

Lausanne, 2018



Lausanne, Ouchy.



Montreux

Why Medical French? Why Lausanne?

I've always loved languages (despite not being that confident with them) and different cultures. Throughout my 5 years of Medicine, Medical French gave me a way to escape the mundane day-to-day of medicine and explore another culture and challenge myself. It also meant I didn't forget the language I'd worked so hard on during high school and sixth form. This period of exchange at the end of 5th year seemed like the perfect opportunity to me- escape abroad for 4 months post finals to delve straight into another culture, language and way of living. It also seemed like an exercise in self development and a chance to improve my confidence before starting F1 in August.

Lausanne is such a beautiful city; buried in the Swiss mountains it is worlds away from Manchester and this seemed perfect for me. I'd never been to Switzerland before and was keen to explore a new country and culture. Furthermore, Switzerland is nestled in a handy location and enables you to visit different countries (France is just across the lake!) without travelling too far. It is also a very diverse country; there being Swiss French, Swiss Italians and Swiss Germans. Furthermore, many people I worked with in the hospital weren't Swiss themselves- they came from Germany, Spain, Portugal or Italy.

Pre-departure feelings

Naturally, I am quite a worrisome person, which probably comes with the territory of being a medical student, so moving abroad for 4 months was a really big deal to me. I had always studied French since high school, but had never spent more than just a school trip or family holiday there. Before moving away, I was terrified about the language barrier and therefore not being able to communicate with anyone or seeming like a fool on the wards. I was equally scared about being alone in a new city and feeling lost or without friends.

Administration

The Swiss love their red tape, which can be annoying, but this love for bureaucracy also means that you will know if you haven't done something important. The University make contact with you fairly early on (for me, I think it was around the end of Semester 2 in 4th year) and they often have quite short deadlines so be wary. They will send you learning agreements to fill out and sign and will also send you information about picking placements. I'd think carefully about the placements you pick, all 3 of us got the placements we asked for so don't worry about competition. Spend some time reading about the different placements, what they entail and importantly where they are based (they won't all be at the main hospital- the CHUV).

Importantly- you will receive a salary from the CHUV (for us; 920CHF a month) as well as the bursary from the University (the equivalent of the Erasmus grant) for around 1600 CHF in total. Although Switzerland is famously more expensive- this money means you don't really have to worry, though you need some money to cover you until you first get paid.

Switzerland is not a part of the EU so technically not a part of the Erasmus programme, but has a SEMP (Swiss European Mobility Programme) which is essentially exactly the same. This is important for us, as it means Erasmus pre-departure talks are not applicable for you and you do not need to fill in the same forms the Erasmus students do.

Accommodation

There are several options for accommodation in Lausanne, and each of the 3 students from Manchester chose a different one. I had accommodation in the University halls; the FMEL (Fondation maisons pour étudiants Lausanne). My halls, Falaises, were opposite the metro stop for the CHUV and only a couple of minutes walk from the hospital which was fantastic. I chose this option because I wanted to be around other students, and have the security that University residence provides. Furthermore, rent was 530CHF which is very cheap for Lausanne. There were a lot of international students at Falaises, and a lot of medical students as it was so close to the CHUV- this was nice because I got to meet people from all over and talk about different cultures and health care systems. Alternatively, you can apply for accommodation with the hospital or you can look online for co-locations (lots of students leave for a Semester so are looking to rent their rooms out).



The view from my balcony at Falaises- Winter



Summer

The department at the University sent me an email telling me I could apply for hospital accommodation during Semester 1 of 5th year. I took it upon myself, however, to self register for the FMEL which you can do on their website (see links). You can register for the 2nd semester on a certain day only (mid November for me), so keep checking the website and be prepared! You then have to renew your registration at the beginning of every month. I finally got my offer early-mid January, so this was quite late (as I was flying on the 29th). What I would advise would be signing up for accommodation with the CHUV and with the university and see who gets back to you. Both of us who applied to the FMEL this year got offers, and so did last year's students but just bear in mind this may take longer than you think. FMEL offer contracts from the 16th or the 1st of each month, so taking a contract from the 16th January may be easier, as I had to stay in a hotel for a few nights before moving in on the 1st February (which was the same day as my placement started). As for co-locations, there are websites, but I'll paste a link to a Facebook group that most people use.

Pre-arrival checklist

It sounds quite self explanatory, but make sure you take all your important documents with you, I didn't use all of these but I think it's good to be prepared. In short, your passport, EHIC card, B2 and C1 certificates, attestation d'immatriculation and contrat de bourse (the University will send these to you), your accommodation contracts and a copy of the University insurance policy (you can email the European studies department for a cover letter, or alternatively just print the policy from the my placement website). Get some passport photos taken before leaving, as many places will want a picture.

Flights to Geneva airport are relatively cheap, depending on how flexible you are you could probably find one way tickets from £20/£30. You can book train tickets to Lausanne direct from the airport which take around 45mins-1hour depending on the train. An anytime ticket is around 28CHF, but you can purchase "supersaver" tickets in advance at a reduced price which are valid for one particular train only.

Arrival

Arriving a few days early and being organised is a good idea. Placements start on the 1st of every month (if it's a weekday) and finish on the last day. I arrived on the 29th January so this gave me a few days to get all the admin done, and even visit the museum! Here's a list of all the boring things to get done, but this will make your life so much easier. Tip- before visiting these places make sure you know when they open (a lot of places close at lunch time, and the insurance office is open every other day, I think).

- Go to the "**bureau des étrangers/contrôle de population**" and fill out the "annonce d'arrivée". This costs 30CHF but provides you with the permit that you might need to show later on in your studies. They'll ask you for a piece of ID, your attestation and proof of residence.
- Open a **Swiss bank account**, you need to do this to fill out the "contrat de bourse" in order to receive the University grant. I chose BCV but there is also UBS and Crédit Suisse.
- Buy a monthly travel pass. This costs 50CHF a month, and you can buy 1 or 2 months worth at a time. It allows you to use any transport all over Lausanne- the metro or the bus etc. You can get this from the travel shop by the **Lausanne flon** metro stop. You'll need to take a passport photo and some ID in order to receive a "Swiss pass". (If you want to do lots of travelling you can buy a "demi tarif" which gets you 50% off all trains in Switzerland but this itself is around 180CHF so it may not be worth it.)
- Go to the **university campus**, pick up your student card and IT access and hand in your "contrat de bourse". Once you've received your card go to the library on the campus to validate your card at the machine. (The campus is out of the city centre, so plan your day well!)
- Go to the **office vaudois de l'assurance maladie (OVAM)**- you'll need to present your EHIC card and your student card or attestation to prove exemption from the compulsory health insurance. They will then send you an exemption certificate.
- On your first day, or before depending on your correspondence, go to the **HR department** of the hospital to collect your card, payment forms and find out how to receive your "blouse blanche". This is on Rue de Bugnon 21, you will receive some letters around December time which explains this.
- On the Manchester **myplacement website**, fill out the confirmation of arrival form.

Life at the CHUV

Life at the CHUV is quite different to MRI. Cultural differences are quite apparent from the get go. Meals have great importance, with many doctors going to the canteen to get a pastry and a hot drink before starting the ward round. At lunch, most of the team eat together in the canteen and lunch is a proper meal (not a sandwich in a pokey office!). I found this really nice as it fostered a pleasant team environment and made everyone feel a bit more relaxed. I also feel like the CHUV ran much more efficiently than hospitals in England- staff seemed less run down and patient care was a bit smoother.

As one "chef de clinique" explained to me, Swiss doctors are far more direct- they tell their patients to "do this, do that" rather than "may I do this, may I do that" and conversely patients are also more direct with doctors and aren't perturbed by this. It is also completely normal for doctors to ask patients to take all their clothes off to be examined, and patients expect this. For me, this was slightly strange as there was less focus on privacy or chaperones and many a time the doctor would continue a history whilst a patient undressed. Although not a hard and fast rule, I feel England (especially Manchester medical school) has more of a focus on communication skills and the patient as a whole.

Most staff I met were lovely, and made allowances for my language barrier; taking the time to let me practise my language whilst also helping me along. I would imagine all of the doctors speak English well (certainly the ones I encountered) so will help you if ever you are struggling. Due to the diverse nature of Swiss culture, and of the staff at the CHUV, many people are understanding and interested in where you come from.

As a whole, I feel both cultures have important lessons to learn from another. Sometimes I thought better communication skills here at the CHUV would have aided encounters and helped patients feel more at ease. Other times, I could see how the directness and different culture enabled things to run more efficiently.

Placements

Rhumatologie (Rheumatology)

Being honest, I picked placements I was interested in but also ones I knew had a relatively nice work/life balance and (stereotypically!) a nice team environment. This appears to have held true for rheumatology. On the first day I met my Chef de Clinique who was so nice and spent the whole morning introducing me to people, showing me round the hospital and familiarising me with the computer software. He also printed me a timetable and a booklet of useful information- including an "anamnèse/examen clinique" textbook which was so useful!

The staff on the ward were so friendly and the medecin assistant (junior doctor) and assistant medical (like a physicians associate) I was based with most days were so lovely and looked after me. I didn't see the chefs de clinique as much but whenever they saw me, they involved me in ward rounds and clinics. Clinically, I clerked several new admissions in, I had the chance to practise ultrasound and I assisted in joint aspirations (and then viewed urate crystals under the microscope!). I also saw patients with really interesting clinical signs (not just limited to rheumatology!)- very severe rheumatoid arthritis, Pott's disease, frontal lobe tumours, RCC with cannon ball mets and lots of herniated discs. Overall, this was a perfect first placement, I felt like a valued member of the team, I developed my French, saw some really interesting medicine and was able to practice my skills.



The view from the rheumatology ward- quite different to MRI!

ORL (ENT)

I was lucky to have such a lovely first placement, and unfortunately I didn't have the same experience on ENT. The ENT team was much larger with several sub specialities so I didn't really feel a part of the team and I didn't have a role, I was just left to wander. This was difficult for me as I had no idea what was available for me to do.

My supervisor was nice and quite relaxed, but he didn't really mind what I did and this lack of structure was quite frustrating. However, this meant there was no real pressure for me to be in all the time. When asked, he'd let me come along and assist in many operations and I was even allowed to do the final sutures which was fun and really good practice for me. I spent a week shadowing a friendly otology specialist, and this allowed me to see many signs and observe some really interesting microsurgery.

Overall, I managed to get some valuable experience and see some really interesting things during this placement. However, I found the lack of structure and guidance very frustrating in comparison to the lovely welcoming team on Rheumatology.

Dermatologie (Dermatology)

Again, on Dermatology I didn't have an induction at all and was just briefly told to spend half my time in the policlinique (outpatient consultations) and half my time on the ward. Despite this lack of induction, the junior doctors were friendly and let me observe their clinics and I saw some really interesting dermatological pathology. Unfortunately, for the first month there were 3 stagiaires in Dermatology all at once, so the other Swiss stagiaire in the policlinique often had priority in terms of taking histories and practical procedures, which was slightly frustrating. However, after they left I was able to do histories and exams on my own in policlinique and present them back to the doctor. This was fantastic practice.

I really enjoyed my time spent on the ward, I had my own desk next to the junior doctor and I felt like I had more of a role in the team. The junior doctor was really kind and friendly, and helped me along with any linguistic difficulties. Every day I accompanied her on the ward round and afterwards updated the notes and helped her carry out any jobs. I also clerked in new patients, made phone calls and was able to do skin biopsies which was fun.

As this was my final placement, it was slightly longer than the others so allowed me a period of time after the first month without other stagiaires. This meant I was free to gain more experience in the areas of my choosing. Overall, the team was very friendly and I was able to see some really interesting pathology that I wouldn't have had the chance to experience in England. I also had the time to really practise my history and examination skills in dermatology which I think will serve me well in future as this is a speciality often neglected that can crop up in any other speciality.

In General...

Depending on your placement, you're quite likely to encounter other Swiss medical students, either stagiaires in their final (6th) year like you or "cours de bloc" students from 4th year. I found it really interesting to chat to them about the differences between our courses and our culture in general. One thing I definitely picked up was that Swiss medical students seemed a lot more pro-active. Quite often you had to ask to do certain things, and be very forward with what you wanted/questions you had. This shocked me sometimes as it could come across as quite rude (to an English med student) but I feel this is expected of Swiss students so isn't construed as disrespectful as much as it would be in England.

At the end of each placement, remember there is a sign off form for Manchester (on eforms) and a written one for Lausanne to which needs to be sent to the UNIL medicine department. You also need to get a superior to sign off your payment forms to hand in before the end of each month in order to collect your salary.

Overall, you get Good Friday, Easter Monday, Ascension and Pentecost as congé and furthermore, you are allowed 2 days congé a month. Though this depends on your supervisor, as some are a lot more laid back and will probably allow a few more days for you to explore Lausanne and the surroundings!

Life in Switzerland

First things first- yes it is more expensive, but you do just have to accept this after a while. However, the money we receive more than compensates for the increase price of living and actually meant I was probably a lot better off than other students on different placements in France. Furthermore, I was able to finish my placements in May with francs left over from my salary to take back to England.

The cheapest supermarkets to do shops at were Aldi, Migros or Co-op. Aldi was probably the cheapest, but Migros and Co-op have a much greater range of products. Furthermore, you learn to avoid the expensive items, I decided to buy less meat and explore eating vegetarian for a while.

Some linguistic differences- the most obvious is the numbers "septante, huitante, nonante", it seems a bit weird at first but it is so much easier than the alternative (four twenties and ten?!). In terms of meals- breakfast is "déjeuner", lunch is "dîner" and tea is "souper", although some people I spoke to who weren't Swiss still used the traditional terms. Doctors also say "ça joue" quite a lot at the end of consultations, being synonymous with "ça marche". The Swiss for mobile is "natel", which I had never heard before, but is very useful to know in hospital!

People in Switzerland are really friendly and will often greet you just in passing in the street. I also found that it is incredibly important to always say "bonjour" before you start any conversation. I got told off for asking a question without starting with "bonjour" and introducing myself formally so watch out! They are quite keen on introducing yourself "se presenter" to all members of staff (including the nursing/HCA team) so I would also be aware of this.

I really enjoyed the diversity of Switzerland- having so many people from different places being able to speak different languages with different stories. I also found Switzerland to be a lot more efficient and clean than back home. The trains were nearly always on time and some of the train journeys you could take were gorgeous. The metro system in Lausanne is also really practical and reliable.

Places to visit

There are so many great places to visit, so get planning! The Erasmus students network (ESN) is great and will organise many trips which are very good value so I would recommend these. At the end I've listed some places to see whilst you're here.



View from the Château de Gruyères.



Château de Chillon in Montreux

Departure checklist

- Confirm the end of your contract with the **FMEL** (if applicable). This can be the 15th or the end of each month, and you need to communicate this 2 months in advance. You then need to organise a check out appointment with the housing manager.
- Go back to the "**bureau des étrangers**" and fill out an "annonce de départ" within 8 days of leaving.
- Make sure you organise to collect your last **CHUV** salary early, and hand back your ID card and coat.
- Close your **bank** account.

Post-return feelings

After only a few days in Lausanne, and after having sorted all the admin things, I felt at home and all those feelings I described earlier disappeared. I still found it difficult to get by exclusively in French but I soon developed management strategies and it slowly became easier for me. Furthermore, I quickly got over my insecurities and learnt when speaking French to not worry about making mistakes or about looking a fool. This helped me improve my spoken French so much as I was a lot more at ease. I felt this also helped me improve in terms of general self-confidence too. If I could start a new placement in a strange place and approach strange doctors in French, doing this in my native language back home would never scare me again.

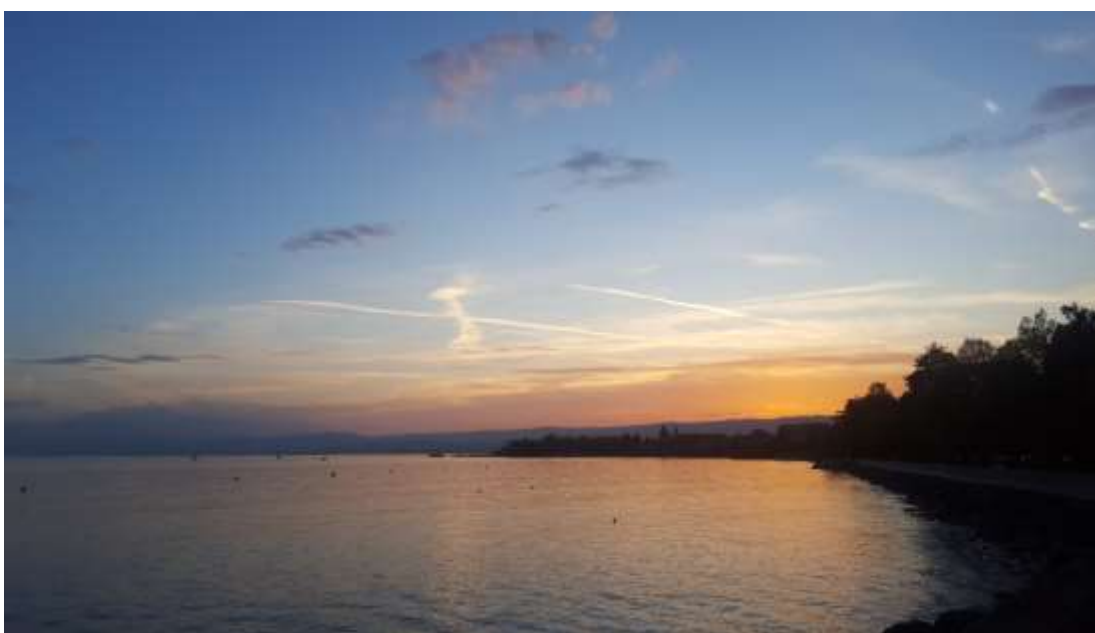
The students in my accommodation were mainly fellow Erasmus students so everyone was so friendly and welcoming. It was also nice to chat to other students in the same position as you (struggling to get by in a foreign language!). Between my friends in accommodation, friends from Manchester, ESN trips, friends visiting Lausanne and visiting family friends in the region, I had things to do most weekends. Often it was a relief to have a free weekend!

Lausanne is so lovely and something about the city welcomed me straight away. A year ago I actually was dreading coming, leaving my friends and the comfort of what I knew for the vast foreign unknown. Remembering that, and then feeling the way I do now I am proud of my achievement and the mental hurdles I have overcome. This experience has made me more confident, independent, outgoing and able to confront my fears and overcome them. I feel these traits will be invaluable to me going forward as a junior doctor, and I will strive to remember this.

I've had a great experience, both at Manchester over the last 5 years and in this beautiful city of Lausanne. I will never forget the incredible mountain and lake views I was treated to almost every day (and from my very own balcony!). Now I can't wait to start my new life as a qualified doctor in Bolton and put these new skills to the test.



Lausanne, Ouchy.



Lausanne, Pully.

Top tips/Useful links

- FMEL website- <https://fmel.ch/en/>
- Co-location group "Lausanne a louer- bouche a l'oreille"- <https://www.facebook.com/groups/330486193693264/>
- Join the ESN Facebook group and page (parties and trips around Switzerland/surrounding areas)- <https://www.facebook.com/groups/399672407094530/>
<https://www.facebook.com/esn.unil/>
- Train website- look for journeys with the "%" sign on them- this means you can purchase supersaver tickets at a reduced price which are valid for that journey only- <https://www.sbb.ch/en/home.html>

Places to visit/Things to do-

- There are many places to run/walk along the lake and lots of little beaches to relax on the way. The lake path from Ouchy in Lausanne leads to neighbouring ports of Pully, Lutry and Cully etc.
- 20km de Lausanne- I did the 10k at the end of April and it was a great experience. The route takes you by the lake and through the town to finish at the "Stade de Pierre de Coubertin".
- Cully Jazz Festival- renowned jazz festival around the middle/end April.
- Lavaux- UNESCO world heritage vineyards. I would recommend a little restaurant called Café de Riex in the village of Riex in Lavaux (5 mins walk from Cully station).
- Vevey- scenic lakeside town, musée d'alimentation.
- Montreux- beautiful riviera town! Rochers de naye, Château de Chillon
- Gruyères- Cailler chocolate factory, Château de Gruyères, Maison de Gruyères.
- Sion- lovely little town with 2 amazing castles on a hill.
- Genève- CERN, the UN and lots of museums (I'd recommend the red cross!)
- Evian-les-bains or Thonons-les-bains- you can catch a boat to France!
- Lavey-les-bains- thermal baths at St Maurice, 23CHF for students for 3 hours!
- A bit further away- Zermatt (with the matterhorn!), Zurich, Locarno/Lugano (Italian Switzerland).

In Lausanne-

- For fondue- pinte besson, café de l'évêché, café Grütli
- Brunch- Blackbird café, le Pointu, Cochinelle café
- Bars- étoile blanche, bleu lézard, great escape
- Museums- Musée olympique, musée d'Elysée (photography), fondation de l'hermitage, collection de l'art Brut
- Sauvebelin tower and forest- great views of Lausanne.
- Cathédrale de notre dame- you can climb the bell tower for 3CHF.
- Ouchy is the main port in Lausanne- there are places to eat/sit and admire the view.
- In Summer- pedalo on the lake.