**Introduction**

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**Preparation for exchange**

While planning my exchange, I would have found valuable doing some research about the accommodation options since my residence was not located in the best area. Throughout the term, I never had any problems concerning my residence or its location, but I would have liked knowing a little bit more about it beforehand in order to avoid surprises.

In terms of packing, I was told that the weather in Tours was very similar to the one in Vancouver, so I took that as my reference and packed what I would have worn in Vancouver during that time of the year (January to June). It does not get too cold, or too warm, there; average temperature was 10°C and during summer it reached up to 33°C. I tried, though, not to pack too much because when you are abroad you always end up buying stuff there that you will want to take back home, and airline policies are very strict in luggage allowance. Therefore, I only packed what I considered necessary, some casual clothes and some to go out at night. Also, I made sure to bring a couple of charger adaptors to use my electronics while I was there; as well as all my important travel and medical documents.

Getting to Tours is very easy since it is located just one hour away by train from Paris, and Paris is a super popular destination with a lot of options to get there. Flying from Vancouver to Paris took me about nine hours with one scale in Toronto, and then from Paris to Tours I took a train from the airport. The trains from Paris to Tours, and vice-versa, go as often as every half-hour (depending on the day and time) and they can be very cheap if you buy them on time. I strongly recommend purchasing the “Carte Jeune” with which buying a train ticket is cheaper for students
under the age of 25. Besides from taking the train, there are also buses that go very often and are cheaper, the duration of the trip is longer though and the difference in cost is not worth it. A last, and cheaper, option would be trying “covoiturage” (carpool), which is the sharing of car journeys so that more than one person travels in a car. It is very common for people to do that in France and is generally safe.

In regards to financial details, a lot of people like to open bank accounts in Tours; however, I did not find it necessary since I was only going to stay there for one semester and I wanted to avoid the famous “French bureaucracy” (which was a good decision in the end). Most people use cash for the everyday living and just a few use credit cards, which are not accepted in some places like bars, clubs or bakeries. Living in Tours is a lot cheaper than Vancouver, mostly in terms of food, beverage and accommodation. What can get more expensive is travelling around since there are quite a few places to visit and the transportation may be expensive in high seasons.

**During exchange**

When I first arrived in Tours I did not know anyone, but it took just one day for me to meet the rest of the Erasmus group and the people in my residence. The university organizes very early in the month weekly events so that all new students can socialize and integrate easily, and since every one is in the same situation, they are all very open when it comes to meeting new people. The people that became my closest friends were the ones that lived in the same residence as me, we were six new Erasmus students in my building, and I shared the floor with two of them. All of them turned out to be really nice and after seeing them basically every day, they became very good friends. I went to class with most of them so classes were never boring, plus they were not hard either. When it comes to Erasmus students, teachers are extremely flexible and you don’t feel a lot of pressure from university. Most of them lasted two hours and since I mostly took French classes, they were all given out as tutorials; however, there are some lectures too, which are generally two hours long too. It is nice taking the opportunity to meet local people in class, one of
the things people usually regret the most about studying abroad is not meeting enough local people, and not speaking the local language enough. So I think it is important to make an effort and try to do both as much as possible. However, the best way to meet local people and practice the language is by going out. Tours has an amazing nightlife, there is something going on every night and “Tourangaux” are fun and open. Most bars in Place Plume or Rue Colbert close at 2 am, when clubs open; so the typical night starts at around 10 pm and finishes quite late (or early) in the morning. But the nightlife is not the only fun part of Tours, the city offers a lot of different activities, like visiting museums, doing wine tastings, joining sport and dance clubs or going castle-hopping (Tours has an excellent location since it is right by the Loire, a river where hundreds of castles emerge all along).

Reflection after exchange
Going to Tours was definitely one of the best experiences of my life; I don’t regret anything about going there. The language barrier may be very tough at first, so socializing with French people is not always an easy thing to do, but as time passes, so does your confidence in French language and thus in meeting local people. Moreover, I did not have any problem with this, but many of my vegetarian and vegan friends did: Tours is not prepared for vegetarianism. It is rare to find vegetarian options in restaurants, so going out to eat can be frustrating for some; however, all of them managed to eat well by preparing their own food all the time. Every single person that I met there had a great time; none of them regretted anything about going and enjoyed their time abroad. Take the opportunity to live in a new country for you, completely different from your own!