

Experiences and thoughts from my Erasmus exchange to the city of love

My name is Nikolai Refshal and I had the privilege to be the first student from HiØ to exchange to U-PEC. I did the exchange in the last two semesters of my bachelor's degree, including writing my bachelor thesis in Paris. In this report, I will explain some practical information and share some of my many experiences from France.

There is a lot to consider when moving abroad, but first things first. Planning is essential in making the exchange a good experience. Use the schools international office, they have plenty of information and can answer your questions promptly. It is worth mentioning that the son you might consider to go on an exchange you should go and seek information, the sooner you start the more options you will have.

The city is Paris, big, historical and alive!

I lived just outside of the city for the first few months, but moved into the city after a few months. My home away from home was a small apartment in the 19th arrondissement. Prices vary depending on size and location, but you can find a nice studio for around 600 EUR. Public transport is a chapter for itself, but there is plenty of information so you will not be lost. The grocery stores are smaller, but the prices of food is a fair bit cheaper than Norway. Keep in mind that there is always something to do in Paris, regardless of what taste you might have.

Universite Paris-Est Creteil XII

The university itself is a lot different from what you might be used to. Longer days, with plenty of work to do. All my courses were in English, but having some basic French knowledge will give you a huge advantage both practical and social. The relationship between student and professor is very different from the Norwegian system. Be prepared for a hierarchy where you as a student is not the most important factor for the lecturer. To sum up the courses and daily life on campus; Longer days – Saturday lectures are not uncommon. I had many smaller courses, as far as I remember I had about 13 courses to attend every week...

Finding courses can be a real hassle, but asking fellow students is a good way to start.

Information from the university about the courses might be in French, so be prepared to use

google translate. In my case I had to find three different PDFs to find out; what the course was about, when, where, and who was teaching the course. The semester starts fairly late compared to Norway, and courses might not even start before the last week of September. It finishes in mid-December, and before you know it exams are due. There is a Christmas break similar to what we have in Norway, and the exam period is during the first weeks of January. The exams were short (about 2 hours) and it requires good memory! It is more about reproducing what the professor have gone through during the semester than what you have actually learned. Personally, I didn't like this type of exam because it does not give you as a student the possibility show what you can do, just how good your short term memory is. Nevertheless, I have never had such a busy exam period as I did in France, and I hope I never ever will have! If you are lucky you might have one each day, but you could have two a day.

The university will be a huge part of your social life as well.

I view myself as a very social and outgoing person, but connecting with the French students was quite difficult because I did not know the language. So when we had a small break between the lectures I stood in the circle not understanding when to laugh. Sometimes some of my fellow students said "We have to speak English so Nikolai can participate!" That was very nice, and the French used the time to improve their English. I connected better with my fellow Erasmus students, primarily the Germans. To me the German and Norwegian have more in common in the way we think and behave, naturally they became my best friends during my stay.

Last, but not least. My final advice is; Go! Don't worry about what you are leaving behind, this is an investment in yourself and will be a journey of a life-time!

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