

Erasmus+ Erfahrungsbericht

Persönliche Angaben			
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☒ ja
☐ nein
☐ anonym

Bericht

Before departure

Apart from the papers needed for your Erasmus exchange, your stay in France also requires several personal documents such as a translated birth certificate, a European health insurance card, etc. Make sure to consult the yearly "International info kit" for a detailed list and other useful information.

When it comes to your luggage, you will most likely need both summer and autumn/winter clothes, because the temperatures are usually high throughout the whole September. You may also take advantage of the beaches of the nearby city La Rochelle if the weather allows it. The autumns and winters are also quite mild and the temperatures barely get below zero. Also, beware that there is no "Materialbüro" where you could lend kitchen utensils, so you would need to bring some from home or buy them from the local supermarkets.

Arrival and accommodation

I got to France by plane from Sofia Airport to Paris Beauvais, then took the bus to Porte Maillot, changed two underground lines, and reached Gare Montparnasse, where I took the train to Poitiers. A couple of university students were assigned to welcome and direct the newcomers to their residence.

I was accommodated at the university dormitory Marie Curie, which is situated 30 minutes from the city centre and 45 minutes from the university campus. My room was of the "Three functions" type, which includes a personal bathroom and a shower, yet the kitchen and the fridge are shared. The rent of 230€ for this room type can be decreased if you apply for social assistance (CAF). Also, a large number of students choose flat sharing or studio rental and there are lots of attractive sites in the city centre, yet I would advise you to ensure in advance that your room is furnished.

Orientation week

There are a few institutions that need to be visited during the first week of September:

1. The International office in the central part of the university, where you will get detailed instructions for your further steps in the city;
2. The International Relations Office in your faculty, where you will sign up and receive an appointment for issuing a student card;
3. The bank, where you will create a bank account and purchase the obligatory residential insurance;
4. (by preference: CAF; student bus card; mobile phone card)

University life

My experience with the English Faculty at Université de Poitiers did not exactly fit my expectations of a third-year Bachelor academic level. In order to obtain the required ECTS points, I selected all five available non-overlapping English-instructed courses for Licence 3 and two from Licence 2. The course format resembled that of a lecture, where the students were for the most part passive. When they were given the chance to participate, the majority did not fully meet the presentation requirements, specified in advance by their lecturers. Overall, I did not find the academic environment competitive enough, since most of the course participants were timid and rarely initiated and stimulated interesting discussions.

Both parties would also often insert interjections or phrases in French, thus you need to have advanced in the local language before departing to Poitiers. Not only was the most important information for the courses in many cases communicated in French, but the exam format would also fit the one which the students prepare for their BAC (A-levels, Abitur). Hence, you need to research how to write a “Commentaire” and a “Dissertation” before entering the four-hour-long written exams. The lecturers used to build their classes on the basis of the “Commentaire” format and distribute a plan, so the foreign essay structure was not too hard to get used to.

The students were ardently encouraged to research in the university library, yet it was disappointingly scarce in resources for English studies both written in English and in French. It of course provides access to electronic databases, but when it comes to working on one of the university computers, you may need some time to get used to the AZERTY keyboard. The working hours of both the university and the state libraries are a lot shorter than the ones at the TU Chemnitz.

Nevertheless, apart from the university activities, I was lucky to have the best work experience in my life so far – I found a job as a German language assistant.

The Internship

Before leaving for my semester abroad, I had not expected that I would work in France, yet I eventually applied for the position of a Language Assistant in German (as a foreign language) and got employed. For 12 hours per week from October 2016 to April 2017, I would practice and teach German of all levels from Beginner (A1) to Advanced (B2) together with students from two high schools and one middle school. I would prepare materials for reading and listening, some written assignments, and most often lead discussions together with groups of about 10 students.

Working with adolescents is always interesting and not only did I become more confident in German and improved my French, but I also learned to collect and present attention-keeping content, and to lead a dynamic lifestyle. My German-teaching colleagues were inspiring, cooperative and supportive, and since I was a beginner in pedagogy, they would always empathise and thoroughly explain their didactic approaches together with some tips and tricks on mastering a classroom of blooming teenagers. My colleagues and I eventually became great friends and thus I got a first-hand experience of the French culture.

Free-time activities

Apart from the traditional cinema, theatre, opera, concerts, etc. you can follow the events in Maison des 3 Quartiers, Le Biblio Café, as well as gatherings organised by ESN and locals. There are many individuals who are interested in teaching French or making a language tandem with international students, so make sure to join the yearly Erasmus Facebook

group. The university also offers a large number of sport activities, free movie projections and workshops.

Overall, an Erasmus stay in France meets you with many people, who have interesting personalities, and open up your perspective. The immersion into the French culture essentially means an immersion into the French language. What made this stay abroad truly rewarding was the ability to adapt to the new study and work environment, to overcome the language barrier and the culture shock, and to eventually make the best out of my chosen destination for Erasmus exchange.