



NEOMA Business School (Rouen Campus), France
Spring Term 2022-23
SUN Yun-Chu (Marketing & Management, Year 3)

- Monthly Activity Log

January:

I arrived in Paris on the 28th of December (2022) and decided to tour around before heading for Rouen. I stayed with the hostel 'The People-Nation', luckily met a couple nice roommates, hung out with them for 1-2 days and did some city-touring for the rest of the time. I was allowed to check-in on the 2nd of January, so then me and my friend took a train to Rouen and settled in on the day. Grocery shopping, cooking, meeting people was the routine for the month, and I'd say I adapted to my new lifestyle pretty smoothly due to the laid-back vibe Europeans/the French gave. I did little day trips with Erasmus to Mont Saint Michel and Etretat, which I highly recommend because you won't have to worry about the transportation. Other than that, I didn't travel much out; instead, spent time exploring the city and getting along with new friends.

- Erasmus held a Rouen free city tour for international exchange students. The tour guide told us about the history of Joan of Arc, like how she was burnt to death in front of the market in Rouen... All those historical stories made this city more interesting and I just felt unbelievable that I'm actually living in this part of history.
- Epiphany, one of the oldest festival days of the Christian church that the French would usually celebrate it in January. They'll usually have a tradition of sharing a special pie called 'galette des Rois' (direct translation: the king's pie) with family and friends. My floormates and I decided to experience it since the one who gets the 'bean' inside the cake would have to put on the golden paper crown and be the king!



February:

It was a month that I did my first travelling abroad, and I visited 2 countries: the Netherlands and Iceland. The workload in NEOMA is relatively low and easy compared to UST, so I've got plenty spare time after dealing with several assignments and group discussions. I had the freedom to develop new interests (first time trying to play the guitar borrowed from my friend 😊), to plan out future travel plans, and to meet up with new friends for games night! I admit that I first had some issues and concerns utilizing time because there was just too much spare time to arrange; while back in UST, I used to just stuff my schedule with academic studies and skill-improvement activities that made me feel 'fulfilled' but not really happy and also mentally healthy. I learned from other European friends and the environment that it's very crucial to rest and have fun in life.

- Since there's a long spring break towards the end of the month and I really wanted to catch the last season of watching Northern lights, me and my friends signed up for a 6-day-5-night tour in Iceland. The flight ticket and the tour itself are both pretty expensive; yet, I'd say it's worth it due to the astonishing landscape and the tiny bit of aurora we saw!



March:

Looking back this month, some significant events like birthday celebration for my floormate, a hike up on the Rouen Panorama peek, 3-day trip to the Annecy (the border of France and Switzerland), and a couple of bouldering exercises. I did get sick after trips, so I usually took plenty of time to rest in my room the week after. I don't know why most of my friends coming from Asia get sick pretty often (including me), and the sickness lasts couple months (?) even though it's not a very serious cold but still annoying... I guess it's because of the climate difference so make sure you keep yourself warm and try your best to maintain a healthy habit haha.

- I went to Greece for my trip of the month! Supposedly, I were to travel with 4 other friends, and I arrived a day earlier than them. Yet we didn't expect there's going to be an air strike in Athens so all my friends' flights on the day got cancelled... and turned out that I'll have to solo-travel in Athens for the first couple days and only 2 of my friends are able to catch up the later travel schedule in Mykonos (an outlying island of Greece). It wasn't a big matter for me, but lesson learnt that there may be plenty of unexpected situations to be solved while abroad so just be open-minded and keep your mind flexible, all is well! To prepare beforehand, you can find online sources related to the refunding policy due to flight cancellations. Airline companies should usually compensate your loss.



April:

I had my finals in mid-April so I spent some time studying in the beginning of the month. I vividly recall that some friends were leaving right after the semester ending on the 15th of April, so I was simultaneously having farewell meals and waving goodbye to some of them. After finals, I planned with my friend to join a skiing course on the French Alps with UCPA, and we'd booked the one week course half a year ago with a price of 700-ish euros including skiing gear, lessons, accommodation, and food. Again, I highly recommend and it was such a nice experience especially meeting other cool skiers/snowboarders and definitely also experiencing skiing itself! Finally, it's my turn to leave Rouen on 26/4 so before that I tried to meet every friend once again to let them leave a signature on my white t-shirt. It was hard saying goodbyes. ☹️

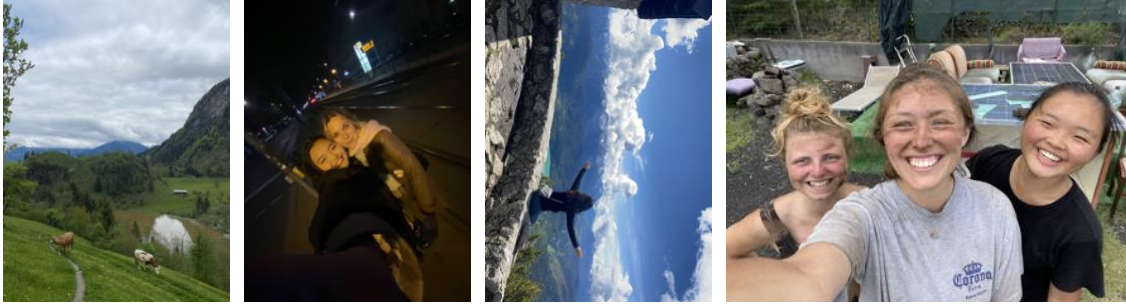
- Sharing a little more detail of the skiing course just in case someone is interested in it: At first, I struggled a bit to pay for the skiing course since it's not a small amount of money, yet little did I know how much fun and interesting things I could miss if I didn't sign up for it at that time, really grateful for making the decision! [UCPA](#) is the most-budgeted option to learn skiing from scratch so don't hesitate to check the hyperlink. Just a little reminder, make sure the course you've booked is for beginners. It sounds obvious for a beginner to book a beginner course, but I was dumb and didn't check the course descriptions clear enough, so I ended up having the 'experienced' course and it was complicated to switch to the beginner one.



May + June:

After the semester, I decided to stay in Europe longer to backpack in other countries. I started from Stockholm, Copenhagen, Berlin, Munich, Austria, Prague, Hungary, to Italy. Something worth mentioning is that for the last 2 weeks, I foresaw that I would be exhausted backpacking for such a long time so I did a workaway in Sicily. It was an extraordinary experience doing some gardening work up on the volcano Mount Etna, and a time when I truly relaxed and temporarily escaped away from civilization.

- [Workaway.info](#) is the platform I chose to seek for workaway opportunities. If you are on budget and would like to 'do as the locals do', meaning experiencing a local life, you could contact hosts on the platform and ask for a stay. In return, you'll have to work for the host, and they already have listed down the job duties on their profile so just make sure it interests you!



- **General Study Abroad Information**

Visa Procedures:

I applied for a French long-stay visa and I felt like it took me forever to get my visa back, so be prepared to go through a long process. You will first have to sign up for a timeslot on [campus France website](#) for your interview, which is mostly asking basic questions like your reason of paying a visit to France, why France, which university are you doing an exchange in, etc. Remember to bring your printed application with some other required documents to campus France to avoid coming back and forth. Then, you'll have to book another appointment with the Consulate General to turn in your passport and the visa fee. At last, they'll notify you to get your passport back when your visa is ready. Do expect to visit the French embassy in Admiralty Station at least 3 times to get your visa and make sure you plan ahead for your visa application, which is possible to take up a month to complete the process.

Orientation Activities:

NEOMA held the orientation day for international and exchange students on the 8th of January. They gave us a NEOMA tote bag along with the ISIC card (important and super good because not all schools help exchange students register), which gives you plenty discounts for basically everything. (Check on the ISIC France app for discount details.) We had a couple of ice-breaking activities to get to know other exchange students and we were also assigned into groups to explore the campus.

International Services and Activities:

NEOMA International Hub is usually the department contacting and dealing with exchange student issues, so don't be afraid to ask them if you have any questions in mind. They sometimes arrange activities (like the experience tasting of galette des Rois) and announce them through NEOMA student email account so make sure you check your mailbox frequently.

Accommodations:

NEOMA provided us with several accommodation options, including the ones with Crous, which are majorly located in Mont Saint Aignan, and those closer to the city center, which are run by private landlords. I chose Ango residential building, a 10-min walk to NEOMA campus, at last because it's one of the cheapest options and the only one without local French students. I like Ango's room because a little kitchen is included,

so you won't have to move all the ingredients and utensils out when cooking, very convenient. I only shared the toilet and bathroom with one other roommate, so I consider having plenty of private space even though the soundproof of the wall in between is sometimes not enough. I would say most of the international students chose residencies nearby Mont Saint Aignan but one of my friends chose a shared building in the downtown living with 7/8 other housemates. I once went there for a visit, and I'd also recommend that if you have budget that because the house is cozy and it's right next to the train station.

Course Registration:

NEOMA sent us a detailed follow-up email explaining the steps of registering courses. They first sent out the semester catalogue, which would provide the 'potential' courses, so don't expect you'll see every course while registering because it's subjected to slight changes. Then, there's a registration timeslot for you to select your courses, and it's first-come-first-serve based so be on time for that. One point that I'd like to mention is that when I was logging onto the NEOMA registration website, it didn't work until I turned on VPN, and no one told me about that ☹️ If your page wouldn't load, try turning on VPN or use other browsers (Safari/Chrome). I personally tried couple of times with different browsers AND turning on the VPN but still didn't work until I waited for another 30 mins and did the same thing... It sometimes depends on luck I guess...

Teaching & Assessment Methods:

Courses in NEOMA are mostly taught in a small class, so you could have more chances to interact with the professor and other students. Since most of the courses I've taken are project-based, group project takes up a big quantity (let's say 50-60%) of the final grade, 20-30% would be allocated to midterms/finals, and the rest to your daily performance like attendance or participation.

Finance & Banking:

BNP is the banking company NEOMA is in corporate with, and they come to the campus on the orientation day to help exchange students open bank accounts. I highly recommend having one French account because you'll have to receive your housing deposit, CAF housing subsidy, and some other refunds. Even though Hong Kong exchange students usually have the HSBC world debit card in handy and wouldn't be a problem to deal with their daily expenses, the French bank account is still worth it. However, the process of opening a bank account is somehow complicated due to the fact that they usually mistaken plenty of documents... I'd say 6 out of 10 students had problems when opening the account and had to visit the bank branch located 10 mins away from campus couple of times. I gave up at last since I somehow didn't receive the bankcard and the pin number that supposing should be mailed to my mailbox. If you are unfortunately put in this situation, you could still get your accommodation deposit back by leaving your friend's bank account. Be sure you ask the Crous for the piece of document!

Climate:

It was not that cold as I thought to be very honest. I experienced the weather in France/Europe starting from December to June, and it's very bearable if you wear a t-shirt inside and then with a thicker jacket out during January. It gets rainy often in the Normandie region, so bringing a waterproof dawn jacket is a good choice to not to bother your hands holding umbrella. I don't know why the French don't use an umbrella when raining, they just use their cap instead. It's a quite interesting observation and after doing like the French do, I found it convenient while you are holding on other stuff haha. In approx April, the weather gets warmer and flowers nearby Ango/on the street starts blooming. It's amazing to have a little picnic with friends at that time, with the soft breeze and perfect temperature.

Health & Safety:

The residential area near Ango is pretty safe because most of them are students. I feel safe even when walking back late midnight since there are plenty road lights that leads the way, and there's a high possibility that you are just walking back with a group of friends living in Ango. As for European countries having a bad reputation for their pick pocketers, I consider it wasn't that dangerous after staying in Europe for 6 months. Yet, please be aware of your personal belongings while traveling and guard your stuff while resting on public transportation. (My friend's whole backpack got stolen when she was asleep on the train...)

Food:

There are so many food options in France, and they are all very delicious! I personally love the pastries and desserts, especially pistachio flavored croissant or madeleines. For a typical French meal, you should expect an appetizer, main dish, and dessert. You'll be considered not 'local' enough if you only had an appetizer, which happened to me once ordering a salad for my meal because I wasn't in the mood of having food. But I feel like it's also fine since we're not locals, so just make yourself comfortable in ordering anything you want and be respectful to their culture. There is this incredible crepe restaurant that I MUST recommend if you are doing your exchange in Rouen: La Cornaelle. The crepes are the best I ever had and it's also one of the foods that I missed a lot after coming back to Asia.

Transportation:

Transportation in Rouen is easy and most of the places I've been to is accessible with buses. T1, F2, F7 are the most common buses I took: T1 brings me from Ango to city center where the cathedral notre-dame is, and F2/F7 brings me to the train station and Carrefour. The monthly public transportation pass is affordable, you could take all metro and buses with 20 something euros per month. I bought my pass the day I arrived Rouen in the train station, and you'll need a hard copy headshot in order to get your monthly card pass. As for transportation out of Rouen, I mostly took trains coming back and forth from Paris, but blablabus would be another good and cheaper option if you don't mind heading a bit further for the bus stop. Talking about flight tickets, I personally

recommend comparing prices on [skyscanner](#) first, then book it directly with the desired airline company instead of booking on the third-party platform. [Googleflights](#) is another useful tool to track the prices of flights, so I sometimes book my travels based on cheap destinations.

Communication:

I use Whatsapp to communicate with the locals, and most Europeans do use it for group project discussion and daily chat. They also use Instagram, beReal, Snapchat for social use. I bought my mobile plan in Rouen with 'free mobile', which offers a monthly plan costing approx. 16 euros with 100GB national data and 15GB international data. It makes it convenient that you wouldn't have to cancel the plan after leaving since you renew your plan every month. Cancelling the mobile plan requires another process and I personally don't want to trust the French administrative efficiency, so going after the monthly plan would be a wise choice, just make sure you renew it online monthly or else you'll have to pay for another sim card again.

Sports & Recreation Facilities:

There are 2 gyms nearby the campus, one belongs to NEOMA and the other belongs to the Crous. I wouldn't recommend either of them and it takes an effort to actually start exercising because you'll have to find a doctor to prove that you are 'healthy' enough to practice sports, so I didn't bother to complete that process. However, my friend brought me to a bouldering place in Rouen and I loved it a lot even though it's my first time trying climbing! I also tried ice-skating because the rink is next to the bouldering gym; all in all, you could try plenty new sports (at least those are not that common sports for me to practice in Asia) in Rouen with a decent price!

Social Club & Networking Opportunities:

Follow these 2 ig pages and they'll offer you a lot of social events!

https://www.instagram.com/rouen_erasmus_fun/

<https://www.instagram.com/cultureconnection/>

Cautionary Measures:

Please try to learn some French before you come! I'd tried but workload during the semester took up most of my time and I didn't prioritize learning French at that time so I'm not consistent enough after 3 weeks lol. If I could warn myself in the past, I'd be telling her to learn French to get more inclusive of the culture and French peers. Rumor has it that the French are giving xenophobic vibes, and I wouldn't deny that but if you could communicate with basic French or at least understand a little bit of the conversation, it makes everything better. It's not hard to communicate without French due to the convenience of Google translate but getting yourself familiar with the language definitely makes your exchange experience more interesting and memorable.

Good luck and enjoy your time during your exchange semester!

- **Items to Bring**

1. Clothing:

I prepared winter heavy clothing, but I would recommend also bringing lighter ones if you'll be staying till May or June. It gets warmer to the extent that you won't need to wear a jacket out and crop-tops could do by then. Other than the clothes you are bringing, which I don't think you would have to bring a lot because that'll take up a lot of space of your luggage, I bought some good-looking and cheap second-handed clothes. I personally love the style of vintage pieces and the atmosphere in Europe generally that there are A LOT of vintage shops for the sake of sustainability. If you are a fan of thrifting, Europe would be your heaven; and if not, try it and you'll probably fall for it! (under the condition of making conscious consumptions :)

2. Toiletry travel kit:

I found it very relieving after a whole day of travel flight from Hong Kong to Paris and be able to take a hot shower with my travel kit of shampoo, body wash, hair condition, and lotion. It sounds cliché but I'm glad I brought my own because most of the hostels don't provide any, and the empty bottles later come in handy when moving around Europe with budget airline. Only liquid under 100 ml is allowed in carry-on luggage so those bottles could be refilled and brought along while travelling abroad.

3. Electronic device (laptop, iPad, earphones, camera, travel adapter...)

4. Medicine in preparation for sickness (headache, stomachache, fever, sore throat, runny nose, coughing...)

5. Financials (some cash to get you through the first couple weeks, credit/debit cards...)

6. Temporary mobile data card

- **Useful Links and Contact**

<https://neoma-bs.com/international-experience-at-the-heart-of-neomas-dna/international-students/> : neoma website

<https://france-visas.gouv.fr/en/hong-kong> : visa application

<https://www.sncf.com/fr> : to search for local trains in national French regions

<https://www.blablacar.co.uk/> : bus and carpooling (cheap and easy-accessible but pick drivers with good reviews to avoid matters)

<https://www.hostelworld.com/> : compare prices among 3 platforms, booking.com, hostelworld, and the hostel's official website when looking for accommodation