnamese Pho in Paris. There are quite many restaurants that offered excellent Pho and I still miss it very much! In general, it will cost you around 10 euro to have a bowl of ramen or Pho in Paris.

There are a few restaurants near the ESSEC campus. I have tried Cergy Tokyo, a Japanese restaurant that run by Chinese. I would not recommend this restaurant as the quality of the food was not very good and I was served with Chinese rice which I found a bit strange. Besides, there is a canteen inside ESSEC campus. It is also a common practice for students to bring their own lunch boxes then reheat them by using the microwave at school.



## Transportation

In general, you will need to rely a train line called RER A to go to ESSEC. Most people in Paris would tell you that RER A is the worst train line because of its frequent delay and strikes. Below are two pictures that were taken at la defense station when the RER A broke down in late October. A friend of mine had waited for more than an hour in the station but still could not proceed to the train platform.



---

## Communication

A lot of people have said that French people do not speak English well. Yet, from my experience, most of the time I could use English to communicate well with locals. Once, when I did not know how to use the machine in the self-service laundry store, a middle-aged woman was very helpful and explained in details on how to use the washing machine as well as paying the money in English. My approach is that I would always greet them in French first, then asked in French if they could speak in English. They would usually tell me that they can only speak a little bit, but it turned out that they in fact could communicate with me perfectly. Even if they could not speak English, most of the time they would still be very helpful and tried to ask other people who could speak in English to help me.

Compared to people living or working in Paris, I found that people in Cergy in general did not speak English and therefore sometimes it may be difficult for exchange students like us to make an order in a restaurant.

I am very grateful that I have encountered many kind-hearted and helpful French people during my exchange journey. Before my exchange, many people have told me that French people were arrogant and sometimes impolite. Perhaps I was really lucky, but most of the time the French people I have met were very friendly and helpful, even though when they could not speak in English. Once when I got on the RER A and heard an announcement that the train was delayed. As my French was not very good and I wanted to know how much time I needed to wait because I was in a hurry, I asked a group of French girls. Although their English was not very good and could only use some simple vocabulary, they tried to count their fingers to show me how many minutes I would need to wait. When I was confused about which bus I should take at the bus station as all the buses did not indicate their destination, seeing me walking around, a French guy who did not know how to speak in English tried his very best to use body language to tell me how I can get the information from the apps and even accompanied me to help me ask the bus drivers one by one to see which bus I should take.

All in all, I am very impressed by the politeness and helpfulness of French people. It would be a good idea to learn some basic French sentences such as "Parlez-vous anglais ?" would certainly help.

Paris is a city that is different from Hong Kong in many ways. Despite all the challenges that I have encountered throughout the exchange journey, I am glad that I have gained a deeper understanding of the typical life of a Parisian. To conclude my report, I would like to share an infographic that I have seen online. I couldn't help but kept nodding my head when I saw it. Be open-minded and try to live like a local. You will find your exchange journey very rewarding at the end.

