

France

ESCEM/ TOURS, France
FJ Cava, 2003

What to bring:

You need a laptop. Without my laptop I would have been lost completely. It doesn't matter if it's a Mac or PC. Everyone here has a HP and I have a PowerBook and things worked just fine. Computers work on all currents and Hz throughout the world so you'll just need to change the plug and not the power.

Clothes should be for the season. It was extremely cold when I was in Tours but it started very hot. So it's difficult to say exactly what to bring. Clothes should be appropriate for business school.

Arrival Information:

I flew into Charles de Gaulle airport and took the train from there to the Gare du Tours. It was very easy and inexpensive. Representatives from ESCEM met me at the Gare du Tours and things went very smoothly. After contacting ESCEM I'm sure you can make arrangements to be met at the Gare du Tours as well.

On site orientations:

They went very well. There was about a week of orientation before classes started. I met all the other foreign exchange students, got used to the school, and was greeted and oriented by a student group called Aloha. They were charged with helping us get oriented to the culture and the school and they were wonderful. I'm sure they'll still have the same system when you get here. They even contacted us before leaving the US to see what types of activities we'd like to do after we arrived, like visit a castle, canoe on the Loire, etc.

Language:

French is spoken obviously and the better your French level the better experience you'll have. French is the key to the culture and the way to get around and survive. Without a strong French background you will struggle. I would recommend getting as much French as possible before you leave.

Money & Banking:

ESCEM helped us start a bank account with Société Générale. They offered 30 € for opening an account with them. They are one of the largest and most common banks. There's also PNB, Banc Populaire and others. I would open an account with whichever banc the school suggests. Accounts are based on age. I had a different account than the rest of the students since I'm a bit older than everyone else. The monthly charge is about 5€ without any interest. So it's not a great account but you get a Carte Blanche. This is useful because it's like a VISA or MC to be used almost anywhere. VISA and MC are

taken also almost anywhere but there is a charge for money exchange every time you use the American card.

I would suggest do one large money transfer to the French account as early as possible. This will cut down on money exchange costs and you'll have money through out your sejour. I had a horrible time with finances and would recommend doubling any budget you may come up with. The € was much strong then the \$ and therefore lost a lot of money in exchange. If you should have the luck for the reverse then you'll make money when you transfer your funds from the US to France. I on the other hand lost money every transfer.

Housing:

ESCEM sent me a questionnaire before my arrival in order to find out what type of housing. I requested a single studio. The other choices were living with other students or to live in a dormitory. I would suggest that you balance your choice between your budget and you lifestyle. I had an extremely small studio but heating, electricity and water were included. Some apartments you have to pay utilities extra. My studio was also extremely expensive from the beginning and I negotiated the price to a much lower price of 360 € month. I paid one month worth of security deposit plus the first month. Then I arraigned with my landlady to pay her once a month.

If you stay longer then 6 months you'll have the right to a Carte de Sejour and therefore the CAF which is a housing allowance given to all students in order to help them with their housing. I did not have a right to the CAF because I only stayed for 5 months and therefore no Carte de Sejour.

Health Insurance:

I chose to get the Health Insurance suggested by SFSU. I applied on line and printed out the card that was on-line. I then got a card in the mail and it wasn't at all expensive. It was underwritten by Combined Insurance Company, www.ssi-incorporated.com. I would recommend it. I have not needed to use it thank God but it is needed for a student VISA. It also wasn't that expensive, about \$175 for the entire 5 months I was here.

Registering for Classes:

This was extremely confusing because classes here are done by filiere or track. You choose a track by your 3rd year. I was a 3rd year student because I'm getting my MBA. Others may be in the 1st or 2nd year and I'm not sure how that happens or who decided that I follow the 3rd year. I chose the track I wanted based on the information that was available on their website, www.escem.fr and my interests. I chose Marketing of Services and then followed it up with SFSU professors signing off their classes for the Marketing of Services track in order to get SFSU credit for the time I spent here. ESCEM already had my registration and I just got my schedule went I went through orientation.

Laundry:

Lavo 37 was the closest Laundromat to me. It took awhile for me to locate a Laundromat and I had to finally ask at a local hotel where I could find the closest Laundromat to my house. It was a coin operated Laundromat and cost about 10€/week. I would budget for this. I would put my laundry in my luggage and walk it to the Laundromat. Wash and dry it, and then walk it back to the house. It was a pin in the ass but a necessity.

Health, Diet & Exercise:

Well all I can say is the French food is the best in the world! It was awesome the diet. I've never eaten as well as I have in my life since I've gotten here. I would make friends quickly and learn how they prepare food because you'll not find common American things in the markets. Some of the stuff will prove to be puzzling how to prepare. So make friends and watch how they prepare their food and then mimic their preparation. Health, I was never sick. Actually I felt the healthiest during my sejour in TOURS. Exercise, I walked a lot everywhere and took the bus so I felt that I was in pretty good shape. There were many gyms you can join and one even close to ESCM but it costs about 25 €/month. There are a lot of health trails and bike trails and paths to run and walk.

Transportation in the City:

I got a FilBleu bus pass which is about 23€/month for a student. I would try and get it as early as possible when you arrive because after the students arrive the lines are horrible. It took me 3.5 hours to get my bus pass and I was not a happy camper. So I would recommend to try and get your pass as soon as you arrive. Also you recharge your pass every month at the local tobacconist or at the bus station itself. The buses go about everywhere and they come much more regularly then in America. Bus 5 takes you right to the school. There are also a lot of bike trails so if you buy a used bike you can get everywhere. I would recommend this. I didn't do this and wish I had.

Travel on Breaks and For Field Trips:

Very simple and easy with the TGV (High speed train line) or slow train. I would save your money and visit the castles close to TOURS. There are many and this region is known for them. Paris is very close for day or weekend trips. There is also an airport here that you can fly to London round-trip for only about 30€so it's very inexpensive and I would recommend visiting London. It's very easy to travel and there are many opportunities to go places. Just save your money and you'll be able to do a lot of traveling.

Telephone and Mail:

Telephone, I would have a phone that takes SIM chips and works on the European frequency 1100/1400 MHz not 900 MHz which is America. All you need to do is buy a SIM chip. You can either sign up for a year contract, which is the cheapest, but at the minimum one year. Or you can buy a SIM chip that is more expensive and you charge it when you run out of credit. This is the method I chose and it worked just fine. I had a T-Mobile Sony Ericson T68i and it worked just fine. There are 3 major companies, SFR,

Bouguyie, and Orange. SFR is the biggest and has the best coverage. Orange is the French company and the next biggest followed by Bouguyie telecom, which has less coverage but is the cheapest.

Mail was sent to my studio and is delivered every day but Sunday. I had no problems. I received and sent mail without any problems.

Employment:

I was not allowed to work because I was not staying long enough. You need to be here longer than 6 months in order to have the right to a Carte de Sejour and with a Carte you can get employment. I did give English classes for 8€/hr in order to get some money coming in.

Class Structure and Studying:

Well there wasn't much to study. There was a lot to read and most of the work is done in groups. I would recommend getting to know the best student in class and becoming their friend. There is an intensity of work here like no other. I don't think they expect you to get everything done that they give you and I think that's why we work in groups. Groups divide the work and then we just put each other's names on the work.

My class had two groups, the Apranti and the Classic. Classics are the students who are without internships and Apranti work for a company. In the middle of the year the Apranti's left for their internship and we had a major project sur terrain to complete.

Computer Accessing:

I would recommend bringing a laptop with wireless access. It's not necessary but it saved me more than once. Internet access throughout the year was spotty. The Internet at school continually cut out and returned and when there were a lot of students on the system practically crashed.

There were computers at school that you could access without having your proper computer but it was much more limited and more difficult to work. Everyone is given an email access, which also allows you to access the intranet, which has supporting documentation and pictures of students and other helpful information provided by the school.

Interaction with Local Students:

Nothing remarkable to say here. They were great. The French are difficult to get to know in the beginning. There seems to be the wall that you need to get over before you can really get into their circle so to say. But after you get over that wall their extremely hospitable people. I wouldn't take your initial contact as a final judgment. It also takes awhile to make friends so be patient with yourself and them. It'll happen.

Places to know and check-out:

Place Plumereaux (open time referred to as Place Plume) – this is like the old market place and where everyone gathers to drink, eat and party. It's where the town gathers to enjoy themselves after work and school.

Rue Colbert – It's the counterpart to Place Plume. It's a walking shopping place. No cars and lots of cafes and little stores.

Rue Gourmand – National Road 1 it's the center town road and you'll quickly get to know it and also Jean Jaures the place where city hall is found and the Court. It's also a place with lots of cafes and shops.

Bring money for shopping, restaurants and travel. If you're good with that then you'll have a wonderful time. Study the French and come with cash and all will be fine.

WEBSITES:

www.tours.fr - Info on Tours itself

www.sncf.fr - Trains

www.escem.fr - School