

Erasmus placement in Lyon

Why I chose the European Studies

I chose the European option since I am fluent in French and I thought this represents an excellent opportunity for me to practice my French. It would also be beneficial if I intend to pursue my future career in a French speaking country. This would give me the chance to learn from French doctors and learn how things work in other countries.

The French course was definitely demanding and required extra effort. Going for evening classes from 6pm to 8pm every week was extremely tiring. Besides, finding time to complete French homework and revise for French exams was challenging. Many of my friends quit the European option because of the time we needed to invest in it. I was tempted to quit for the same reason, however, I persevered with it and in the end it was definitely worth it.

The four months spent in France have been a wonderful experience and I would recommend it to other students.

Lyon

At first I struggled between Paris and Lyon. Paris was an attractive option since it had a vibrant city life and the universities had an excellent reputation. I finally chose Lyon since through some research and advice from friends I met through the buddy scheme, I realised Lyon would suit me best. Lyon is a beautiful vibrant city found in the Rhone-Alpes region. It is divided in 9 arrondissements. It is very student-friendly and the cost of living is cheaper than Paris.

Lyon has several interesting places of interest such as the Fourviere which is one of the highest points in Lyon and offers a magnificent view of the city. On the top of the Fourviere hill sits the Basilica Cathedral which is a must-see place. Other must-see places include Vieux Lyon and Parc de la Tete d'or. La Part- Dieu and Confluences malls were the 2 main malls found in Lyon.

There are two main rivers in Lyon: the Rhone and Saone. By mid-april, there is nice sunny weather and one is able to enjoy drinks at the Quays of Rhone river.

The Erasmus placement takes place in a perfect period where one is able to enjoy skiing during the 1st few winter months, then enjoy the lovely sunny days towards the end of April and May.

University

There are 3 main university buildings in Lyon; University Claude Bernard Lyon 1 (UCBL1) for medicine and sciences, University Lumiere Lyon 2 for social sciences and University Jean Moulin Lyon 3 for Law. The medical school at UCBL1 was divided into 2 branches Lyon Est and Lyon Sud.

I chose Lyon Sud, which is found in Oullin. This is slightly outside Lyon. Despite the placements being of excellent quality, I would advise against choosing Lyon Sud since they are not used to receiving Manchester students and they have a completely different system to Lyon Est. The system does not always work in the favour of Manchester students.

Students at Lyon Est had 6 weeks of placement followed by 6 weeks of study (lectures at university), whereas in Lyon Sud, students had 3 months of placement and they had to attend placements only in the mornings; afternoons were reserved for study. The system at Lyon Est works better for Manchester Students since we do not have to go for lectures.

Choosing Lyon Sud was slightly inconvenient for me. First of all, the semester at Lyon Sud starts on the 3rd January and the European option starts on the 29th January. This meant that I not only missed the induction session but also 3 whole weeks of placement. Each placement at Lyon Sud lasts for a duration of 6 weeks, which meant I could only do 2 placements during the 16 weeks of Erasmus. The university offers 2 weeks of holiday; 1 week of winter vacation in February and 1 week of Easter vacation in April. Moreover, each placement carries an ECT score of 5, which means the maximum ECT score one can obtain is 10. This does not meet the ECT requirements at the Manchester medical school which is around 30 ECTs. I had to send out various emails to sort this problem which was time consuming and resulted in a delay in receiving the grant.

The university offered several courses which students were free to sign up to. French classes were offered once a week in the evening from 5:30 pm to 8 pm. This was not compulsory. It was a good way to meet other Erasmus students, however the lessons were lengthy and tiring, especially when I had to go to classes straight after a long day at the hospital.

The main medical library was in the Rockefeller building in Grange Blanche. The University card used an 'Izly' portal which could be topped up online and used to pay for food in the university cafeteria or even to pay for laundry services at university accommodations.

To be able to begin placements, it is mandatory for students to have an insurance (responsabilite civile) called SMERRA. This cost around 28 euros and was available from any SMERRA agency. Without the insurance, students are not allowed to begin their placements.

Placements

The two placements I chose included plastic surgery and oncology. For each placement, Erasmus students are given an evaluation form. The evaluation form assessed areas such as attendance, clinical knowledge and participation. For each area, a score was allocated and a total score of more than 11 over 20 enabled students to pass the placement. In some placements, doctors were flexible about the evaluation form and students would easily pass, while on other placements, doctors were quite strict and additionally required a small power point presentation on a case observed in order to pass the placement.

Plastic surgery

Plastic surgery at the St Joseph St Luc hospital of Lyon was my first elective placement. St Joseph St Luc hospital was located near Quay Claude Bernard. It was a modern hospital in a perfect view of the Fouvriere hill and the Basilica Cathedrals. I spent 8 weeks in the department. I thought the placement was enriching and I got to learn a lot from the French surgeons.

The placement was organised in such a way that I had to spend 4 weeks in theatres and the remaining 4 weeks in clinics. There were around 5 medical students from (year 3 to year 6) on the placement. Medical students are known as externes. Externes are usually supervised by interns. A typical day starts at 07:30 am with the ward round. Ward rounds were particularly helpful since doctors used less medical jargon to explain conditions to patients. As medical students, our role was to shadow doctors

during ward rounds, then depending on the schedule, either attend clinics and clerk patients or assist surgeons in theatre.

I thoroughly enjoyed assisting in various surgeries including flap reconstruction, skin grafting, abdominoplasty, rhinoplasty and face lifting among others. During clinics, I had several opportunities to take histories and examine patients. I observed a variety of cases ranging from reconstructive surgery for severe burns to aesthetic surgery such as liposuction. Plastic surgery was an extremely diverse field, where on one hand, patients presented with severe burns and on the other hand, patients presented with discontent over minor body problems. A case that stuck to my mind was that of a 3 y/o child coming from a war zone with a severely burnt face, needed several skin graft and reconstruction.

Medical students were given a card which could be topped up at the hospital cafeteria called the Self. The card was used to buy food at the SELF and also to obtain a white coat. The meals cost on average 4 euros.

Oncology

For my next placement, I spent 6 weeks in the oncology department of Centre Hospitalier Lyon Sud. I was under the impression that the placement would be on general oncology, however, it was specifically radiotherapy. At first I thought it might not be very interesting for students since radiotherapy was complicated and not exactly appropriate for my level, however, it turned out to be a good placement overall.

The placement was particularly helpful in enabling me to practice clerking cancer patients. I also had the chance to follow patients up, before and after treatment with radiotherapy. I learn about the various effects the treatments had on patients and also had the opportunity to observe procedures such as brachytherapy in theatres. Moreover, I had several opportunities to observe doctors breaking bad news to patients and relatives as well as deal with angry patients and manage their expectations. It was interesting to note that the French used the same SPIKES system to break bad news.

The role of medical students was to shadow doctors, clerk new patients and observe radiotherapy techniques. In order to pass the placement, I had to do a power point presentation on any interesting case I observed.

Erasmus students at Lyon Sud did not receive a hospital card and were not allowed to use the SELF. However, food could be bought from the Lyon Sud University cafeteria. Since I did not have a hospital card, I was not given a white coat and had to borrow one from other interns. It might be worthwhile bringing your own white coat in case one is not provided at the placement.

Overall I thought I managed to get quite a lot out of both placements. The nurses and doctors were very helpful and were keen to explain things to me. During the first few weeks, I struggled slightly with the technical French terms, however, after spending some time in the department, my medical vocabulary improved. I realised that the French classes taught at the Manchester medical school helped a lot.

Differences and similarities in systems

Differences

1. Outfits- France observed a more informal approach in the sense that doctors were not required to be dressed formally to come to work. Casual outfits such as jeans and shoes were worn unlike in the UK.
2. White coats- It is compulsory for doctors and medical students to wear white coats in hospitals in France. I had mixed feelings about the white coat. On one hand, it was extremely handy to have huge pockets to keep stethoscopes, note pads and what not. On the other hand, these were not changed daily which meant the risk of spreading infection was higher.
3. Training- In France, medical students attend medical schools for 6 years. During the final year, students rank their career choices and these are allocated on the basis of an extremely competitive exam (the ECN), unlike the UK, where the career choice is made after internship.
4. Doctor title- In the UK, medical school graduates are called doctors, however, in France, it is only after completing a thesis that medics are called doctors.
5. Doctor-patient relationship- While on placements, I was surprised to see doctors telling patients off or even being rude at times. This is however not abnormal and patients tended to rely on their doctors to make decisions for them. Unlike in the UK, the concept of shared decision-making is not observed widely. I also noticed that French patients tended to be less uncomfortable with intimate exams than patients in the UK. In fact, at first I was slightly taken aback by patients who come in clinic rooms and started to undress without being told to do so while the doctors were still taking the history. However, this was considered normal.
6. Informal approach- the French observe a very informal approach among colleagues. Junior doctors, nurses, health care assistants and consultants call each other by their first name. In the beginning this was unusual and slightly uncomfortable but I soon adapted quite easily to the friendly environment.

Similarities

1. Hospitals- clinics and ward rounds took place in similar ways
2. Hygiene- the same hygiene conditions were observed such bare below elbows, hand-washing, etc.
3. Recording information- both paper documents and electronic methods were used to store patient information similar to the UK

Accommodation

I chose to live in the university student accommodation called Residence Crous de la Madeleine, located in the 3rd arrondissement. The rooms were en-suite with plenty of storage space and a mini fridge. On each floor there were about 15 rooms. The kitchen was shared between 2 floors, approximately 30 residents. This was not ideal, nevertheless, not everyone used the kitchen regularly. Internet connection in the rooms were via Ethernet cables.

The monthly rent was 267 euros, which needed to be settled at the beginning of the month. The fees were paid by calendar month thus despite moving into the accommodation during the last week of January, students are still expected to pay for the whole month. Therefore, it is worth looking into cheaper temporary accommodations for the 1st few days; then moving into the university accommodation in February. For the first month, students were required to pay a deposit of 230 euros and also a non-refundable fees of 110 euros for admin work. Moreover, it was compulsory to buy

insurance (ADF l'équité formule étudiante) for the room. Therefore, expect to spend at least 600 euros on accommodation during the first month.

For an addition of 10 euros per month, students could rent of 2 bed sheets, 1 pillowcase, 1 pillow and 1 blanket. The bed sheets and pillow case could be changed twice in a month and this was included in the price. The laundry worked by contactless payment only.

Students were eligible to apply for a 'CAF' bursary. La CAF pays one third of the rent. Applying for La CAF is slightly complicated and requires a French bank account.

<http://www.caf.fr/allocataires/mes-services-en-ligne/faire-une-demande-de-prestation>

It is worth taking an appointment stating the date and time of your arrival since staff may not be available to help out of hours.

Travel and Transport

When coming from the Lyon St Exupéry airport, the Rhone express which is a tram service, cost around 14 euros. Only coins and cards can be used in the ticket machines.

Students can get a monthly travel pass of about 32 euros to travel around Lyon. This can be used in the metro, buses as well as trams and can be purchased in any TCL travel shop. The pass does not include the airport travel. Other means of transport commonly used in Lyon are bicycles. These are available for rent at a price of 15 euros per year at any Velov service point.

The TCL travel app is a very useful tool for travelling. <http://plan-interactif.tcl.fr/>

The coach and train service, Ouigo bus and Ouigo sncf are cheap means of transport to travel from Lyon to other places such as Geneva or Paris.

Food

Lyon has a reputation of having one of the best gastronomy in France. It is known that France has a reputation for cheese, wine and pastries. Lyon had its own traditional Bouchon Lyonnaise which was mainly a meat-based cuisine. These tend to be on the expensive side. Some good student spots include l'Épicerie in Vieux Lyon and the Wallace bar in Bellecour for drinks.

Useful to know

Grant

The first instalment arrives towards the end of February, therefore it is worth ensuring that you have enough funds for the first month. This is usually around 660 euros. The next instalment is only available after the Erasmus placement ends. Therefore, the first instalment should be spent wisely otherwise you will struggle by the end of the placement.

Socialising

It is a good idea to join the Erasmus Facebook group to meet other Erasmus students from other countries and other courses. The group often organises fun outings such as one-day trips to Geneva.

Forms

Completing UPSAs, UCExs and UCMDs before going for your Erasmus placement will make your life a lot easier. Keeping up to date with portfolio is always useful.

Scanning and printing

Printing can be done using your Lyon uni card at the medical school library, however, scanners are not available. There are plenty of scanning apps that you can download on your phone.

Documents and forms

Bring all documents needed for registration. This is available from the University handbook which will be emailed to you. It is worth bringing several copies since the accommodation often requires the same documents.

Bring many passport size photos, these are needed for accommodation and university registration.

Check My placement regularly since a delay in submitting forms results in a delay in receiving the grant.

Ensuring the learning agreement is filled out early is helpful since it requires 3 signatures- the student, Manchester medical school and the university at Lyon. A delay in uploading the learning agreement will result in a delay in obtaining the grant.

Health

Organise an appointment with occupational health to obtain a certificate of travel. It is worth taking the appointment early since it can get quite busy. Apply for an EHIC card. Bring your vaccination cards with you to Lyon.

PSA

Some students tend to take some days off in March and come back to Manchester to do their PSA. This will depend entirely on how your placement in Lyon is arranged and whether your supervisor is able to give you time off.

Most students tend to sit for the PSA after the Erasmus placement, in June, which means that you only have one attempt at passing the exam before you start your FY job. Remember that if you decide to revise for exams while in France, the online BNF does not work.

International students

International students are not entitled to La CAF.

It is worth starting your visa application early, around November time to avoid having to sort out visa in December during revision time for finals.

Using the TLS contact centre for visa application is useful. You will be required to make an appointment and deposit your documents in either Edinburgh or London. Once you deposit the documents, it takes around 1 - 2 weeks for the visa to arrive if all documents are satisfactory, therefore make sure you allocate enough time before your departure.

The visa application fees is usually £87, this is covered by the university. There is a delivery fees to pay if you choose to have your visa delivered to your postal address.

https://fr.tlscontact.com/gb/lon/page.php?pid=long_stay_more90

Note that for visa application, you will need a proof of address, therefore you will be required to sort out your accommodation before applying. Additionally, you will need a proof of financial means of support to ensure you have enough funds in France.

The learning agreement (with all 3 signatures) is also required for visa application.

It is essential to bring some copies of the visa obtained and your vaccination cards. You may be asked to take a tuberculosis test at CDHS in Lyon.

What I gained from this experience

In general I enjoyed my Erasmus experience. At first I thought, the exchange was lengthy, however, 4 months went by rather quickly.

Linguistic development

It was interesting to work with French doctors and practice my French. I definitely improved on my medical French vocabulary.

It was nice to learn about how the medical system works and learn about the various teaching styles across countries. It was also fun to increase my social networking.

Intercultural understanding

Through the buddy scheme organised by the Manchester medical school, I met a French student who came to the UK when I was in fourth year. We practiced communicating with each other in French and English, visited places together and discovered each other's cultures. We kept in touch and during my Erasmus placement in France, I managed to meet her again and she helped me explore the French culture. I thought this was an amazing experience and a really nice way to meet people.

Future plans

This experience has increased my ability to adapt more easily and this is helpful if I decide to pursue my career in other countries.

I am hoping this experience will help increase my employability if I decide to work in a French-speaking country in the future. I did enjoy spending time in Lyon and I would consider going back for job in the future.

Useful contact

Lyon Sud

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