

ERASMUS 2014
PARIS V – UNIVERSITE PARIS DESCARTES

Why you chose to study on the European Studies programme?

The European Studies Program was a clear choice from the start of Manchester and one of my main motivations for applying. In fact it was my deciding factor of whether to apply to Leeds or Manchester. Although I love medicine and it is what I want to do with my life, I have many interests outside medicine, including travelling and learning languages. I am bilingual in English and Serbian and learnt French throughout school up until A Level, and after such a long time, I did not want to give it up. The added bonus of a four month placement rather than two after finals was also incredibly enticing. Even though I was very apprehensive about it before I set off, and even though there were many negative aspects as well, the Erasmus placement has been one of the best experiences of my life.

An overview of my experience of Paris

Travelling to Paris:

I'm lucky because my home is in London, but I would recommend taking the Eurostar to Paris. When you are moving away from home for 4 months, you need all the baggage you can get! With Eurostar you can take two massive suitcases that no one weighs, so I would really recommend that!

My Living Situation:

My living situation was an absolute nightmare to start with! I was meant to live with two other girls from the European Studies Program who signed for a flat for just the two of them because they said there weren't any 3 bedroom flats around. I had rejected my offer of a place in halls in order to be able to live with them, and so after all of this was left completely homeless!

It also really isn't wise to look for Parisian flats from the UK as there are lots of scams out there, so beware! A lot of people ask you for a deposit up front, and all in all, there are many dodgy dealings going on! So I really wouldn't recommend this to anyone. I wouldn't really recommend getting a flat on your own/with a friend full stop. French medical students aren't welcoming or inclusive to say the least (I will talk more about this in another section) so I would highly recommend getting a place in halls. Although this feels very much like a step backwards having left halls and having been living

with friends for numerous years, I couldn't emphasise enough how much this is the best thing to do in Paris! It is the cheapest option by far and also prevents you from being isolated.

So after being left homeless, and unable to find somewhere to live from the UK, I was introduced to another girl in the same position as me going to Paris. So we decided to look for flats together, but little did we know how hard it would be! We spent our first two weeks in Paris moving from hostel to hostel, moving into a temporary family friend's apartment which then proceeded to flood, to move again from hostel to hostel. It was an absolute nightmare! All of the suggestions that anyone gave to us, we had already exhausted all those options prior to contacting them. I would not recommend what we went through or our approach to anyone! Finding housing in Paris is nigh on impossible!

Apart from being faced with people who were trying to scam you left right and centre, it was virtually impossible to find a two bedroom flat. There are plenty of one bedroom flats out there, but you would be hard pushed to find anything bigger than that! Our saving grace came in the form of Cité Universitarie in Paris. I again couldn't emphasise enough how much you should apply there!

of Cité Universitarie is a huge complex of houses/halls from different countries on site, and you have to apply to each one individually. I would recommend applying to the British house first, and if you have no luck there, apply to the American house as they take people from everywhere. If you have citizenship with any other country that has a house there, apply there first too. But I would just say email and apply to them all. It very much has an American campus feel and is absolutely beautiful! We were offered two places in the American house, and it was definitely the best decision we ever made!

We had the best social life of everyone that was in Paris by far! We made so many friends there from different parts of the world, did all the cultural things that you would want to in Paris and all the going out you could ever want! Contrary to French halls that are very antisocial, ours was the complete opposite, and like I said, I couldn't recommend it enough! It was because of my accommodation and the people I met there that I enjoyed Paris so much, which I would not have done otherwise. As for how much it cost, it was £475 per month, which is a really reasonable price.

Travelling Around:

The way in which I travelled around Paris was mainly by using the metro. It's very much like the underground, but much faster I think. They also have the RER which is their overground train system, but unlike in London, or in fact anywhere in the UK, it is incredibly fast, efficient and regular. It is no different to the rest of the metro, so don't be put off by living somewhere near an RER stop. The metro is really great and really convenient. It costs about 65 euros for a month navigo pass (their equivalent to the oyster card) and this is definitely the cheapest metro option. Warning though, buy the monthly pass on the first of the month! If for example you bought a month pass on the 29th September, you would only have it for a day! Same goes for weekly passes – buy it on a Monday as if you bought it on a Wednesday, you'll only have it for four days but pay the same price! This might sound like a very silly system (because it is), but that is how it is over there! You can use your navigo pass on the metro, RER, buses, trams etc. The only station I really would not recommend at night is Gare du Nord – seriously dodgy after a certain hour so I would really avoid it at night, including changing over at it. I am not being sensitive at all, but this is what all Parisians would tell you, and having tried it, I would say just don't do it! Otherwise, a lot of my friends who like to cycle used the velib – the equivalent to London's Boris bikes. A year subscription costs about thirty Euros and for that you can use the bikes unlimited for forty-five minutes at a time.

Free Time:

Paris really is an incredible city and is so beautiful. I chose to live there for many reasons. Personally I think that if you're going to study French and live anywhere in France, it has to be Paris! I am also a London girl born and bred and so wanted to try out living in one of the other greatest capital cities that the world has. Finally, I thought that even if by some chance I met absolutely no one, I would still be able to keep myself occupied on a daily basis.

You can really entertain yourself by wandering for hours on end. Art and museums are plentiful and if you are under twenty five then they are on the whole completely free. Exhibitions are usually paid for – but you can sign up for a years pass at the Centre Pompidou which cost twenty Euros and gets you in to all they have to offer. I would also really recommend going to see a ballet or opera at the Paris Opera House as it is really a wonderful experience. Definitely go to Versailles as well as it is just breathtaking – I just didn't realise one place could possibly be so gold and kitsch!

For your timeout equivalent, use the on Paris lebonbon blog to find

out what to do. I can't deny that t Paris is expensive and is a similar price to London, but you can find good deals and the blog definitely helps. Paris hosts a range of fun areas to go out/have dinner – for the cheaper ones Republique/ Bastille/ Oberkampt are great. Bastille and the Latin quarter are also really great to go out in and you can find some really cool bars there. Also try to go and see a gig at Le Trianon. Such a beautiful venue. Kind of like Brixton Academy in London, but better. Really great for small, intimate gigs.

Eating:

I would say that food is pretty expensive in Paris. There are lots of little supermarkets scattered all over the place, but they are more expensive than the big ones. You do have to really hunt to find a big one, and it is very different to the UK. A good large one that I found was called Auchan. There wasn't one hear me, but I also heard that Dia is also pretty cheap. Unfortunately I don't think there is any way of getting around that. There are also fruit and vegetable markets around and I would recommend buying your Fresh produce from there as it does end up being cheaper and of better quality. There is also Lidl, although not an authentic French experience, is a cheap one. Whilst you're there, you have to sample all the delicious cakes and baked goods from the patisseries! They are to die for! Go to Angelina's for some heavenly hot chocolate!

Restaurants as a general rule are pretty good. However, I am a vegetarian, and I can safely say that France is not vegetarian friendly! They don't really seem to understand the concept, and heaven forbid you're vegan, I genuinely don't know what you would eat out! I'd just say really plan where you are going to eat out if you are vegetarian. Look places up beforehand and pick and choose carefully that way otherwise all you will eat is goat's cheese salad! And trust me, there is only so much goat's cheese salad that one person can take! Le Potager du Marais is a really delicious vegetarian restaurant that I would recommend – even my non vegetarian friends really enjoyed it. Another great restaurant we found was Le Petit Trianon near Sacre Coeur – really delicious, reasonably priced food.

The University – Paris Descartes:

The University itself is incredibly old and beautiful and is the most prestigious medical school in France, but I would say that my placements in France were considerably less organised than my placements in Manchester. The Erasmus coordinator is very good

and she sorts out your student cards etc the first day you get there. A lot of the chefs de service don't exactly expect you when you turn up! The university did organise welcome drinks, which was a nice way to meet some other students. They also continued to organise other evenings throughout the four months which was also nice.

My Hospital Placements:

First thing to say is that hospital dress is very different in France and from what I can gather, most of Europe than in England. The usual attire is very casual, trainers and jeans are perfectly acceptable, and indeed most of the consultants wear them. You basically wear what you would from day to day to hospital. You just cover it all up nicely with a white coat that your hospital will give to you. So I really wouldn't bother taking any smart hospital clothes with you as it is just a waste of packing space. It makes a really nice change to be able to wear casual clothes to hospital and is very comfortable! Placements do start a lot earlier in France though, so be prepared for early starts!

Also, however nice, friendly and welcoming were all the French medical students whilst they are here, offering our numbers and inviting them to nights out, I would not expect the same treatment. They are actually quite cold and have the attitude of my friends are my friends and my colleagues are my colleagues.

Placement 1: PARIS SAINT JOSEPH, NEONATOLOGY

My first placement was at Saint Joseph, which is a private hospital in Paris. It was what you would expect from a private hospital – super new, lovely and shiny. I chose this placement as I have a strong interest in doing paediatrics as a career.

There is a difference in routine like I said compared to UK hospitals. I had to be there for eight thirty am and left usually by one in the afternoon. In the morning we had a ward round which involved us all sitting around the desk discussing the patients and not actually seeing them. Afterwards, in a very French manner, everyone went off for an excessively long break from the strenuous ward round for coffee and cake. After this, it was the medical students job to prescribe the medications (essentially milk), fill in the patient records with blood results, observations etc, examine the babies that needing discharging (then having this checked by a senior member of staff), and then writing the discharge letters. Other times in the week there were staff meetings where we had to do power point presentations on a new interesting research paper.

The positives – I wish I could say there were more positives to this placement, but there weren't that many. The best thing about it was that you got to cuddle tiny, adorable French babies! Also, it was good in the respect that there were too many doctors and not enough to do. However that did make it very boring as you were expected to stay the whole time even though there was nothing to do. It was also good practice for my medical French to write prescriptions and discharge letters and a good opportunity to get some UCEXs signed off.

The negatives – the placement was very long, ten weeks to be precise, and I felt that after the first month I had really learnt all that I could considering it is such a niche part of paediatrics. It also gets quite dull and repetitive after four weeks - the routine was pretty monotonous at times and it would have been really interesting to also visit other departments.

The worst part of it was however that the chef de service was not really a very nice person. She was very mean to me on a number of occasions and upset me a few times, and no one has ever made me feel that way in the entirety of my medical school career. None of her staff liked her, and even her registrar said to me that she was 'very mean'. This meant that the working environment was not the best to say the least.

So overall, I would not say that neonatology is a specialty that I would pick again knowing what I know now!

PLACEMENT 2: PARIS COCHIN, OBSTETRICS AND GYNAECOLOGY

As soon as I arrived at my second placement I could tell already it was more for me. The staff were much friendlier and kinder, and the whole thing was far better organised. There were more students and the cases more varied. The only downside was that you had to organise with the other students who does what which week, which is a bit manic and takes a whole day, but after that is fine.

The department in the hospital where I was working was completely newly built and was very nice to work in. I had obviously done an obstetrics and gynaecology placement before in the UK, but I really fell in love with it here. I got to experience lots of different aspects of it, from ward rounds and consultations, to performing ultrasounds and helping out in theatre. I also had opportunities to present on ward rounds which was really useful for my French. I think my medical French really improved on this placement, as compared to the last placement where I felt more like I was doing a

lot more of the administrative aspect, on this one I spent most of the time talking to the patients. I also had the opportunity to see some really interesting and rare cases which I would not necessarily have had the chance to see in the UK. Although still not as warm as we would be over here, I also found the other students to be a lot more welcoming than the first placement.

Overall, I would say that this was a really great placement and would highly recommend it.

What you have learnt on the placement with regard to any differences to UK hospitals and practice, the medical training programme, the contrasting medical cultures:

I think on the whole the French medical is pretty good, with patients getting a good quality of care in two hospitals I have been at, especially in terms of getting the tests speedily. I do however feel that communication skills and patient centered care is something that the French really need to work on and is the biggest difference comparatively. Medicine in France is far more paternalistic, I think that this is very cultural and patients do not expect any different and do not seem to have a problem with it. There were quite a few situations however where I felt uncomfortable in the way in which doctors were speaking to patients and that things could have been handled differently. Furthermore as I have had the time to talk to patients, I have found that they have really appreciated someone listening to their ideas, concerns and expectations, and I know we get it drilled into us, but it really does make a huge difference. The patients treat you very differently and I think it really does change the whole patient experience.

How you have gained from this experience in terms of linguistic development?

The experience definitely improved my French immensely. I don't think that spending time in a country can be substituted for anything. It is clear that you cannot learn a language from a classroom and whilst the lessons in Manchester kept my language skills ticking gently over, I do not feel I learnt that much there. This is really not a reflection of the teaching, but more the effort that I put into them. I think it is very challenging to do both medicine and French, and unfortunately, medicine takes priority every time.

The only problem with living in the American house was that 'at home' I spoke minimal French. Whilst time at hospital helped my language, the language you use there is pretty limited and medical

lingo is essentially the same as English. This was obviously comforting, but the main goal of coming to France is really to advance your French and so I think to do this, making French friends is key to immerse yourself in the language. Having said this, it is much easier said than done.

I would say that now I can understand about 95% of what is being said, but I still do find it hard to express myself at times. Some days you have good days, and some days you have bad days. I have really found that how much I can understand really depends on the person – how quickly they speak, if they merge their words, their accent and if they have a speech impediment. I think the most important thing is the confidence when you speak and I feel I still have a way to go there.

How you have gained from this experience in terms of future plans?

I have my room until the end of May and so am going to go back to Paris after the one week of training in Manchester for an extra week where I can really get to enjoy it. Although it has been a wonderful experience, it has firmly cemented to me that the French are too culturally different for me to want to ever live there. I am however very interested in working in developing countries and knowing French opens up the opportunity to work in other French speaking countries.

Any practical issues and further tips that future students on this placement should know about?

Just the things that I have already mentioned and something I wish I had known - as a student you can get CAF (a housing allowance for students), and although very bureaucratic, you get 250 Euros a month towards your accommodation. Also, open a bank account as soon as possible, so that if you want to get the CAF you can, and also, if you work in a state hospital, they can pay you. You also get a pretty decent amount of money from the Erasmus grant is pretty decent – every little helps!

I rented my house in Manchester for the whole year and I would really advise against this. All you need is a 6 month lease until the end of January – the rest is a waste of money. I just really wanted to live with my housemates that I had lived with for the past 5 years! I would advise all European Studies students to live with other European Studies students for the first few months of fifth year in Manchester. A much cheaper option!

I would just really enjoy it and make the most of an incredible city!

My Final Impressions:

I have had such an incredible in Paris and I really think it's a once in a lifetime opportunity! Don't be put off about the fact that you won't be lying on a beach somewhere! You will have an incredible time away and if you want that beach, you have plenty of time between out last training week in Manchester and graduation to get an exotic trip in! I have made some incredible friends and have vastly improved my French. I think knowing different languages opens so many doors and is great to have on your CV. Also, don't forget that you get to be on elective for 4 months whilst everyone else gets two! Even with all the negative aspects, I have had an amazing time and would recommend it to everyone, and I hope you enjoy it as much as I did!