

# France

CERAM Sophia-Antipolis Nice, France

## **An SFSU student's perspective on studying abroad**

### **Who, What, When, Where and Why? Answers and More...**

S you are thinking about going to CERAM in the French Riviera. I don't blame you. The sun, the beach, the pretty French people and, oh yeah, school. Remember – location, location, location. It's that and then some. Actually it is the "some" that I want to share with you. Fear not my fellow American. You too can enjoy CERAM and the student life just as much as I am now.

I have listed by subject title helpful issues that will make your existence in the Cote d'Azur that much more easy. First, I will start with day one. I will tell you where to go, what to do and why. Then we will go into the school's specifics and what to expect. I will cover classrooms, to the Administration to student life. The next part will cover travel questions. Not the *what* to see (everything) but *how* to see it. Next I will reveal the specifics of the other red tape you have to deal with when you get here. And you thought you could just come here and soak up the sun, wine and cheese. The last part will cover the French and the French Riviera. I will highlight on the best shopping and the best bars. I will then end with some added quirks about the French that every American should know.

### **Arriving**

You arrive in Nice, France. I suggest getting a window seat on the left side of the plane (facing the front) because the view of the French Riviera is breathtaking. Just think - you will be living there now. You will need to fill out a "disembarkation card" stating who you are and what you are doing here. Quite simple. After obtaining your baggage, head out the door and turn left. Keep walking until you see the bus office, which is just around the corner. Purchase a ticket for the 200 Sunbus to whichever town you are going to live in (Antibes or Juan les Pins). Ask for buses that are going to Valbonne, but if you are smart, you won't live there so don't worry about finding transportation.

I recommend obtaining a map beforehand from *GoFrance* or a book on the Mediterranean France. You can also go to [www.iti.fr](http://www.iti.fr) and type in the address of the Residence. Last resort - once you are off the bus ask people for directions.

### **Where to Stay**

The orientation packet suggests some residences: Couleur Soleil, Resideal, and Valbonne. Couleur Soleil is about two blocks from the beach in Juan les Pins and quite small. The rates are usual and are good to start out in before venturing to find your own place, if you want. The rates change practically each month because of vacation peak times. All apartments everywhere are furnished, so you don't have to worry about buying pots, pans or silverware. This is a great thing. It is also close to everything: a block from the post office, the pertinent bus stops, the beach, the supermarket, and

the train station. It is also close to the discos for those late night walks home. The hot water can be scalding and the décor is pink. Besides that it is rather nice.

Resideal is located more inland in Antibes. It is cheaper (a little) than Couleur Soleil, but not as close to everything. Many CERAM international students live there though, so it is kind of like a dormitory. A great social network and the beaches in Antibes are nice.

Valbonne: This is close to the school. Wow. Great perk. Too bad that's the only one. The school itself is located inland, in the hills of Antibes surrounded by trees. Why live there when you have the beach. In short, don't go there.

It is up to you which housing you choose, but stay open to other options. The rent "leases" are monthly so you can up and leave pretty easily. The best advice? Live with someone other than a North American, preferably a French person. There is no better way to learn the language and the culture. You could email Valerie PEACOCK at CERAM ([Valerie.Peacock@cote-azur.cci.fr](mailto:Valerie.Peacock@cote-azur.cci.fr)) and ask her if there are any French students who are looking for roommates. Some students have been lucky this way and have benefited greatly from living with French people.

### **Transport To and From (local destinations)**

*School:* From Juan les Pins, take the 1A bus (which runs every 20 minutes) to the Gare Routiere (Bus Station) in Antibes. Then you walk to Gare SNCF (Train Station) to catch the 2VB bus. This bus passes by CERAM and runs roughly every 40 minutes. Check the schedules obtained at the Gare Routiere for bus times on Saturday and Sunday. The cost for the 1A is 7 ½ francs and for the 2VB is 15 francs one way. I recommend buying a monthly bus pass for 110 francs at the Gare Routiere in Antibes. The price for the same pass if you are older than 25 is 220 francs.

*Everywhere else:* The buses vary in fare. The complete listing of buses and their stops can be viewed at the Gare Routiere in Antibes. Individual bus schedules for each line can be obtained there as well. It is pretty easy to follow. The 9A and 6A go to Carrefour (This is France's equivalent of CostCo). Take the 2VB or the 1VB to get to Grasse (This town hosts a perfumery that allows you to make your own special blend). For other distances farther than this you should take a train.

### **Classrooms**

The classrooms are basic, sort of uncomfortable for the shorter people because the chairs are fixed, unmovable, and grand distance from the tables, which are also fixed. Other rooms have regular tables with moveable chairs so it is not like all the rooms are bad. CERAM has three small amphitheatres where larger classes are held in. These rooms have projector capabilities through remote access and are very clean and modern. On the whole, they are pretty acceptable. They also have what is called La Salle de Marche. This room has real time trading access to Reuters and host classes in Commodity Trading and Portfolio Risk Management.

### **Technology**

CERAM has four big computer rooms and two small computer rooms. When I say big – I mean the size of a smaller classroom. I believe the total number of computers available for students is about 80 for 1300 students. Each computer has a CD Rom and a 3-½ disk drive. Many are old and have sticky keyboards, and/or have disk drives that don't work. To combat this, CERAM sold laptop

computers to many students because access to the LAN and Internet is available after configuration. They have converted more table space for more laptops to connect to so I strongly recommend taking your laptop and your Ethernet Card. The campus has a scanner available for 5 francs per usage. So check with French friends to use theirs. Also, the printers (about 5 of them) work but are often out of either paper or ink. The best idea is to check the printers before accessing a computer.

## **Library**

The library is equivalent to the computer lab and the 24-hour study room at SFSU. Most of the books are in French, naturally. Most of the students obtain needed information from the Internet, which in some cases is better. Many of the texts needed for classes are on hold at the library so you can check out the book rather than buying them. I bought mine because I like to highlight in order to study. I would buy them online from Amazon.co.uk. It is cheaper than the USA based Amazon.com and some books are received within one week.

## **Contents of classes**

I highly recommend two things.

- Get your classes “okayed” in writing by the department chair before you leave to come here.
- Keep all your work you do here for presentation to the department when you come back.

This is protection. Something could come up later, such as the department chair or your faculty advisor leaving or class requirements might change. Keeping all your work will show the subject matter you covered and provide proof to the department of the coursework you completed. It just makes it that much easier to convince the department that the class you took abroad is the equivalent (more or less) to a class at SFSU.

The actual quality of classes differs. They offer management, finance, accounting, marketing, and international business courses. The two examples I know well are in the area of Finance and Marketing. The Finance department at CERAM is highly recommendable. Current professors include a member of the World Bank, a former paper trader for over 20 years, and a former commodity trader for over 10 years. The department has its own website at [www.globalfinance.org](http://www.globalfinance.org) containing faculty backgrounds, course descriptions and syllabi.

On the other hand, the Marketing department varies. The degree of homework and formula vs. case studies varies. It is not the worse in the world, but do consult Martha Pulido via the International Program Office for a clearer understanding. I highly recommend going if your area of concentration or major is in Finance. Again, CERAM is a Masters of Business school so the classes will be on the challenging side.

## **Timeliness of the School**

*In regards to the classes:* The morning classes usually start at 8:30 until 11:45 with a break between 10:00 until 10:15. This break is incredibly flexible. It is amazing, but sometimes the breaks last until 10:30. Watch the other students to determine the normal, acceptable time lag. Some professors hate tardiness and some are more lenient. Again, follow the social cues.

After a 2-hour lunch break, afternoon classes start at 1:45 and last until 5:00 with the official break time at 3:15 until 3:30. A 3-unit class will meet once a week for 3 hours. It's like choosing all night classes at SFSU and meeting once a week. A little different but you get used to it.

*In regards to administration:* Example 1. The school has about 1200 students and it takes the second or third time to tell the office that you have joined or dropped a class. Not very sophisticated. Example 2. You can bring your laptop and using your Ethernet card or other LAN card, you can be configured to use your computer at any of the numerous hook ups located throughout the school. One monkey wrench in your plan – It takes at least two weeks for the Network Administrator to log into the main computer, by inputting identification codes about 20 characters long, so it recognizes your computer when you log on. TWO WEEKS to enter in a stupid ID number. We've complained but the story still holds true, unfortunately.

Moral of the story, keep reminding the school employee about the matter which needs to be accomplished. If at all possible, it would be best to remain in their presence while they get it done. Sometimes the French say "no" just to end your conversation. Word your request differently or try another person before giving up. This is a cultural thing. The French have a lot of red tape and they love their seals of approval. Its actually considered an admirable attribute if one can get passed the red tape quicker than through the normal route. This needs to be done in a tactful manner though. You don't want to burn any bridges. You need all the help you can get for future leaps through bureaucracy.

Your basic student liaisons include Danielle Fortet in the Administration Office. She is very nice but always overloaded. Lawrence Descos and Valerie Peacock are the people in the International Office. Unfortunately, the only time you see them is when you have a problem. Valerie has more contact with the students than Lawrence and is often overloaded too. They are the only ones in the International Office handling about 100 students so it is understandable that they are busy.

## **Student Life**

Try to go for a year. Many reasons support this. It is hard to get adjusted to a lifestyle, only to have it revert to the old way after just getting used to it. One semester flies and two semesters seem to drift quickly as well. You want to adjust and go deeper. You want to saturate yourself with your new surroundings in order to learn all you can about the culture and you. I believe I have learned more about myself than the culture. Take away all the social comforts you were used to and you begin to find out the real you. Not to get too deep into philosophy, but it is the truth. Another reason is for the language. The longer you have in the country, the better in fluency you will become.

Some students come here to travel. Great idea if you can get your studies done as well. Traveling each weekend can be done, especially if you schedule your classes so you have Monday or Friday off for a long weekend. You are an hour away from the Italian border and Europe is greatly diverse, offering completely new surroundings only a short train ride away. One semester might not be enough time to visit all the places you had in mind. Give yourself a year to see the country and get your studies done too.

The first semester I feel is the best. This is because all the foreign students are eager to meet other students. It is easier to make friends and you learn the school's quirks together. Often times the foreign students remain clickish because they take the English classes together. You are surrounded by the French at school, but unless you take classes taught in French, there is not much interaction

with the French people at the start of the year. This all fades away when you are at a party. The French and college students the world over love a good party.

The second semester is where the foreign students venture out to the French more because they made French friends from the semester before and their French is better, so communication is easier. The French students are approachable. It is the language thing that separates the foreign students from the French. Often times the French students speak English well and would like to speak English to you while you practice French with them. This is very helpful on both accounts.

Some French men are overbearing. These are the men who think any foreign student would love to get them. Stay away from them. There are very nice French men so keep your eyes open. French women have a stuck-up air about them. They are probably harder to approach, but are very nice once you get to know them. With French men like the ones described earlier, it is understandable that they act a little stand-offish.

## **Parties**

CERAM has two clubs that all they basically do is throw parties. They rent out local disco clubs either in Nice, Juan les Pins or Cannes. Their posters are top-notch quality. They offer presale tickets that include the cover charge and one drink. The music is almost always good and if the club is in Juan les Pins, you can walk home. Otherwise, you would need to go with someone with a car because the last trains home leave before 1:00 am. Usually there are parties each weekend. Keep your ears open for where they are. Bring a bottle or two of wine – one for you and one for the house.

More parties? Yes, every Wednesday night at a bar in Antibes called La Gaffe. Two for one drink special between 9 and 10 pm, and the bar closes at 1:00 am. It's perfect for a school night and many of the French students join in on the fun. As mentioned before, it is pretty safe to walk home at night, but try to use the buddy system.

## **Planes, Trains, and Automobiles.**

Planes: Easyjet has cheap flights to London. Flights are cheaper going to the United States than coming from the United States. This is an expensive but fast way to travel.

Trains: Trains are the major form of transport in Europe. From Juan les Pins to Cannes it is 2 stops west or about 8 minutes. To Nice, it is about 25 minutes heading east. Costs are from 8 francs for Cannes and 36 francs to Nice. Story goes you don't have to buy a ticket because the conductors don't always check. It's a gamble. The fine on the trains if you don't have a ticket is from 50 francs and up. Also choose the under 25 years of age fare or student fare as opposed to a regular adult purchase.

For longer travels like to Italy, Spain or other areas of France (Bordeaux or Paris) you will need to purchase a Eurorail pass. You choose 3,5 or 7 days of travel in a two-month time period. It is great for weekend travels here and there. The idea is to travel the most in a one-day period to get the most for your money. For more information, contact [www.eurorail.com](http://www.eurorail.com).

Another suggestion is the Interrail Pass. This has some stipulations. Apparently you have to be in France for 3 months before buying it. And when you do, travels in France are half price, but there are

added charges. You purchase zones rather than days and you can travel as much as you want in the zones you picked. The trick is to go to Ventimiglia, Italy, the local train stop on the other side of the Franco-Italian border. The Italians don't care how long you have lived in France and you can travel in France without an extra charge. For more information, contact [www.interrail.net](http://www.interrail.net).

*Automobiles:* The point being is to watch out for them. Drivers in France are THE worst, ask anyone. Quick to accelerate and late to brake. Be careful crossing the street. Scooters are another menace – even more dangerous than the cars. You could rent cars for traveling, but your best and cheapest form of transportation is the train.

## **Basic Bureaucracy Stuff**

### **Banking**

In order to get the Carte de Sejour, you need to open a local bank account. Choices include Societe Generale, Credit Lyonnaise, Caisse d'Epargne, and Banque Nationale de Paris. You only need 200 francs to open an account. You can get a debit card and/or checks. Do both – just in case. Not many bank employees speak English so bring the French-English Dictionary or someone who understands French well. The bank might sign you up for something you don't necessarily need.

### **Carte de Sejour**

Within 2 months of your arrival, you must obtain what is called a Carte de Sejour. This allows you to stay in the country for one year. Items that need to be presented to the Prefecture include the following. Make 3 to 4 copies of each, just in case:

- Proof of residency. This is a simple paper written by your landlord or the front desk of a residence place.
- Acceptance letter from CERAM.
- Proof of your French Bank Account. The bank will provide this. It is titled "Releve d'Identite Bancaire". It states your name, where your account is and the bank account number.
- Medallion seal bought from the Prefecture themselves. This seal costs about 240 francs. Ask the information desk where to buy it before sitting in the waiting room for what seems like an eternity.
- Copies of your passport.

After you have presented these items, they must be kept and presented the next time you see them. There is a long waiting period for obtaining your Carte de Sejour. You have to wait for an appointment to see a French doctor for an exam. CERAM coordinates it and you just have to wait. The doctor's office is in Nice and it is a fairly quick exam. Most of the doctors there speak some English so it is not that uncomfortable. Bring your copies that you kept from the Carte de Sejour process, just in case.

Afterward, they will give you a signed bill of good health. Take this to the prefecture along with your copies of the other papers you submitted. Present the bill of good health and voila – the Carte de Sejour.

## **Caisse d'Allocations Familiales (CAF)**

After you get your Carte de Sejour, you can qualify for the CAF which is money given to students to help pay for rent. The CAF is located near Carrefour, the CostCo of France. For this you need more paperwork. Again, get 3 or 4 copies just in case:

- A form they will provide titled “Demande d’aide au logement.” Obtain this first because both you and your landlord have to fill it out parts of it.
- Proof of residency. Same as for the Carte de Sejour.
- Proof of citizenship. This is obtained by showing your birth certificate to Hotel de Ville (the City Hall) in Antibes. They will in turn make however many official copies you need of their official seal of approval.
- Receipts of past rent payments.

When this is handed in, the processing will take about 10 days. You will receive anywhere from 800 to 1000 francs per month, depending on the amount of rent you pay. It is definitely worth the trouble.

## **Shopping**

Casino, Spar, Intermarche, and Champion are all good stores for regular shopping. For bulk items and other larger items go to Carrefour, the French’s equivalent to CostCo. You can take the 2VB to the McDonalds stop and walk from there. Remember that supermarkets and boutiques are closed on Sundays. Some boutiques will open on Sundays during the tourist season but not all of them. Make sure that you have enough food and wine to last you throughout Sunday. Last minute parties are probable on a warm Sunday evening.

## **Miscellaneous**

I recommend buying a particular book (with large print so it is easy to read) about the French culture. This made the transition easier for me. I learned about the bureaucracy beforehand so I wasn’t that surprised when I had to get another approval or fill out another form. I also learned about how there is no line to wait in for something. It is considered more English (or American) to follow the “first come, first served” rule. When waiting for the lady behind the counter to ring you up, don’t be offended if three little old ladies cut in front of you. “Lines” or “cues” rarely exist.

Another strange thing is walking down the street. (Warning! This is a generalization about the French in my neck of the woods.) Americans appreciate their space and tend to “weave” in and out of crowds. Americans share the narrow sidewalk with others. Actually most people do this, except the French here. They own the sidewalk apparently and walk as if you are supposed to get out of their way. This pissed me off until I started walking assertively in the same manner. Try not to be offended when a French shoulder hits yours. They won’t be (to some extent).

Another thing to be aware about is the French fascination with their dogs. This does not seem out of the ordinary, but the small presents the dogs leave on the sidewalk are extraordinary. It is everywhere so watch your step.

The dining experience is the highlight or main focus of the French life. A typical dining out experience lasts about an hour forty-five minutes to two hours. This is comparably different from the fast food options prevalent in San Francisco. Other choices? Antibes and Juan les Pins do have two McDonalds franchises and the French equivalent called Quick. They are located about a two-stop

bus ride away so it's not that convenient. There are food stands all along the boardwalk and in Old Antibes. They sell sandwiches, quiche or pizza slices pretty cheap so there are some faster food choices. The restaurants do serve great food and it's great to sit and people watch. I do have to give you fair warning on the time frame though, because you shouldn't be surprised if you receive your bill 10-15 minutes after you have asked for it.

Some etiquette points: wine is drunk only with food; bread is eaten before and kept on the table (meaning without a plate) and without butter; pasta is eaten without a spoon; the Europeans eat with the fork in the left hand and knives in the right; and cheese is eaten after the main course. You don't have to follow these rules. They are strictly "For Your Information" in case you have to impress some French person on a date or something.

Discos open around midnight and last until about 3 or 4 am. The drinks are very expensive. You could choose to buy a whole bottle of hard liquor like whiskey or vodka for about 650 francs. This might be the better choice if there are 5 or 6 of you. This equals about \$100 and it might be cheaper than individual drinks. Also, some bars have seating for those buying a bottle of alcohol and/or made a reservation beforehand. The local pubs are more relaxed and have cheaper drinks. Be sure to visit Old Antibes and Old Nice. Both locations have some great bars to hang out with friends.

## **Conclusion**

This paper is meant to give you a better insight into the life you will be experiencing. Obviously this does not cover everything. Make friends with the International Office at CERAM and go to all the international student school functions (the school parties, I mean). Don't be afraid to ask questions and go with the social flow. Be sure to look at the scrapbooks of SFSU students who have already been abroad. They would probably love to talk your ear off about life abroad.