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Introduction

Age: 22
Year: 5th
Concentrations: Finance and Economics

Preparation

Student Visa

When collecting your documents for the Student Visa, start early! [Note from International Services for Students: Please note that you are required to research your own visa requirements with the French Consulate or Embassy. Visa requirements may differ depending on your citizenship and may change over time.] Be prepared to deal with a lot of bureaucracy, but at least it is free! What I needed was the 2B Visa Application Kit: Inter-University Exchange, which includes

i. The application form
ii. Identity photos
iii. Passport
iv. Return flight ticket
v. A bank statement
By far the cheapest insurance is through LMDE or SMEREP (student insurance in France), which also covers civil insurance; most private health insurers, such as Pacific Blue Cross, do not offer this because it is specific to French requirements. Furthermore, Sécurité Sociale is mandatory, but it is easy to purchase. Your Incoming Coordinator at ESCP will send you the information.

If you are thinking about getting the CAF/APL, stop thinking about it. Firstly, it is unavailable to students staying for under six months, and secondly, it will only save you a few hundred dollars. As you will soon learn, business tends to proceed at a pace that is much slower, even by west coast standards, in France; applying for the CAF/APL is not worth the headache.

Banking & Expenses

It is unnecessary to open a bank account in France; in fact, it is very difficult to do so for a period of less than six months. In Canada, I bank with BMO and I simply notified them of my travel plans and withdrew cash as-needed. In France, cash is the predominate form of payment, and so most cafés, bakeries, butcher shops, etc. require a minimum payment of 15 euros to accept payment by card (both debit and credit, although credit card is even less acceptable).

The best way to save money in Paris is to cook your own meals and eat on campus, where lunch costs around three euros. Groceries in France are surprisingly inexpensive in Paris, if you know where to shop:

i. Buy from your local boucherie and boulangerie, and get to know the owners
ii. Avoid the large chains like Monoprix and Franprix, but Carrefour is perfectly reasonable
iii. Find a specialty beer store (I recommend Bootlegger, near the Pernety Metro station)
During Exchange

Accommodation

I chose to live at the Cité Internationale Universitaire de Paris for two principal reasons:

1. Paris is expensive
2. Finding an apartment is impossible without an agent. Being that I speak very little French, this seemed like an uphill battle to perform from Canada.

If you are brave, however, I met many European students who came to Paris without accommodation and had no trouble securing an apartment once they arrived. Some options for cheap, temporary residence include CouchSurfing or Airbnb.

As previously mentioned, France tends to move a little slower than North America, so the application process for accommodation at the Cité Universitaire was a frustrating one. First, you must contact la Maison des Étudiants Canadiennes (MEC). In addition to the application form, you must also submit a copy of your transcript, letter of acceptance, and a cover letter explaining the reason you want to stay at the Cité Universitaire. The application deadline is in mid-November; however, ESCP often does not distribute the acceptance letters until late-November to early-December. In my case, I sent ESCP multiple emails to have a photocopy of my acceptance letter.

The benefits of living at CIUP are:

1. Relatively cheap rent ($900 CDN per month)
2. A two-minute walk to the nearest RER station, which connects to the metro lines

Although I had a pleasant experience at Cité Universitaire, I was hoping to live in one of the numerous other houses, as opposed to being stuck in the Maison Canadienne. I requested to move into another house, to no avail. Living with other Canadians was a major
detriment to my exchange experience, so my recommendation is to contact the ESCP exchange coordinators and request to be put in touch with other students seeking accommodation and roommates.

ESCP does offer off-site housing, Vivaldi, but I did not hear anything good about it.

Academics

Since I only enrolled in Finance courses at ESCP, read the following with a cautious eye.

Previous student reports have indicated that ESCP is an easy-going party school, but this is not 100 percent true. I did study less than at SFU, on average, but the academic system is also entirely different. Fellow finance students can attest that we (at SFU) are often asked to memorize a bunch of formulas for a quantitative exam, in which we cover at least 13 chapters in 13 weeks of classes. At ESCP, we only covered 4-5 chapters in 10 weeks of classes. That means the courses required thought-provoking analysis and significantly more practical understanding, and therefore, the exams were often open book. The most frustrating thing was a lack of feedback and the inability to meet with professors outside of class hours.

The courses I would recommend are Commodity Risk Management and Valuations. The courses I enrolled in were:

i. Emerging Markets Finance
   - 40%: Two group case studies (20 percent each)
   - 60%: Final exam

ii. Commodity Risk Management
    - 30%: Weekly assignments
    - 70%: Final exam

iii. Financial Analysis and Strategy of Firms (avoid this class)
    - 40%: Two group case studies (20 percent each)
    - 60%: Final exam

iv. Valuations
    - 10%: Weekly assignments
    - 45%: Midterm exam
    - 45%: Final exam

v. Risk Management (avoid this class)
    - 30%: Weekly assignments
    - 70%: Final paper
Furthermore, previous reports have indicated a plethora of internship opportunities. This is only partly true as all of the career fairs take place in the fall semester only. In addition, exchange students do have access to the internship database, but counsellors will not assist exchange students. Bon chance!

**Words of Wisdom (What I Learned)**

i. Go as early in your academic career as possible (i.e. 5th year is too late) and take easy classes
   - Discover yourself because academic exchanges are not about book learning
ii. Travel way too much and with an open mind
   - Paris has a lot to offer, but Europe is so diverse. Take in as much as you can and accept that some things will disappoint you because many more will exceed your expectations
iii. Go to orientation. It is excruciatingly boring, but it is where you will make most of your exchange friends
iv. Attend the ESCP parties
v. Meet your tandem (i.e. the buddy-system with a permanent ESCP student) often and go out with their friends too
   - Learn to live like the locals
vi. Have drinks with friends along the Seine on a warm spring evening