

University of Paris—Dauphine, France 2009

Introduction

Like many others, Paris has been a dream for me. It is the city of history, art, culture and romance. The first time I saw the Eiffel Tower, I almost screamed out of excitement. I enjoyed walking along Le Seine River with a baguette in my hand, getting lost in all the little streets, having an espresso in a café, and sipping a glass of wine with different kinds of cheese. I got used to the smell of the bakery in the street and the “stinky cheese” every time I enter the cafeteria. Now my exchange is coming to the end. There are so many unforgettable memories and lessons I’ve learned. I hope this could help the incoming students to enjoy Paris more.

Before you leave

I think the most important thing you have to do is to get your visa. I recommend you to apply as early as possible. Before making an appointment at the consulate, you have to fill a form online and send it to the Embassy in Washington, D.C. Once you get the confirmation from the embassy (takes about one week), you can start your application process. During the high travel season, you have to make an appointment far in advance. Oh, it’s very time consuming. (I got mine 2 days before my departure and I had to make an emergency fax, which was really stressful!) You need the following documents to obtain the visa: your letter of acceptance from MICEFA, proof of medical insurance and a letter of financial guarantee, which can be obtained from your bank, your parents, or the financial aid office and an official copy of your birth certificate.

However, a visa is not enough for you to stay in France. Once you arrive in Paris, the MICEFA will help you with the formalities for your "carte de séjour". You will need approximately the same documents that you needed to get your visa, plus at least two photocopies of each, and 4 photos. The procedure will be reviewed at the orientation in early September, and the paperwork will be handled through the MICEFA office.

I think you’ve all done some research on Paris and the universities you are going to. Just get as much information as possible. And also try to improve your French by getting involved with the exchange students at IEEC and practice with them. (I wish I did this when I first arrived in Paris. I found out I didn’t understand anything, which made everything much more complicated)

Weather

The weather in Paris is not very pleasant. You don’t get a lot of sunshine. Summer is the best time. The other seasons are usually grey and rainy. Winter is very cold, so bring some warm clothes to help you get through it, especially if you are from California. PACK LIGHT!! It’s not fun dragging 3 suitcases in the streets and train station. You might have to move too, so don’t bring too many things. You can basically get everything in Paris. Don’t forget adaptors for electronic appliances from home.

When you arrive

MICEFA will book a 10-day short term housing at cite universitaire for you, but there will be NO ONE to pick you up at the airport. You can either take a taxi (about 60 Euro)

or RER B which takes you from the airport directly to Cite in about 45 minutes, it cost 8 euro.

MICEFA will provide a compressive orientation for the students including information about academic system in Paris, housing, telephone, bank account and transportation. They also provide languages training, and some activities.

You will have to look for long term housing once you arrived in Paris. You can look for ads available on www.fusac.fr and <http://paris.craigslist.org/>. Housing in Paris is hard to find and expensive, but MICEFA will help you. You can also do an “au Pair” position babysitting or teaching English as exchange for free housing. You can also go to the American church where there are a lot of ads. It’s usually cheaper to share an apartment or to live with a French family.

The public transportation is very good in Paris. The metro can take you almost everywhere, one ticket is 1.6 euro. If you use metro a lot, then it’s better to get an Imagine R for the whole year (around 300 euro) or buy a Navigo pass every month (55 euro per month).

University

The academy system is very different in France. To be honest, I find it very confusing and unorganized. You can’t find out what classes are offered until one week before school starts. You have to go to find all the descriptions on the school bulletin. Usually they are scattered everywhere on the wall. There are not many interactions between teachers and students. Although most of the time they don’t really care about attendance, at Dauphine you can have maximum 3 absences. The finals and essays are the most important part of the classes. At dauphine, the classes are usually 3 hours long and only once a week, so you have to do most of the work at home.

Like the campus in the U.S., there are student organizations at the University of Paris, who often organize activities. At Dauphine, DEE has Erasmus bar night for exchange students every Thursday night (like pint night). They also have weekend trips, is a good opportunity to meet people from all over the world. You can also join student clubs according to your hobbies.

Leisure

There is ALWAYS something happening in Paris! Here are some ways to find fun stuffs!

The Pariscope

This pocket sized publication, available for under a buck, comes out every Thursday and is filled with everything from movies, clubbing, concerts, and events, to museums, language and singles clubs, and travel excursions. You can pick one up at any "kiosk de press". Their web site, which is equally packed and also free, can be found at www.pariscope.fr.

Jeunes à Paris

This free entertainment guide for students, also pocket size, can be found piled in

magazine racks at your local university. Besides the wealth of information on the latest music release, night life, and cheap traveling, it offers dates and locations for student organized parties and events that can't be found in other publications. It's a good way to meet French students. They also have a website at www.studyrama.com.

The FUSAC

You would have learned about this one when searching for housing, or perhaps a job. On the front page you will find out all about happy hour at many Irish pubs that advertise in the FUSAC. Close to the back is a section called "Meeting Places", which lists many organized meetings at local cafes or bars for those interested in the exchange of conversation in any and all languages. Also here are bars popular among the students:

Shebeen

Irish bar made out like a little cave. Sympathique, belle ambiance, etc.
7 rue de Tournefort M° Place Monge

5th Bar

Rue Mouffetara M° Place Monge

Hideout

Rue du Pot de Fer. One of the only bars open till around 5am on Fridays and Saturdays...but you should really be home before then. One pint for 2.5 euro, hard to find this price anywhere else

Lizard Lounge

In the Marais.

Café Trésor

Rue de Trésor. Nancy's daughter really likes this place. Go check it out.

Traveling

Traveling in Europe is very easy. You don't need a car because the trains and buses are very convenient, and you can often find cheap flights (I went to more than 20 countries during this year). Usually it's very safe, but it's always a good idea to ask the locals for help to avoid any possible danger. For example, pay attention to your wallet in Italy!

Conclusion

Theses are just some tips I could offer, but there are much more for you to discover yourself. There will be problems, sometimes you may get misunderstood, upset, or miss home, but you will learn so much in one year. You will become more independent, more open-minded and tolerant. I felt I've grown a lot and learned so much. I'll miss Paris and the year of adventures. Good Luck! This will be one of the best experiences in your life!

Bon Voyage!!

