For my Summer 2019 term, I went to Kedge Business School in France on a short-term summer exchange. There I completed 2 courses in 2 weeks: Value Creation and Brand Management in Wine and Spirits, and Design Thinking. The first course was in Bordeaux, the other in Toulon. Here’s how my exchange went:

**Kedge Business School - Bordeaux campus**

**Preparation for Exchange**

For the summer program at Kedge, I emailed the school advisors for the syllabuses of the courses so I could send them to the SFU academic advisors to see if their courses suited the necessary requirements to be transferred to SFU. This was the most crucial component to determining whether I was to enroll in the exchange program. Ultimately, both courses were transferrable to courses that I needed to complete at SFU, which is why I chose this program.

I found the information provided in the Exchange 101 course on Canvas was valuable to preparing for my time abroad; as this was my first time travelling by myself and a lot of the things required for travelling, I did not consider prior to my travels. Some of the critical things that were mentioned were medical vaccines. For this, I booked an appointment with my doctor to discuss my travels and compiled all my records of my history of medical vaccines. Then, I went to a travel clinic to get any necessary medical vaccines prior for my trip. Another thing the course mentioned was travel insurance. I had travel insurance through my student health plan, but I bought extra travel insurance for things like my baggage, in case anything was stolen or lost on my trip. As well, I bought insurance for my flights, in case my flights were delayed or cancelled, and the company does not give me the
compensation I need. As you may have heard, many airlines are not good at compensating their passengers if there are delays nor follow the countries guidelines regarding compensation, so having insurance is a nice backup in case anything like that happens.

Other things I did to prepare for my exchange were doing extensive research on the activities and attractions in each place and making a list of all the activities I wanted to do. As well, the school advisors emailed the students a welcome package, which provided a checklist of what we needed, tips on how to get around the town, and recommendations on activities to do. Doing the research prior to my trip and having additional information from the advisors really helped me make the most of my trip and not waste time researching things to do during my travels.

During my trip, I took airplanes, trains, and buses as my means of transportation. I got to Bordeaux, France by plane with a layover in Amsterdam for my first week of classes (there weren’t any direct flights from Vancouver to Bordeaux). Then I went by train from Bordeaux to Toulon for my second week of classes. Both Bordeaux and Toulon had buses around the city and Bordeaux had a light rail train, which made it easy to get into the city centre.

For my trip, I packed clothes, toiletries, my passport/ID/credit cards plus copies of them, detergent pods and hangers, a beach towel, medication, cash, and left some room for souvenirs and purchases abroad. A lot of places in France take card and cash. However, some only take cash, so it’s handy to carry around. As well, I brought my small French phrase book to carry around and refreshed my mind on the French that I had learned in high school prior to my trip.

During Exchange

Kedge Business School had a student team at each campus to help the students in my program with settling into our accommodations, organize social activities, and answer questions. For my arrival in Bordeaux and Toulon, I arranged for the student volunteer group to pick me up from the airport and train station. On the first day of class, a student volunteer escorted other students and me from our accommodation to the school. As well, there was an orientation, where we got to mingle with the other students in the program, the student volunteers and program organizers over a light breakfast, and received Kedge swag.

With accommodations, Kedge doesn’t own their own accommodations, so they communicate with accommodations close to the campus and help arrange them for the students. In Bordeaux, I stayed at a student accommodation, Study’O Talence, which was a 20-minute train and walk away from campus. In Toulon, I stayed in a student dorm, NeoResid, which was a 5-minute walk from campus. Both accommodations were decent, providing a kitchenette, washroom, bed and a good amount of space.

For both weeks, classes were held from Monday to Thursday for 6 hours with a 1 hour lunch break. I had no homework to do after classes and each classe had a project or final
exam on Thursday. On Friday, each class had a cultural or business trip for the day. In Bordeaux, we went to Saint Emilion to visit a winery and had a tour around town. In Toulon, we went to the Toulon Design Parade. The course evaluations were very clear, both having an individual and group component. Everyone on their last class in the program get a completion certificate, so you will surely pass the course.

I went to France in late June/early July. In my first week, western Europe was experiencing a heatwave, so the hottest it got was 39 degrees. Through the duration of my exchange, the weather included lots of sun and no rain, and was typically around the 30 degree range. I found French culture and customs to be different from Canadian culture. In France, the price included taxes and tip, so there’s no need to tip restaurants, taxis, etc. As well, some stores closed for 1-2 hours in the middle of the day to give their employees a lunch break and stores tend to close around 7pm. Moreover, France was 9 hours ahead of Pacific time, so I experienced jetlag for my first few days in France. As well, I found that not everyone could speak nor understand English, so it was very handy to know some French prior to going. I used sign language to communicate the rest.
Reflection After Exchange

Some lessons I had learned during this experience were:

1. Book your flights right when you get the confirmation of your acceptance into your classes. Because I booked my flights a month prior to my trip, it ended up costing a lot more than I had expected. As well, I had fewer flight options since I was going during the peak travel season and many flights were fully booked.

2. I assumed that I was getting a good deal for my accommodations booked through the school. When I got there, I spoke with some students who opted out of the student accommodation for AirBnb. They mentioned getting a better price and better accommodation than the student accommodations. In the future, I would book accommodations through AirBnb.

3. I have a student credit card, which charged the exchange rate plus a 2.5% fee, which sometimes almost doubled the cost of my purchases when it was converted to CAD. In the future, I would carry more cash and get a travel credit card that doesn’t charge a fee.

This was my first time travelling alone internationally and I had the one of the best times of my life. During my travels, I learned a lot more about myself as it tested my strength and resilience when I faced stressors that I never experience at home. It also tested how well I had prepared for my trip, whether I did the right amount of research, and my knowledge of my back up plans incase any unwanted scenarios happened. Ultimately, I gained a lot of knowledge in the classroom, learned and grew as a person outside the classroom, and became a stronger person from this experience.
Saint Tropez – 2 hour bus ride from Toulon