

ERASMUS Jan-May 2018 Université Claude Bernard Lyon Est.

Before I start this account, I should specify that my experience is probably not a classic Erasmus experience. Indeed, this is the account of a French person returning to France after being away in medschool in the UK for 5.5 years. It will therefore likely be very different from the experience you have, which will be one of cultural discovery and exploration.

I chose Lyon Est, mostly because this university has more ties with Grenoble University (for instance, they have a communal dentistry school), which I thought could be helpful for me in the future. Information about what documents to submit was fairly straight-forward, as the documents were listed on their website. According to their information page, we had the option of either doing three 6 week placements in sequence, or to join the Year 4 or Year 5 cohort of French students, who alternate between 6 week periods of placements and 6 week periods of full-time classes (classes 8am to 6pm five days a week). As I had already done many placements in France (for a QEPEP, another for my elective, some voluntary ones during the summer etc), I felt that I would benefit most from joining the cohort of French students (ie attending classes as well as placement) to see what medical school is like for them. After explaining my reasons to the European Studies team, this was accepted, although I believe the preferred option is for Manchester students to undertake 3 placements and forego the classes. It is worth knowing that if taking the classes, there are also exams in Lyon, and these are at the same time as finals/resits in May. If you do like everyone else and only have placements though, there are no exams!

After making this decision, I then had to submit my placement choices and decide which cohort to join. In second semester, 4th Years studied all of the following: Infectious Diseases (70h), Haematology-Oncology (27h), Dermatology (28h) and Orthopaedics-Rheumatology (38h). 5th Years studied ENT-stomatology-ophtalmology (28h), Psychiatry (40h), Hepato-Gastro-Enterology (45h) and Nephrology-Urology (35h). In brackets is the number of hours of classes they received on each topic during the semester. After reflection, I decided to join the 4th year cohort (rather than 5th Year) as this is the semester in which they receive classes on orthopaedics, which I want to do as a career, and I thought attending these classes would put me in good stead for the future.

As I had agreed with the university that I would be undertaking a 6 week period of full-time classes, I could only do two placements, not three. The choice of placements was extremely broad, with a wide variety of choices in both adult and paediatric medicine. I submitted my top three choices for each period of placement, and was fortunate to receive my first choice in each.

Some time in first semester of 5th Year, I therefore found out what my semester in Lyon would comprise of:

- A first placement in plastics
- A 6 week period of full-time Y4 classes (with the subjects listed above, ie. Infectious diseases, haematology-oncology, dermatology and orthopaedics and rheumatology).
- A final placement in trauma and surgical emergencies (A&E).

We were also contacted by email regarding accommodation. The easiest thing to do was to submit a quick form requesting accommodation with the CROUS (Centre Régional des Oeuvres Universitaires et Scolaires) which is a French organisation which provides financial and other practical help for students. This would pretty much guarantee a room in a hall of residence. Although I submitted the form just in case, I ended up finding my own accommodation which suited me better. I enjoyed living near Grange-Blanche as this is where the main university is, and this was also near where I was going to take my classes and near the hospital in which I was going to do my second placement. There isn't much to do around there but it is an easy trip into town using the metro, which suited me perfectly. Wherever you decide to live, I think the only advice I'd give is to choose somewhere near a metro station as this will make the key difference about whether or not it is easy to get to places.

My arrival in Lyon was pretty straight forward, I drove up from home with my parents with a carfull of belongings. However, having taken the plane from Lyon to Manchester (and back) often throughout my years in Manchester, I can say that it is an easy journey, there are many direct flights to choose from and they can be reasonably inexpensive if booked at the right time. There is then the Rhone-Express tram service that travels every half hour between Lyon Airport and the city centre train station (gare de Part-Dieu). I should specify it was also necessary to be present in Lyon at some point in the week preceding the start of the Erasmus/placement to complete some admin and pick up our student ID card (doing this on the Friday afternoon preceding the start date worked fine for me).

MY PLACEMENTS AND CLASSES:

My placement in plastic surgery:

This placement was at the Croix-Rousse Hospital which was easily accessible on the Metro C line.

When I arrived, the other (French) students on this placement had already been there for a couple of weeks. I was immediately introduced to them: there were 4 students who ranged from year 3 to 6. The two Year 3 students were expected to work part-time while the rest of us were considered on placement full-time.

Every week, the doctors would inform us how many students they needed each day in both theatre and clinics, and it was up to us to organise a timetable between us to ensure there were always students present where they were needed. On most days, two students were required in theatre, and two more in clinics, from 8 or 9am until 5 or 6pm. Organising the timetable was pretty straight-forward, the three of us who were full-time students would be in pretty much every day, while the two third years filled the fourth spot between them. I liked this system as it allowed some flexibility: if one of us couldn't come in on a specific day, we could arrange for a different one of us to cover for them.

Students were never required on the ward, mostly because aside from the burn victims, the patients we saw were not unwell.

Throughout the placement, I got to familiarise myself with both reconstructive and cosmetic surgery, and both French private and public sectors. Examples of operations discussed in clinic or seen in theatre include: skin grafts, burn surgery, transgender surgeries (feminisation of the face, phalloplasty, vaginoplasty), rhinoseptoplasty, lip injections, otoplasty, face/neck lift, brachioplasty, breast augmentation and reduction, breast reconstruction (DIEP and latissimus dorsi flap), abdominoplasty, dermolipoaspiration, lipofilling, cruroplasty and scar adjustment.

Be aware that in clinics, we were expected to welcome the patient into the room and take a history alone. We were also expected to record the consultation on the computer, using different forms depending on whether this was their first, second or a post-op visit. Once we had finished, the surgeon would then come in and review what we had discussed, examine the patient and then advise or plan the surgery as required.

In theatre, we were able to scrub up and assist with the operation in a similar fashion to in the UK.

Overall this was a fantastic placement and I highly recommend it to anyone interested in plastics. The balance of clinic/theatre time is dependent on the interests and needs of the other students on the placement, but I found that it was easy to find something that worked for all of us. I got to see a wide variety of procedures, and feel that my understanding of plastic surgery has hugely increased, which is fantastic as this is an area of medicine that interests me and that I had not had the opportunity to experience in Manchester.

Classes:

After my placement in plastics, I attended 6 weeks of classes. The subjects I studied and alternative options are listed earlier, but for clarity, I shall repeat them here:

Year 4 French cohort (semester 2):

- Infectious Diseases (70 hours)
- Haematology-Oncology (27 hours)
- Dermatology (28 hours)
- Orthopaedics-Rheumatology (38 hours).

Year 5 French cohort (semester 2):

- ENT stomatology and ophthalmology (28 hours)
- Psychiatry (40 hours)
- Hepato-Gastro-Enterology (45 hours)
- Nephrology-Urology (35 hours).

As stated previously, I chose to join the 4th Year cohort as I wanted to attend the orthopaedic classes as this is my area of interest.

Overall, I'd say the level at which the French students studied was higher than that which we are accustomed to in the UK. The classes tended to go into more detail and students were expected to understand more of the basic science underlying medical conditions. They also covered rarer medical conditions in a lot of detail.

This was very useful as it meant that I now feel I have a much better understanding of many conditions I did not fully understand before, however I would warn that I think this would be difficult to do if French weren't my first language. Classes always started at 8am and usually finished as late as 6pm (although there were days when we finished at 4pm). Lunch breaks were usually from 12-2pm. Attendance was not monitored however there were exams at the end of the semester.

The classes took place in the "Laënnec" Faculty of Medicine which was easily accessible using Metro D. We were essentially allocated our own lecture theatre within the Laennec building and our classes were put on there every day. The fifth years had classes in the lecture theatre next door so it would be possible to switch between the two if there was a class of particular interest to you in the other lecture theatre although I chose to just stick with a specific cohort and attend their classes as I would if I were in their year.

Aside from the fantastic learning experience and development of my understanding of many complex medical conditions, another advantage of joining the classes was that this allowed me to intergrate with the rest of the French students (whereas I found a lot of the other Erasmus students tended to end up friends mainly with each other). This was not a problem, but I feel mixing fully with the French students was the right decision for me as I had already experienced what placement was like in France on numerous occasions throughout medical school, so this was my opportunity to experience all aspects of medical school in France aside from placement.

Trauma and Surgical Emergencies (A&E sub-specialty) placement:

This was my last placement and again, this was absolutely fantastic. The hospital I undertook this placement at was Hôpital Edouard-Herriot, which is also easily accessible on the Metro D (the stop is called Grange Blanche) and right next door to the medical school building which is convenient for admin purposes

I got the opportunity to clerk patients on my own, report back to the doctors, order xrays, suture wounds and generally communicate with and manage my own patients.

Erasmus students were expected to be present from 8am till 3pm Monday to Friday (although we usually stayed later, sometimes as late as 6pm if we were with an interesting case though it was rarely that late). This was perfect as this gave me lots of time to learn on placement, but there was also time to enjoy the sunshine as the days started to get longer and warmer.

There were also extra classes during this placement reviewing classic A&E presentations, which I found very useful. Examples include a class on history-taking, chest pain, interpreting xrays, a suturing workshop etc. There was also a class on what to do in the event of a mass casualty situation.

As there happened to be three Erasmus students who chose this placement, they decided to rotate us and expected us to spend one week each on the Medical and Psychiatric A&E. This was great as it meant I had the opportunity to spend some

time seeing other types of emergencies, although most of it was still spent on surgical and trauma emergencies which aligns more with my areas of interest. Although this would not be an automatic part of your placement should you also choose to be placed in the Trauma and Surgical A&E, staff were very accommodating and I expect they would be able to organise rotations on the Medical and Psychiatric A&E too should you request it. Personally, I would recommend trying to organise a week on the medical and psychiatric A&E building as it gives you the chance to see an even wider variety of things.

In trauma and surgical emergencies, we were placed either on the “short route” (with mainly uncomplicated patients), or on the “long route” (with more complex issues. Examples of things we saw on the “short route” are fractures, lacerations, or acutely unwell young patients with few comorbidities (appendicitis, renal calculi,...). On the “long route” were older patients presenting with complex health issues, fractured neck of femurs, road traffic accidents, stab wounds etc. In the medical and psychiatric A&E there was an extremely wide variety of cases, ranging from your average medical problem to sectioning and restraining acutely unwell psych patients by tying them to the bed in the psych cubicle (this happened at least twice per day).

I may add that if you want to do a lot of suturing on awake patients, this is definitely the place as it is the medical student's job! Suturing quickly became a normal part of my day which personally I definitely appreciated as it is good practice for my future surgical career aspirations.

Lyon as a city:

Lyon is a big city, the second largest in France after Paris, so logically there are many things to do to suit all interests. Sights worth seeing include the St-Jean-Baptiste Cathedral, the Notre-Dame-de-Fourviere Basilica, Bellecour Square, the Lyon Museum of Fine Arts and the Lumiere Museum. There is also a very famous Miniature Museum for those interested in films and cinema. I'd also recommend going to see the old Roman city of Lugdunum, the old name for Lyon, where there is a Roman amphitheatre, a museum and a beautiful view over the city. There are two rivers that run through Lyon, the Rhone and the Saone, and it is worth walking along (or even just sitting with ice-cream along) the river banks on a sunny day (of which there are many after March or April). It is also possible to go to bars and restaurants on boats on the Rhone, for example the Sirius or the Marquise, which are moored permanently on the river bank. In terms of food and restaurants, I'd recommend experiencing eating in a “bouchon Lyonnais”, in other words a traditional Lyon restaurant, where you can find local specialties such as cervelle des Canuts or tarte praline. There are many such restaurants to choose from in the Vieux Lyon, although it is also possible to find many restaurants and bars of all types in the city centre.

Lyon is also the home of the famous Olympique Lyonnais, or OL, football team, if there are any football enthusiasts reading this.

In terms of getting around the city, the Lyon metro system is very efficient and quick. I'd recommend getting a Tecely card from the Transports en Commun de Lyon office

(there is one in the Gare de Lyon Part-Dieu and another at Grange Blanche which is where the university is). This allows you to buy public transport monthly passes instead of having to buy them individually. Bringing proof that you are a student also means that you can get discounts on all future tickets purchased for public transport. You also need a passport photo for your card. Once you have the Tecely card, it is then possible to buy passes from the machines at any metro or tram stop which is very convenient. I recommend finding accommodation near any metro stop, as metros pass every 2-4 minutes at peak times and every 10 minutes at most.

It is also possible to rent bikes although personally I did not use this service.

Places to go around Lyon on a weekend include the Ardeche which is beautiful. Other cities nearby include Chambéry, Annecy and of course my home town Grenoble. It is possible to travel to these places using the train or bus services such as Ouibus and Flixbus which can provide trips for as cheap as 5 euros without even having to be booked that far in advance (a week is usually enough). I would recommend going to Grenoble in particular, which is a mere hour and a half away on the bus, as it is the capital of the Alps and this is where you will have the best view of beautiful mountains such as Chartreuse and Belledonne. A key thing to do in the city is to travel up to the Bastille, which is an old fort which is placed near the top of a hill accessible from the city centre. You can get to the top either using the telepherique or cablecar which leaves from the edge of the Isere river which runs through the city, or it is possible to walk up the hill relatively easily to the viewing points. From there, there is a fantastic view over the Belledonne mountain range. If you go soon enough in the year, there will be plenty of snow on the mountains and even skiing opportunities if you are organised. Later on in the year, hiking is possible around the entire Grenoble region for those who enjoy the mountains. I'd also recommend eating any of our cheesy dishes such as tartiflette or raclette.

If you want to travel further afield, it is also worth knowing that it is possible to get to Paris or Marseille from Lyon in two hours using the TGV. As Lyon is quite central, this means you will have many options in terms of travel around France (or even Italy or Switzerland) without travelling for too much time.

Conclusion:

Overall, I would highly recommend going to Lyon for an Erasmus. The city is beautiful, the weather is fantastic and the staff at the university and hospitals were all very welcoming and helpful. I thoroughly enjoyed my placements and classes and feel that I have greatly developed my abilities as a doctor and explored the areas of medicine that I find to be of interest to me. I also believe the alpine region to be the best and most beautiful in all of France although for obvious reasons I am very biased.

Key points:

- Arrive at some point during the week preceding the start date to complete admin and enrolment.
- Get yourself a Tecely card for transport around Lyon. You can do this at any TCL office (Transports en Commun Lyonnais). This requires a passport photo and proof of being a student (for discounted tickets).
- Choose accommodation near a metro stop if possible.