

Exchange Report



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Background:

Before getting into my exchange report, it is necessary to tell you the France educational system and some information of ESSEC business school so that you can make a wise decision.

France has an unusual higher education system. There are 2 types of university - Grandes Ecoles and normal public universities. The public universities are under the government educational department while the Grandes Ecoles belong to the state directly. French believe in equal educational opportunity and the right to be educated. High school students can get into public universities easily after passing a high school public exam, 'baccalauréat'. The difficulty of the exam is low. For the Grandes Ecoles, it is claimed to be for the elites. Those who want to get into Grandes Ecoles must take an extra 2-year preparation class after their high schools to be prepared for another exam. The difficulty of that exam is similar to A Level. Grande Ecole is only a small proportion compared to the public university.

Although Grande Ecole students need to spend an extra 2-year preparation class, they will get a master degree directly after their graduations. Grandes Ecoles are claimed to be highly selective and specialized that provide cosseted education to the students. Students can get a high position in companies and in the government after their graduations. Most Grandes Ecoles are only specialized to 1 or 2 areas. For example, ESSEC specialized in business, especially in luxury industry.

The ranking of business university in France is HEC>ESSEC>others. HEC and ESSEC are said to be the top-5 in Europe. But there is a distinct between HEC and ESSEC. You can notice that from the minimum GPA requirement of exchange.

1. Monthly Activity Log

August



I arrived ESSEC on the registration day. I did the registration, collected the student card, residence keys, opened a bank account and then headed straight to my residence by the free shuttle bus provided by the school.

The next few days, I met my roommate, another UST exchange student and we hanged out together.

September

The school began. I spent two weeks to get familiar with the environment, classes and made friends with my groupmates. The courses are easy. I didn't spend any time for revision but to do my personal stuffs. I hanged out with my roommate and we explored the restaurants in the surroundings. Later we met some Chinese ESSEC students there and they took us around.

We found that ESSEC is located in an underprivileged region. We heard many robberies. Most of the victims were Asian. There are many black people and you can see quite a few beggars in front of the shopping mall and in the MTR station. There was a middle-aged man asking for €1 every morning in French in front of ESSEC. We all think that he is funny. Perhaps you can still see him if you exchange to ESSEC.

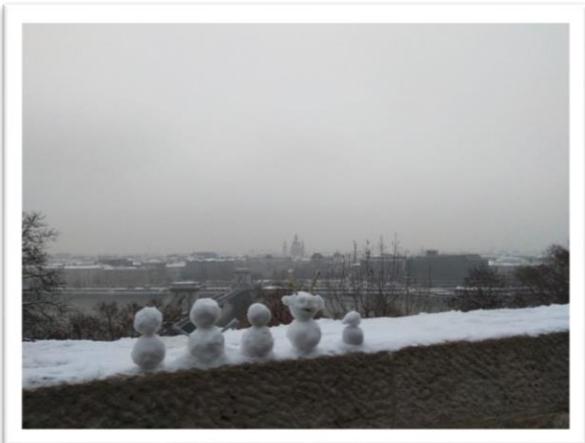
The temperature of September French was already cold. The summer wears I brought were left in the baggage.

October



Some group projects kick-started. It was a good chance to work with international students. By doing group projects, you can see their mindset and how they think and reason. I had group projects with Italian, Slovakian, Polish, Japanese, German and Singaporean students. It is very interesting that you can actually observe some correlations between their cultural backgrounds and their personalities. We exchanged a lot about our culture and societies. One thing interesting was that they thought dog meat is a common food ingredient in China. It is the biggest misunderstanding of Western society to China under the exaggerated dissemination of Western media. I couldn't help laughing every time when I heard about it. Overall, I think the European students are nice and friendly.

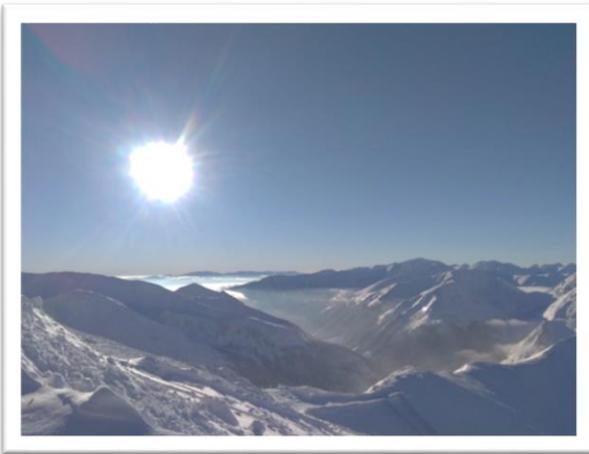
November



All French students have one week of holiday at the beginning of November. It was a good time for us to go on a vacation. I spent a whole day in Musée du Louvre with other exchange friends. Later, I went to Dutch to find my friends there. We explored the fascination of Amsterdam together. Amsterdam left me very deep impression. It is one of the few countries in Europe that speak good English. People were very nice and helpful. And they have very looong legs!

After the semester break, it was the time of midterm. Most courses had midterm, but the exams were very easy, such as group based case studies and presentation. You don't need to prepare much.

December



Most courses ended at the first week of December. Some courses did their final exams in the last session. For me, what I cared were not the exams, but the upcoming festival!

In December, temperature dropped to zero. Christmas is in the air. You could see decorations everywhere, one the streets; in the shops. French people were busy preparing gifts and goods for the Christmas. It is like the Chinese Lunar New Year! Christmas for European is different from Christmas in Hong Kong. For us, it is a time for dating and hanging out with friends, but for them, it is a time for family gathering.

We visited some Christmas markets in France. It was fun and new to me. Vendors sold hot wine, food, local snacks, gloves, hats and handicrafts. It was an unforgettable experience for us in France.

In December France, it was not very safe given the Mouvement des gilets jaunes and the Strasbourg Christmas market shooting tragedy. My friend and I originally planned to Strasbourg Christmas market. If we went there a few days earlier, we may be dead already.

2. General Exchange Information

ESSEC:

Another name for this school is party school. According to the students there, the school has a partnership with 2-floor club in petite Paris. Weekly party tickets are sold in the school canteen. The party is for alcohol, tobaccos and human interactions.

The school is small with only a few buildings. There is a bar that obviously has more customers than Unique Bar.

Students

There are 3 main components: MBA, BBA, and exchange students. Together, the total number is around 1000 students. Every year, 1/3 of ESSEC students are exchanged out and 1/3 of international students are exchanged in.

MBA: According to the BBA students there, MBA students are the elites in ESSEC.

BBA: There is a surprisingly large proportion of Chinese students there. They are rich. I have worked and chatted with the BBA students there. It was fun.

Exchange: There are many exchange students from all over the world. You are going to have many chances to make friends with them.

Courses

I took 6 courses, Strategic Management, Beginner French, Communication, International Marketing, Entrepreneurship2 and People & Organization. With this combination, you can have 17 credits for credit transfer (exclude Beginner French).

All of them except Beginner French have group projects. It is a good chance to know your ability and standard among your international groupmates.

All the course I took were marketing and management. The courses are easy. The workload is low. You don't need much preparation. You are good to go as long as you are good at presentation and doing PowerPoint. Some courses have final exams, but the exams are also easy. Some of them even allowed you to access the internet. I didn't do any revision but I still got very good grades. The courses are fun. The professors are fun. Is it a good time to make friends with your groupmates!

Accommodation:

ESSEC provides 3 residences for students. The cheapest option is double studio with shared kitchen and washroom at €489/month. One residence is only 5 minutes' walk from ESSEC, but the price is higher. Another residence is 25 minutes walking distance. And the last one requires you to take a 10 minutes bus or train.

4 months together cost you at least €489 x 4 + €500 (non-refundable administration fee) + €1-20 (housing insurance) in total.

You can also add a €99 welcome kit with everything included, such as cooking tools, dishes, bed sheets, cups and etc. However, it is very bad to the environment because it is very difficult to sell them out again. Therefore, I brought them there from the 2nd hand markets.

The administration fee is expensive. If you search online such as Airbnb and 91web, you can find similar rental price near ESSEC with no administration fee and housing insurance required.

Most of the accommodations in France have kitchen included. You can cook yourself to save money!

Housing subsidy (APL):

Theoretically, all students are eligible to apply the housing subsidy, APL, in France. However, I were told that my visa type is not eligible to apply. My visa type is for the HK residents, the normally visa type that a local student would apply for exchange. In the previous reports, one student applied the housing subsidy successfully. I think it is because he is a mainland student, thus a different visa type.

Local bank account:

There are a few choices of local bank account on the registration day. Among the banks, SG bank has special offer for students. They offer you €1 housing insurance and €30 as a gift for opening an account. I opened a SG account that I originally planned for receiving APL housing subsidy. Later I found that it was a wrong decision.

The staffs were irresponsible and the charges were high. When I were opening the account, I asked the staff all the necessary questions, such as the administration fee and the canceling procedure. And the answers were 'No' and 'You come to the office. Make the balance zero. And we will close it for you.' respectively. But later I found out that they

charge me €5 administration fee/month. Apart from that, it is almost impossible to make the balance zero when you have numbers like €2.18 in your account. They said that you can only buy things that can sum up to exactly €2.18 to make the balance zero. Also, you cannot use the card 2 days before your cancellation. Moreover, the staffs there seems to have a tendency for forgetting reimbursements. I brought a €1 housing insurance by using the student discount. However, they requires you to pay the total price ahead. I were told that the reimbursement will be paid back to my account later. The fact is that they won't give you back unless you go straight to the office. I were not the only one whom didn't receive the reimbursement.

In short, if you don't have strong needs, I don't recommend you to open a bank account there. Visa and MasterCard are common in Europe.

Transportation:

Transportation in Paris is very expensive. One way ticket from ESSEC to Paris center cost €6.15. As a one-semester exchange student, it is not ideal to apply an octopus card because it takes you many time to get and cancel the card. There are many ticket evaders and I didn't see anyone being caught. According to an ESSEC student, the cost of a round ticket is €12.3. The penalty of being caught is €50. The risk of being caught is low. A wise business student would know what to do. Therefore, I always buy the tickets.

Oversea Assistance:

Traveling abroad alone, it is always good to know where and who can you ask for help. There are some WeChat groups that you can join by asking the Chinese students there. You can hear many interesting stories!

Visa Procedures:

I were told to write something about the visa application. However, there is nothing special, you just need to apply it online 2 months before to prevent any accident.

Orientation Activities:

On 30/8, we have an orientation activity in petite Paris. We were told that everyone should go, but it didn't take any attendance actually. However, it is a good way for you to get familiar with Paris and make some friends.

Teaching & Assessment Methods:

It is more casual and the teaching style is question based. Students ask questions and then we discuss it together. Sometimes if dumb questions were ask, you would waste your time.

The exams are really easy. You don't need to do revision. It is straight forward and simple.

Social Clubs & Networking Opportunities:

There are many societies. However, most of them are French based. Like UST here, most of the society only accept students who can speak Chinese. You can join Chinese students group if you want. They also have a promotion period. At that time, they will throw cheap cigarettes, condoms and canned beers to the audiences as souvenirs. You will find that funny.

Health & Safety:

I have to say, the air quality is much better than HK because it is in countryside.

The school is located in an unprivileged petite community. There are many black. Many robbing and thieving cases happened in Paris. PLEASE ALWAYS BE ALERTED IN METRO AND WHEN WAY BACK TO HOME!!! The most like situation will be when you are going home alone at night and changing your train in petite Paris, especially in **Gare de Lord**. There is a police office in that station specially for handling rob and thief.

Most of them target at Asian face, especially at Chinese people because they are rich, they won't go to police and they are visitors.

Food:

Don't think that you can find some really local French food. It's like HK, you won't eat dim sum every meal. French people usually eat Kabab, French fries and Italian food. Italian food is well known and tasty in Europe. HK Italian food is localized and you will find that there is a huge difference once you tried real Italian food.

Communication:

Don't think that European all speak good English. Indeed, I only find Dutch and Bilishi people speak good English in general.

In France, most citizens don't speak English. It's like Hong Kong, uncles and aunties do not know English. If you have problems, you have to find young adults, teenagers or working people.

3. Items to Bring

Bank Card, Credit Card, Clothes, Laptop, Adopter, Charger, Passport, Visa, Cash, Smart Phone, Student Card, Ear phone, Speaker.

4. Useful links and Contacts

UST Credit Transfer Database: https://crtran.ust.hk/credit_instit

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

GoEuro: <https://www.goeuro.com/>

Flixbus: <https://global.flixbus.com>