

NEOMA Business School (Rouen Campus), France
Spring Term 2021-22
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Monthly Activity Log

January

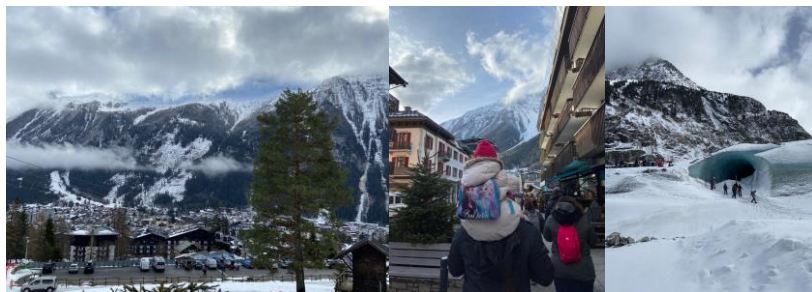


I was allowed to check in my ANGO residence from the 2nd Jan; school started on the 10th Jan and there was an orientation day on the 8th, so I chose to arrive at Paris Charles de Gaulle Airport via a one-hour layover at Singapore Changi Airport on 6th January early morning and headed straight to check in ANGO via the first recommended route here:

<https://welcome.neoma-bs.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/GETTING-TO-ROUEN-CAMPUS.pdf>. Looking back, it was quite a journey to get to the dormitory from the airport, so it's better to minimise your luggage.

- The first month was a lot about meeting and greeting new faces. I bumped into other Hong Kong students exchanging at NEOMA and we visited Paris together over a weekend. It was my first time exploring Paris, but it certainly took more day trips later to truly soak in the ambience of the city.
- On a weekday I made a mini hike to Colline Sainte Catherine with a few friends. It was a ~ 20 minutes hike via the brushes and steps, and soon you would get to see Rouen and the Seine from above!
- I went to Paris again on a Saturday with friends just to hunt for food. I had the best macaroons and croissants from Pierre Hermé, so good that the croissant was always sold out whenever I tried to buy it on my future Paris trips!
- In the last weekend, I travelled to Madrid. I did not know that I missed the sun so much until I experienced a so much warmer climate there! The sunsets there were overwhelmingly pretty every day, which triggered me to intentionally look for “best sunset spots” in all of my future Europe trips.

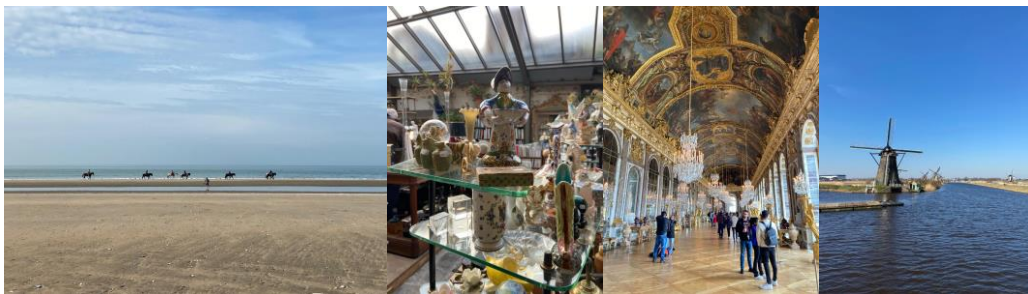
February



- I spent my no-school Wednesday and Thursday shopping in Paris when it was the last week of the famous fashion winter sale.
- I went to my first Erasmus Cultural Party, where one could meet many international students from NEOMA and the University of Rouen Normandy. It was fun but I bet I caught COVID from there.

- I invited friends over to my room and we made a Budae Jjigae dinner with ingredients bought in an Asian supermarket. They were usually 3x the price of what you would get in Hong Kong. Looking back, the most important thing to bring from Hong Kong would be Asian ingredients haha.
- 12th - 20th Feb was the semester break, where I had a few travel plans set. Yet, I was tested COVID positive on 8th Feb. I went through a 7-day quarantine, had to miss a 2-day trip to Belgium on 9th - 10th, and later a Faro trip on 12th - 15th. I now learnt that it was better to book flights directly at the flight company website (instead of via third-party websites for small discounts), because in such cases I would have got refunds or changes for free.
- 15th - 20th: I recovered from COVID and travelled to Chamonix. I skied for the first time in my life - without proper training - and before I knew it, I accidentally ended up on an intermediate trail and fell too many times that my legs hurt badly. I visited the physiotherapist the other day and chilled in town while my other friends went skiing again haha. We also visited the beautiful ice cave via a scenic tram.
- After the semester break, project mid-way tasks started to kick in. Some had mid-term exams but I did not have any for my project-heavy courses.

March



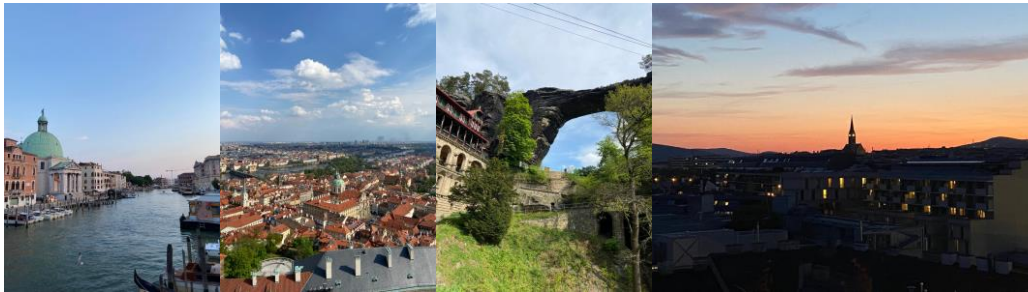
- Project report deadlines and presentations lined up more towards the end of March, along with interviews and assessments for internships. I spent more time catching up with project mates and internships hunting.
- Temperate in Rouen got significantly warmer that I had to buy extra T-shirts. Flowers were blossoming all over the city and over the ANGO residence area. White and pink ones, small and big ones, it was all too pretty.
- I made a day trip to Deauville. It is a high-end neighborhood in the upper Normandy famous for the many pretty villas, horses, and the beach.
- I visited the Palace of Versailles. It was very beautiful, but what really stood out to me is a vintage store in the Versailles neighborhood.
- I travelled to Amsterdam and Rotterdam with Flixbus. I totally fell in love with the Netherlands - over my short stay, I had 5 people reaching out to see if I needed any help without me asking for help or looking desperate in the first place!
- I visited Disneyland Paris and La Vallee Village (an outlet) for 2 days. I wish I spent more days there to check out both parks in Disneyland and actually stayed until the firework showtime, instead of having to catch the transportations returning to Rouen.
- I visited Mont Saint Michel, one of the most famous tourist spots in all of France. It was said to be the blueprint of Studio Ghibli's Castle in the Sky! Truly stunning.

April



- I visited Barcelona in the first week of April. It was fun but then little did I know that it would snow for a day in Rouen! As much as I loved the Barcelona trip as a breakaway from my projects and interviews, I wish I were there to witness the only snow of the year and soaked in the “white Christmas” ambience with my friends!
- When I landed in Paris on the 3rd of April, the city was hosting a marathon. I had a friend who had been practicing for the marathon and did it that day. Looking back, it would be such a unique gift to yourself if you not only did the marathon, but also did it during your exchange.
- Since it was officially the end of the semester with exams lining up on the second week of April, Cultural Connection held a Gala where everyone dressed up half-casually and half-formally as a fancier party night.
- After sitting the majority of my exams, I went to Giverny for Monet’s Garden. It was a perfect day trip to cycle around, feel the breeze, and appreciate nature.
- During the Easter break, I visited Rome, Italy. I loved it but I bet it would have been a wiser choice to stay at Rouen/ go on solo day trips in Normandy/ Paris during Easter break given the NEOMA holiday/ semester schedules, since there were way too many tourists in Rome (and everywhere else), and flight and accommodation prices were more than double than non-tourist peaks. It was also a prime time to bid farewells to my international friends and make more memories with them, which I could not do as much because of spending the days in Rome.
- After the Easter break I took my last exam, bidding farewells with my friends and Rouen via going for a picnic on the iconic Colline Sainte Catherine.
- Prior to completely leaving France, I headed to Etretat for the cliffs and seafood. Definitely a must-go in Normandy, along with Monet’s Garden and Mont Saint Michel.
- My semester officially ended in mid-April, and I moved to my friend’s place in London in late April to save money on rent.

May



- I travelled across Europe in May for 20 days: Venice (Italy), Prague (Czech Republic), Budapest (Hungary), Vienna (Austria), Athens (Greece), Luzern and Zurich (Switzerland), and Madrid (Spain).
- I returned to London to enjoy my last bit of exchange, returned to Hong Kong, and did my 7-day hotel quarantine.

General Study Abroad Information

1. Visa Procedures

I hold an HKSAR Passport, and I needed to apply for a French Long-stay visa. Overall, you should expect 2-4 visits to the Consulate General of France and/or Campus France. The steps that I took were:

- Email Campus France study@consulfrance-hongkong.org to request an interview.
 - Include the name of the exchange school, original school in Hong Kong, program enrolled in France, duration of the study, departure date to France, full name (same as Passport), and HKID in the email.
 - The interview would be focused on general questions such as why France/ this school in particular, your expected departure date from Hong Kong/ France; smart-casual attire can do.
- Make an appointment for visa application submission online, and reserve around 2 months from the beginning to receiving your VISA. (Although it only took me around 1 month.) <https://hongkong.consulfrance.org/Applying-for-a-French-visa-in-Hong-Kong-and-Macau>
 - When they ask for financial proof, even though you may already have enough money as shown in your own bank statement, my advice would be to submit your parent's bank statement anyways; otherwise you may need to make one additional visit to the Visa Center.
 - Your passport will be kept by the Consulate General of France while it is being processed. So make sure that you won't need it during the application period.
 - If you want to minimize the number of visits to the Consulate General of France and/or Campus France, you can schedule both the Campus France interview and the first appointment with the Consulate General of France on the same day; make sure that the Campus France interview comes first.
- Validate your VISA online within the first 3 months of arrival.
<https://www.campusfrance.org/en/how-to-validate-your-long-stay-visa-visa-long-sejour-upon-your-arrival-in-france>

- The visa application cost HKD 440 which you would pay in cash (in exact amount)/ via VISA/ Mastercard upon your first visit to the Consulate General of France.

2. Orientation Activities

There is an Orientation Day held by the NEOMA International Hub and Cultural Connection, which was the 8th of January for me. You would get your ITSC student id card as the NEOMA student id card, which will give you a number of discounts all across Europe's tourist spots. The day was unwrapped with a talk on certain important procedures, fun fact quizzes, and a tour guided by the Cultural Connection student representatives.

3. International Services & Activities

For school-related matters (e.g. course registration, transcript, sick leave), contact the International Hub in person/ via email hub.rouen@neoma-bs.fr.

For bonding activities, keep an eye on Cultural Connection, NEOMA's student society that holds activities for international students, and Erasmus Fun Rouen which holds day/ weekend trips designed for international students in Rouen to tourist spots within and beyond France at a discounted price. <https://erasmusfun.com/rouen/>

4. Accommodations

You are required to buy a housing insurance, but there was no instruction only until much later. The school/ the Crous recommended the SMENO insurance company, but I purchased mine here earlier <https://www.assurances-etudiants.com/fr/5311-assurance-logement-etudiant-tarifs-garanties.html>

. I bought "Formulae 2" and it was also accepted.

You are also required to have a "guarantor", where you can get it following the instructions here https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RDogrqSPOKs&ab_channel=CampusFranceParis.

Check out emails from the school to register for student housing. I chose to live in ANGO, which is the accommodation prioritized for international students and the cheapest option. You may come across students from the other university too. ANGO rooms are only minimal when compared to other European dormitories: what you get in your own personal space of 9 m² is a small kitchen area (only 1 stove and 1 sink), the bed, desk and chair, a small fridge, and another sink for getting ready for yourself; for the toilet and bathroom, they are shared with 1 other roommate over the corridor area connecting both of your rooms (with lockable doors in between). You may specify to the school to have your rooms paired with another HKUST student going to exchange at NEOMA Rouen with you, if desired.

For 248 Euros rent per month, I would totally accept the size and quality of ANGO residence, after all I expected to travel out of France and hang out with friends in Rouen during the semester, and it would not be a long stay given a 4-month-long semester only. I also think that ANGO is the most convenient to get around, since bus stops F2 and T1 are nearby and can get you to Carrefour, the middle of town, and the train station.

You can opt out of the Bed Linen which would cost an extra 31 euros but of poor quality (the blanket, pillowcase and sheet is okay, but the pillow is really, really flat). Rather you can purchase them for higher quality but lower prices at Carrefour after you check-in.

5. Course Registration

Check out your email to receive information about course registration from the school. You would receive the course catalogue from the school in advance of the course registration date, or you might as well search up the course catalogue planned and published at the beginning of the year if you want to map out your credits transfer applications, but there might be some changes for the Spring term during the year. Unlike HKUST's course registration experience, I did not have any difficulty successfully enrolling on all the courses that I wanted to.

6. Teaching & Assessment Methods

The class size is around 40, so you can have closer interactions with the professor and your peers. Overall, since I took a lot of marketing courses, my courses are project-heavy, say about 50% of my grade would be based on the projects, and the other 50% is a mix of the final exams and other smaller individual assignments. Exams are not stressful at all, you only needed to understand the concepts by flipping through the slides once or twice. Attendance policy varies across different courses. As an HKUST student, you would not have any difficulty passing the courses and even scoring with flying colors here. Professors are approachable and knowledgeable.

Note that if you go on exchange during Year 3, you can only opt for undergraduate courses. If you go on exchange during Year 4 Fall Semester, you can opt for graduate courses.

More specifically, here are the courses that I took:

- 2122_MQ_4_2_001_E - Data Analysis & Business Intelligence

A good introduction to data analysis. As a total beginner in data analysis (I only took ISOM 2500 before), I loved that it takes a wider angle - it covers quite broadly but does not dive deep enough that it would be too difficult for beginners.

- 2122_ST_4_2_007_E - Strategic Innovation Management

I highly recommend it if you love to be inspired by innovations. The course is well-designed with a mix of theories, real-life examples, in-class exercises, and a real-life consulting project that would encourage you to put the theories into practice and see doing businesses/ making innovations with a new angle. Attendance is scored.

- 2122_MK_4_2_002_E - Brand Marketing, 2122_MK_3_2_013_E - Strategic Marketing, 2122_MK_3_2_007_E - Integrated Marketing Communication & Digital

Project-heavy, with case studies during lessons. The workload is still really manageable when compared with HKUST. Attendance is scored for Integrated Marketing Communication & Digital.

- 2122_LV_3_X_079_F - FL.2 - French for Communication A1 Beginner

The breadth and depth of the French course are well-designed, but my experience is that self-learning is more effective than learning from the original instructor who could not speak English well enough to teach the complicated French grammar rules clear enough. Towards the end of

our course, the instructor fell sick and there was another instructor who replaced her. The new instructor spoke English well and made the class way more interactive.

You would need to pay decent hard work to pass the mid-term exam and final exam, as well as the group project. Attendance is scored too.

I do recommend learning the local language, especially in France; a good language instructor would open your eye to more cultural contexts that you would not have observed on your own. I also think that being in a French course gave you more opportunities to engage more with other international students since you will have fun struggling together haha.

7. Finance & Banking

You will need a French bank account to receive your housing deposit and claims for your social security (the French health insurance for everyone including foreign students, if you happen to claim insurance with it). The school will email you information on how to open a French bank, which they recommended BNP Paribas. There is a Mont Saint Aignan branch which is just a ten-minute walk from campus. You better also have a French local mobile number to activate your BNP Paribas mobile account, although you may ask for the code to be mailed to your residence instead of texted to you via SMS.

France adopts EURO like most parts of Europe. France/ Europe is very cashless, you can totally survive on using physical/ virtual cards as long as they are VISA/ Mastercard (UnionPay/ American Express aren't commonly accepted from my experience). I asked my parents to transfer euros to my BNP Paribas but there were transaction fees involved. The wisest method I have observed amongst my peers was to use an HSBC World Debit card. Otherwise, Hong Kong virtual banks can come in handy too, where you can transact in the local currency on-demand, but at a slightly higher exchange rate than the real-time one.

I would still recommend bringing euros in cash that would help you survive the first month, just in case any of your cards don't work, and you can use cash to settle down payments with your friends (especially international friends) when going out.

8. Climate

The locals joke that Normandy (where Rouen is) rain 6 months a year, and it did rain almost every day in January and February. I would recommend a down jacket that covers your knees as well to bear with the chillness (especially when compounded during the rain!), or at least some extra warm leggings.

In March and April, the weather is a lot more bearable - even warmer than in Hong Kong- where you can just wear a t-shirt when going out. In these months, Uniqlo's ultra light down series and a decent windbreaker are perfect for travelling in France/ Europe.

9. Health & Safety

As an international student in France, you are covered by the French Social Security (a national healthcare insurance) for free. You will receive information from the school about the registration or check out more here: <https://etudiant-etranger.ameli.fr/#/>. For some reason, I

failed to register for it, but some of my friends succeeded in doing so. Luckily I was still covered by my own private travel insurance package when I needed it, but better to register for it just in case. I believe the Social Security would be able to cover a lot more scenarios while your own private travel insurance package would usually be more strict with their terms and conditions. If you are sick, you can easily seek advice and buy medicine from pharmacies.

The city Rouen, the school, and the ANGO residence area are all very safe in general, I felt comfortable being alone almost everywhere else from day to night. The local students did say that the neighborhood on the other side of the river (as opposed to where the school and Cathédrale Notre-Dame de Rouen are located) is more complicated and unsafe, especially at night. My friend almost had her mobile phone robbed at night over there. So do avoid to live/hang out late over there alone.

10. Food

Food was one of my top reasons to exchange in France! There are so many to try in Paris, and there are a few exceptionally good eats in Rouen too.

There is a canteen at school where you can buy and eat there, or use the microwave there to heat up your own food.

During weekdays, almost no restaurant in Rouen would be open for dine-in dinners, not until Friday and the weekends. I had to cook every day. There is a supermarket ten minutes down the campus (just next to the BNP Paribas branch) which is a little pricier than what you would get in Carrefour, which requires a 15-minute F2 bus ride. There are also a few Asian mini supermarkets downtown, and their prices vary by a bit.

Many people would just drink tap water in many parts of Europe, but the tap water in Rouen is in fact undrinkable based on a number of sources online. Some friends bought a water filter, but I would rather play safe with such an essential part of my diet and buy drinking water.

11. Transportation

I lived in the ANGO residence, so the school campus was just a 10-minute walk. To go to Carrefour/ Rouen-Rive-Droite station, I usually take bus F2. To get to the middle of town, I usually take T1.

Going to Paris/ day trips within France, I usually go by train from the Rouen-Rive-Droite station, or rely on Flixbus as a really affordable way of travel. Download the SNCF app to check train schedule and do the purchases. Note that prices do hike up close to the departure time, so if you can, buy your tickets in advance. <https://www.sncf.com/en>

For travels beyond the country, sometimes taking Flixbus is a better option than going to Paris for the airports, because it picks you up right from Rouen and drops you off right at the destination. I took a 15-hour Flixbus from Rouen to Chamonix and another 8-hour one to Amsterdam, but note that it is always better to have friends that kill time with you during such long-haul road travels.

For the Paris airports, always prioritize the Orly Airport or the Paris Charles de Gaulle Airport to save your energy and time. Even though Paris Beauvais Airport always has the cheapest flight options, it is very time-consuming and tiring to get there from Rouen, so it may not be worth it even for the price difference. It is only wise to try out Paris Beauvais Airport for your return from Paris to Rouen when travelling elsewhere, but do plan ahead and leave buffer time to actually arrive at Rouen.

12. Communication

A lot of people only speak French in France. In Paris, it is only a bit easier to communicate smoothly in English. At school and in the ANGO residence area (which is nearby another university), you can get along with people speaking English only for most of the time. In case of any difficulty in communication, just use Google Translate and say thank you in French!

For the platforms of communication, the French like to use WhatsApp, Snapchat, Instagram, and Facebook Messenger.

You can buy a SIM card for mobile data and a French phone number downtown. My friends and I used "Free". Make sure to unsubscribe when you leave. <https://mobile.free.fr/>

13. Sports & Recreation Facilities

There is a gym room on campus, but I never went there so unfortunately, I cannot give any feedback or comments.

Outside of campus, there are indoor ice-skating rink, gyms, cinemas, shopping centres, museums, and hiking trails.

14. Social Clubs & Networking Opportunities

As aforementioned, keep an eye on Cultural Connection (they should have a WhatsApp group on top of their social media) and Erasmus Fun Rouen. Talk to the local students more and you might discover more activities not promoted on these 2 platforms (e.g. there was a "French Valentine's Party" in late March with an interesting dress code, even though I did not go at last). It may be only unique to my experience because of COVID - there were arguably more activities on campus between March and April.

There were a few career networking opportunities (e.g. job fairs and talks), but I would highly doubt if there are any positions open to non-French-speaking students, even though your long-stay VISA should obligate you the right to work.

15. Cautionary Measures

Even though French is hard to learn, always keep some basic French greetings in mind to show respect while getting around with Google Translate.

A French local student once asked me if many international exchange students and I think that the French are rather distant from international students - and she quickly told me that the

French “don’t bite” haha. While the language is a barrier, I do think that most students at NEOMA are open to befriending internationals, given their own international exposure via exchanges and internships. It is only a matter of how much effort you are willing to put in to break the ice and connect.

16. Other Notes

Looking back, since the spring semester started early in January and ended in mid-April, I would have left more cross-border travels after the end of semester and squeeze more opportunities to stay at Rouen/ travel within France with international friends. Even if you have summer internships in Hong Kong that typically start in June/ July, you will still have at least more than a month of time to travel across Europe after the semester, say until late May or even late June.

I also think that it is better not to plan/ make purchases in advance too much for trips within the semester because NEOMA tends to last-minute reschedule classes (e.g. cancel a class/ add a make-up class on a Saturday) - I had some of my transportation and/or accommodation expenses paid in advance gone for nothing, simply because of the sudden class schedule change or getting COVID. I would suggest only planning more concretely/ purchasing in advance for trips on official holidays and for trips that are more “significant” (e.g. Iceland trips can be easily fully booked vs a trip to Amsterdam or Belgium can be planned on the spot), or for trips that are more “certain” (e.g. a trip after the end of semester vs a trip within the semester).

Booking flights and trains in advance can save you money, but do book directly at the flight/ train’s official websites so that you have a higher chance of being refunded/making schedule changes; booking at third-party websites for discounts cannot get you so lucky.

Be open-minded, enjoy while you are there, and have fun! :)

Items to Bring

- Clothing:
 - For the wide range of weather you would expect in Europe from January to May, bring heat techs and leggings that are light-weighted and can be easily layered under your outerwear.
 - For the chillness compounded by the rainy days, I highly recommend a water-resilient down jacket that are long enough to cover at least your knees.
 - Gloves, beanie, scarf
 - Do bring a few summer clothes and a decent windbreaker to wear within your accommodation/ for the warmer months since March.
 - Suits for online interviews for your summer internship
- Hard copy of important ID proofs/ documents e.g. passport, housing insurance, travel insurance; soft copies on Google Drive/ your phone
- Some cash to settle payments between international friends and just in case
- Laptop
- Travel adaptor
- Temporary mobile data card

- Medicine and vitamins
- Electrical kettle
- Rice cooker
- Hong Kong/ Asian snacks
- Physical VISA/ Mastercard credit/ debit cards (sometimes some ticketing machines only accept physical cards); connecting them on Applepay will come handy for most cases

Useful Links and Contacts

<https://welcome.neoma-bs.com/>

<https://france-visas.gouv.fr/en/web/hk>

<https://www.sncf.com/en> (download the app; it will come handy)

<https://www.omio.com/> (to compare prices and check schedules only, to buy your tickets you'd better buy them at the official websites but not via such third party platforms)

<https://www.assurances-etudiants.com/fr/5311-assurance-logement-etudiant-tarifs-garanties.html>

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RDogrqSPOKs&ab_channel=CampusFranceParis