Be A Local in Grenoble

Studying at Grenoble Ecole de Management (GEM) for a semester is one of the best choices I have made in my life. However, going on an exchange is not as simple as going on a trip. Here I will share some information that should be noticed before departure, my experience during my stay in France and reflection after the exchange.

Preparation

First thing I did after receiving my offer was applying for accommodation. There are two types of accommodations available for exchange students, private residence and student residence. One thing should be noted is that most of the private residences require a French guarantor for the tenant, which is not available for most of the non-European students. Therefore, I picked a studio in a student apartment called Nexity Studea Carre de Halles. Gem provided us a platform to look for housing. However, it took about a month for the agent to send me the confirmation, which was quite frustrating.

I applied for my Visa immediately after obtaining the housing confirmation. The OFII Stamp was not mandatory for me since I didn’t plan to stay in France for more than 6 months so the Visa process was quite fast for me. It only took me around a week to receive my passport. I booked my air ticket through air France around a month before my departure, which cost me around 900 Canadian. I should have booked it 2-3 months earlier since it would be lot cheaper. There is no international airport in Grenoble, so you have to fly to the nearby city and take bus or train to get there. In general, you can fly to one of these three cities: Paris, Lyon and Geneva. I picked Lyon since it was the closest one. Also there was only one 23kg luggage allowed so I paid for an extra luggage.

Remember to PACK LIGHT! Weather can be very cold in Grenoble during winter but you just need to bring 1-2 thick jackets/coats. There are big sales in France from the end of January to mid February so you can buy clothes everywhere during that period. I bought a down jacket, two flight jackets, two sweaters, 4 pair of pants, some summer clothes, some sport swears and 6 pairs of shoes (way more than I actually needed). Also bring some medicine in case since French medical description is way too hard for me to understand. Most importantly, put your documents such as school’s offer, housing confirmation and nomination letter in a bag that you can reach at any time, because the staff at airport might check them.

Finally, Scotiabank has partnership with BNP Paribas which allows you to withdraw cash at their ABMs without handling charge. But make sure to let the bank knows when and how long you are going to be in France in case it freezes your bank card.
During My Stay

I arrived in Lyon on December 31, therefore I decided to spend my New Year’s Eve there with my friend, who was from SFU too. The buildings there were way older than the ones in Vancouver and there were more people on the streets. We counted down at Place des Terreaux. The biggest difference I noticed was that everyone drank alcohol on the street. And people were bit more rowdy on New Year’s Eve.

After staying in Lyon for two days, we stepped into the train towards our destination – Grenoble. There are two kinds of train, the faster one is called TGV, which costs more and the slower one is called TER, which of course costs less. The one we took was TER because Grenoble was only bit more than an hour away from Lyon. Grenoble is a small city. The town center, which is called Victor Hugo, can be finished visiting in 15 minutes on foot. There is no metro in the city, the main public transportation is tramways A-E. But since the city is so small, you can literally go to everywhere by walking. Besides Victor Hugo, another popular place that people often hang during day time is La Bastille. It is a mountain on the other side of the river, you can either hike or take the famous bubble cable car to get to the top. It is a great place to chill and you can enjoy the view of the entire city. London Pub is famous for being the second home of GEM’s students. Basically everyone goes there for couple drinks during the weekend or even weekdays.
On the top of la Bastille

Near Grenoble Museum
My student apartment is one tramway stop from the school, or 7-8 minutes’ walk. Unlike the students’ residences in Vancouver, the ones in Grenoble are all managed by a company called Nexity. You have to contact the manager in order to set up the move-in procedure. Unfortunately, she was off the duty (she only worked from 8:30 to 11:30 and most of the time she was not in the office) and she only spoke French, so I had to stay in a hotel for one night. The suite was a small studio with kitchen, bathroom, a bed and a closet. Rent was paid by wire transfer using a French bank account, and it was 485 euro a month. Internet was included but I had to buy a modem to set up the Wi-Fi. Utility was not included so I had to signed up at a place called GEG, which was just few steps away from my school.

Grenoble Ecole de Management is located beside the Gare (train station). It is a small private school specializes in business. Classrooms are way smaller than the ones in SFU, so does the class size (usually around 40 people). Normally one class takes 3 hours and there is a 15 minutes’ break between the two halves. Unlike in SFU, which we are allowed to choose our own courses according to our preference, courses there are set based on different program. I was in GGSB BIB Year 2 and I was required to take 5 business classes, one French Society and one French language course, which were 30 ECTS in total (15 SFU credits). Class schedules change every week so make sure to check them in advance if you want to travel at the end of the week. Group discussions are facilitated a lot during class and attendance is very important. Unfortunately, I had been locked outside of my classroom once because I was 3 minutes late. Another big difference was that I took almost all the courses with the same group of people, which helped to build our friendship a lot in my opinion. Passing grade was 10/20 and grading was based on continuous assessments, midterms and final exams. One of the bad thing was that gym did not exist there so I had to signed up my gym membership elsewhere.
Orientation was held in the first week. We introduced ourselves, had a great traditional French cheese dinner and then went to a club near my apartment. If you come in Spring, make sure to attend two of the biggest events in the academic year – Gala and Altigliss. Gala is a graduation party but students from all years can take part in. People were all in
suits and bow ties but dancing with the music and the great champagne! Altigliss is an annual skiing week held by GEM’s student organization. During the stay you can ski all day long, drink unlimited beverages in the evening concert and go clubbing at night.
Because public transportation is very developed in France and Grenoble is located in the middle of Lyon and Geneva, which allows you to take flights from either of the places, I have been on traveling many times during my exchange and I have done a one-month trip after finals. Easyjet and Transvania are my suggestion for everyone because their flight tickets are usually very cheap. If you want to go by bus, make sure to take Flixbus since it is one of the most reliable bus company in Europe. In France, I have been to cities like Paris, Annecy, Montpellier and Avignon. I have also been to countries such as Spain, Portugal, Italy, Hungary, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Austria, Germany and Netherland. My favorite place was Vienna because it was just simply amazing and I even had a free concert of Conchita Wurst.
In Lisbon

In Vienna
Reflection

I have learned a lot during my stay, but the most important one is to be patient. Honestly speaking, working efficiency is very low in France and people are always on their break (e.g. two hours break during lunch time and most of the shops are closed on Sunday except in Paris). Moreover, writing letters is compulsory for almost every administration process, even just to stop the service of my phone. Instead of being angry, I have learned to be patient and adapted the slow lifestyle. Now I am able to sit outside the Café for two hours with a cup of Americano. Language was a big challenge during my stay. Most of the people (non-students) I have met in Grenoble don’t speak English. Therefore, practicing body language and using Google Translation have become my daily activities there. Be sure to buy the insurance on GEM’s portal, it will do you a big favor once you need it. Even I waited 11 hours in total at the emergency, I only paid 18 euros for my surgery, which was unbelievable. Also check your schedules and plan your trips at least two weeks ahead so you can save a considerable amount of money. Last but not least, eat cheese, drink wine and chill out at night, you will really enjoy the life in France.

Grenoble Ecole de Management in Grenoble, France
GGSB BIB Year 2 Program, Spring 2017.