Host University: Université de Tours
Host Country: France
Major: French Major with Concentration for Prospective Teachers
Faculty: Arts and Social Sciences
Term: Fall 2019 (Sep to Dec 2019)

Preparation for Exchange
When preparing for your exchange, I would advise to submit your paperwork as soon as possible. There is a significant amount of paperwork and documents that need to be submitted, so it is better to start early and give yourself more time. For example, one of the problems I had was obtaining my Visale. I submitted my application two weeks before my departure, and even though on their website it says that it takes less than 48 hours for it to be processed, I had not heard from them and I ended up not getting it on time for my appointment to pick up my keys for my dorm. Without it or a person as your guarantor, they will not rent the room to you. Fortunately, they gave me the option of paying all my rent upfront so I wouldn’t need a guarantor. However, this cannot be guaranteed for everyone, as some people I know were in the same situation but were not presented with the option I had, so they had to find another accommodation until they received it. Therefore, I would highly recommend getting administrative work done as soon as possible.

I also had issues with obtaining my visa, and I had to visit the visa application centre three times. They charge a $40 service fee for each appointment, which meant that I had to pay a total of $120 for those appointments. Every time I went, the representatives said I was missing documents, even though they were not listed on the checklist they gave us. Many people had the same problem, so I would advise bringing all the documents you think they would need, even if they are not listed, and make copies of them. Additionally, they are very strict about the visa ID photos and they must meet the Schengen standards, so make sure that your photos follow the requirements. I would recommend getting your ID pictures taken at London Drugs, as they give you four ID photos and although the visa application only requires two, I would highly recommend bringing extra photos with you to France because many of their administrative documents or identification requires you to have a photo. It is also important to make copies of all your documents and take them with you just in case they are needed. I even uploaded my documents to my Google Drive so that I have a digital copy in case I lose them.

In terms of academics and planning courses, I had to fill out a learning agreement before leaving for exchange. They sent us a catalogue of courses that are often taken by exchange students, and I filled it out with those courses, though this learning agreement does not exactly apply to us who are in SFU’s French Major with Concentration for Prospective Teachers because we have a list of 5 courses that we must take. We are also allowed to take more courses in addition to those five mandatory ones. Once we got there, we met with our coordinator and they helped us with course selection and registration. We received a sheet where we had to fill out the courses we wanted to take and get our professors from each class to sign it. The first two weeks were “trial” weeks, so we could attend classes in which we are interested, and once we are sure we want to take the class, we can ask the professor to sign it and we had until the end of the second week of school to submit the sheet.
When packing, you may want to pack some summer clothes as it is still quite hot in September. I don’t think a big winter coat would be necessary because although it does get cold in winter, it is still quite mild, and it is generally warmer than Vancouver. However, it is still important to bring appropriate winter clothing. If you prefer sleeping in your own bed sheets, pillows, pillowcases, blankets/duvets, etc. that you have at home, then you may want to consider bringing them. The residence does not provide any bedding, so you will either need to bring or buy your own. The same goes with cooking ware, eating utensils, cutlery, etc. Within the first couple of weeks, the university has a “braderie” (kind of like a yard sale) of items that previous exchange students have left that are for new exchange students to take for free. It would be a good idea to see what you can pick up there before buying anything. They have many useful items and appliances such as hair dryers, laundry baskets, kettles, toasters, hangers, pots, pans, garbage cans, cutlery, and many more.

Getting to Tours was not very complicated. I took a direct flight from Vancouver to Paris, then the TGV from Paris Charles de Gaulle Airport to Tours. There is a very small airport in Tours, but only a few airlines fly there, so the best way to get around in France is to take the TGV, and the biggest airport is Paris CDG, so it is easiest to book a flight there.

Most places in Tours take credit/debit cards, but it would be a good idea to carry cash with you as some places like the outdoor markets or the laundromat only take cash. The cost of living in France seemed to be about the same or sometimes slightly higher than that of Vancouver. They do have a lot of student discounts, so make sure to always bring your student ID card with you!

**During Exchange**

I lived in the Tanneurs residence, and I would strongly recommend applying for that one if you are taking courses in Lettres et Langues because the residence was just across the street from the campus, so it took me five minutes to get to class. All the rooms include a bathroom (with toilet, sink, and shower) and a small fridge. You can choose to rent a regular room or a studio, which includes a small kitchen and rent is more expensive. There are shared kitchens on each floor, though they are quite basic and have only four electric elements and one microwave. There is no laundry in the residence building, but there is a laundromat across the street that charges 3 euros per load and 1 euro per 12 minutes of drying. Since I lived in the city centre, I did not have to take the bus or tram often because most places were within walking distance. There are many grocery stores nearby, so grocery shopping was not a problem for me, though the fridge in my room was very small, so I had to shop quite frequently.

I took six courses during my semester abroad and I found it very manageable. Classes were two hours a week, and most classes were lecture heavy. We generally only had two evaluations, which were either a midterm and a final exam or a group presentation and final exam or something similar, and they were each worth 50% or 40% and 60%. Classrooms tended to change a lot without notice, so we had to check our schedule very frequently (I would say daily) to see where our class would be.

Besides classes, I signed up for the Tandem language exchange program, where we have a conversation with a French student for one hour and we speak in French for 30 mins and then English for 30 mins so that we can work on our French while they improve their English. I did this twice a week and I did the non-intensive program which does not give credits. To receive credits (3 ECTS), you can do the intensive program that requires you to participate at least three hours a week and write a reflection at the end of the semester.
I also bought the “Packsport”, which is a sports pass offered by the university that allows us to sign up for a maximum of three classes per semester, and it was 25 euros for the year. They have a variety of different classes such as dance, team sports, swimming, yoga, weight training, and many more. A complete list of them can be found in their catalogue and it’s a great way to stay active while on exchange.

There are certainly lots of things to do and places to see in Tours. One of my favourite things to do was visiting castles, as there are so many castles in the Loire Valley, and many are relatively close to Tours. You can get to a lot of nearby castles by taking the train. Around the city, there are also a lot of churches and cathedrals, which were nice to see, especially with their stained-glass windows. The Tanneurs campus is just by the river, so I found it very relaxing to go for walks or jogs along the river and enjoy the view. There is also the Guinguette, which is an outdoor bar and a popular hangout spot next to the river that is open from May to September. Another popular place for students to gather after class is Place Plumereau, which has many restaurants, bars, pubs, etc. Starting from the end of November, we can go to the Christmas market in Tours and I enjoyed going there and trying different French foods. It was nice to grab a cup of hot wine to warm our hands while we walked through the city to look at the lights, as well as the market that was free admission.

Other than going sightseeing on our own, the Erasmus Student Network (ESN) and the International Relations Office of the university organize outings and trips to see places around and outside of Tours. They offer such trips at a lower cost, so you may want to sign up for them, though it is important that you sign up as soon as possible because there are limited spots and they fill up very quickly.

Reflection After Exchange
Overall, I enjoyed my term abroad and I got to learn a lot. It was a great opportunity for me to be immersed in the French language and culture, and I was able to practice and improve my spoken French. I think from this exchange, I learned the most about myself. It was the perfect opportunity for self-development, as I spent a considerable amount of time alone away from friends and family from home, so I self-reflected a lot and got to figure out and learn more about what I like (and what I don’t), what works for me (and what doesn’t), my habits, my values, etc. I also did some travelling alone, which was a new experience for me that was out of my comfort zone, but I gained more self-confidence from that and now I’d like to go on more solo trips. I definitely feel more independent because of having to live alone in a foreign country, going to places alone, and dealing with things on my own. I was very nervous and worried before leaving for exchange, but once I got there, it wasn’t so bad, and I realized that I was capable of handling situations and doing things on my own. The first month did feel very slow for me because it can take a while to adapt, but after that, the following months flew by so quickly. If you’re going on exchange for one semester, just take it easy and enjoy your time there because four months go by very quickly. There’s no need to worry so much because at the end you will have everything figured out, so have fun and take advantage of the opportunities!
Photos

Cathédrale Saint-Gatien

Pont Wilson and the Loire river

Rue Nationale (a big shopping street)
Place Plumereau

Château d’Amboise (in the town of Amboise that’s only about a 20-minute train ride away from Tours)