

# **Exchange report**

ESSEC Business School, Paris, France

Prepared by GAO YUCHENG

# Table of Contents

Table of Contents	2
Monthly activity log	3
Exchange information	3
Items to bring	6
Useful links	6

# Monthly activity log

## March

I arrived in Paris on 28th of February to attend the orientation on March 1st. My flight arrived at 6 am in Paris CDG airport and I took a taxi to the ESSEC campus in Cergy, a small town about 40 mins away from Paris downtown. The taxi fare in Paris is astonishingly high. We paid 1,000 HKD for a ride to the campus.

Settling down was quite easy. ESSEC dormitory provided a welcome kit option for newly arrived exchange students, which includes sheets, towels, a pillow, a blanket and even some pots and plates for cooking.

Before the semester begins, there was one week of free time, when ESSEC provides a few intensives courses. The intensives courses are short-term credit-carrying courses covering negotiation tactics and other business related subjects. I didn't take those courses. Instead, I decided to spend the time on traveling.

After the semester started, I met a lot of friends from all around the world.

## April

I joined a local party organized by the local student union in ESSEC business school. My friends and I left the dormitory at 9 am and we arrived in the party at 12. I met some new friends in the party, had some drinks and did some dancing. The party lasted until 5 am in the morning and it was truly a remarkable experience in my exchange.

## May

I stated to do a lot of presentations in the sales action plan course in ESSEC. I worked closely with my Thai group mates to approach every case at a high standard. We examined the sales plan of Samsung in China, as well as the distribution plan of Nutella in France. These FMCG cases are very different from my previous study in HKUST, where I usually provided strategic advice in business cases. I gained a lot and also a high mark in those courses.

# Exchange information

## I. Visa procedures

I am a holder of Chinese PRC passport. I had to apply for a long-stay visa through the French education department, or Campus France in Hong Kong. The visa application process included an academic interview, in which a Campus France staff in Hong Kong office asked me questions about my career development and study plan in Hong Kong.

After the academic interview, I had to submit my passport to the French embassy for visa application. The whole process took about a month. I got my visa one month before departure. The student visa allows me to travel freely in Schengen areas in Europe, without prior application or customs scrutiny.

## II. Orientation activities

The exchange orientation was on March 1st, the second day of the earliest dormitory check-in time. The dean of ESSEC business school gave us a brief introduction of the history and achievements of ESSEC, as well as a brief tour of the neighborhood.

The ESSEC campus is located in Cergy, a small town at the end of the RER red line in Paris. With the RER, it takes about 40 mins to travel to Paris downtown.

After the short orientation, ESSEC hosted a lunch and I met several friends from Singapore and Lebanon. We had lunch together and some beers afterwards.

MELT, an international student society hosts an one-day trip to Paris and it was free to join. We walked around in Paris downtown and had a tour on Seine.

### III. International services & activities

The student society hosted quite a lot of activities for international students. I joined an exchange student party with BGS, the local student union.

### IV. Accommodations

There are four student housing hall in ESSEC business school, most of which are off-campus. I stayed in Cergy le haut, which is two RER stations away from the main campus in Cergy Prefecture. It takes 7 mins to travel to the campus by RER.

There are two types of rooms available in Cergy le haut dormitory: double rooms and single rooms. There's a bathroom and kitchen in a single room while in a double room, these facilities are shared.

The room condition is acceptable and quite spacious. There is a desk and a shelf in the room. The hygiene level of the room is quite satisfying.

AlegESSEC, the ESSEC student housing office does not provide routine cleaning for dormitory rooms. Students are expected to clean up themselves. Room cleaning service is charged.

The location of the dormitory is in the residential area in Cergy le haut. There are some supermarkets nearby to get groceries and a nice bakery to get French desserts. There is also a drug store and a hair salon in the town.

### V. Course registration

The course registration started in February. There are about 20 courses available for exchange students and not a lot of options available since a lot of the courses have very limited quotas.

The course registration system in ESSEC business school is very confusing. Some of the notification are displayed in French, and they do not provide clear instructions and explanations to the system.

### VI. Teaching & assessment methods

Teaching & assessment methods in ESSEC is quite different from that of HKUST. They have very strict rules against skipping classes and if a student skips more than two classes out of ten in a semester, he automatically fails, no matter what the reason is. It is actually quite problematic, since the RER is not very accountable and there are often long queues in front of the RER ticket machines.

### VII. Sports & recreation facilities

There are two tennis courts, a small gym room and a piano in my dormitory in Cergy le haut. On ESSEC campus there is a bigger gym and sports field. I started to learn to play the piano in my dormitory there. I have been practicing it for a month and it has been rather rewarding.

### VIII. Finance & banking

It is not necessary for exchange students to open a local bank account because it takes over a month to process the application. I used my Hong Kong visa credit card in France and withdraw bank notes from Societe General, which supports union pay bank cards.

## IX. Social clubs & networking opportunities

There were quite a lot of social activities and parties in ESSEC. Social societies would organize mingling sessions and some of my friends would also organize home parties. There are also some networking opportunities to professionals in multiple industries.

## X. Health & Safety

Security issues in Paris is probably the most dissatisfying point of my exchange experience. Security has been the primary concern of my staying in Paris for three months. The security in Paris downtown, in Cergy and even in the Cergy le haut dormitory is not guaranteed and I feel unsafe even in the dormitory.

It has been reported that there are a lot of thieves in Paris city who targeted tourists and exchange students. My taxi driver warned me upon arrival that thieves could take away people's mobile phones and other personal belongings in metro and on the street. He told me that one of his customers were stolen for four times for their three days of stay in Paris. It was quite alarming to me and I tried to watch my belongings every time I'm in Paris downtown.

My exchange fellows warned me not to go out at night in Cergy. I am told that one of the exchange students is threatened to give away his wallet and mobile phone at the gate of the dormitory. The gangsters put a knife behind his back and ask him to give them his valuables. This exchange student in the case ran away when the gangster didn't notice. I have no knowledge of the authenticity of this incident, but I would definitely warn my fellow students exchanging to ESSEC and other institutions in Paris to be careful of their personal security.

Even more astonishingly, a lot of my fellow female students reported that their rooms are broken into at night. They reported that a person opened their room door and walked into their room with a key. When he noticed there was someone inside the room, he apologized and said he walked into the wrong room. It is hard to believe why this person could open other's room door even though they are properly locked. Incidents as such as been reported for multiple times. It is also rumored that the break-ins were conducted by a staff in the dormitory. My friends have reported their cases to ESSEC housing office and I do hope they could have more comprehensive security measures in the dormitory.

## XI. Food

Food is nice but expensive in Paris. Most of the restaurants charge more than 20 euros per meal, and over 8 euros for fast food restaurants. Catering options in ESSEC is limited, and costed over 4 euros. Surprisingly ESSEC canteen doesn't offer dinner service, whereas the last class ends at 7:30 pm.

Most of students prepare their own food everyday. It is the only way to control living expense in Paris. I had to learn to cook myself.

## XII. Transportation

Taxis are very expensive in Paris. Taxi fares can easily go over 20 euros or even 50 euros to the CDG airport.

In most cases I would take the metro. There are two metro systems in Paris: RER and city metro. The RER is a light railway service for outside Paris downtown. ESSEC locates at the end of RER A line so we usually take this. Metro fare is also very expensive. It takes over 70 euros for a monthly plan to travel in all areas in Paris.

Bus services are convenient but some what confusing. In some cases the bus drivers don't check tickets and in other cases they do. After 10 am when the RER has closed, it is convenient to travel on buses overnight.

### XIII.Climate

The climate in Paris is rather relaxing. In most cases it's as cool as 10-18 degrees since March to May and it would be comfortable to wear a shirt and a coat outside. It is not necessary to have air conditioning but in the dormitory they installed heater to keep the inside warm.

### XIV.Communication

It's hard to communicate with the staff in the dormitory because they can rarely speak English. In some cases it is hard to get technical support or security advices.

ESSEC has built a housing portal for us to manage our housing matters and call for technical support. So it's easy if you call for support in advance. Only in emergencies, it's hard for an English-speaker to call for help.

### XV. Cautionary measures

In Paris, one must be very careful about their own personal valuables and always lock the door when leaving your dormitory room.

## Items to bring

- Passport
- Charger
- Coats
- Sweaters
- Boosts
- Long-sleeved shirts
- Computer
- 500 euros cash
- Visa/ MasterCard Credit card
- Adaptor

## Useful links

1. ESSEC portal - [myessec.com](http://myessec.com)
2. ESSEC housing portal - [housing.alegessec.fr](http://housing.alegessec.fr)
3. Metro information - [ratp.fr](http://ratp.fr)
4. Call for uber - [uber.com](http://uber.com)
5. City bus map - [busradar.com](http://busradar.com)

