



Erasmus Exchange - Vichy, France. Spring 2009

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Vichy is a peaceful and beautiful city, located about three hours south of Paris. It is famous for its healthy sources, its skincare collection and spas. Experiencing the spring in Vichy has been beautiful. We have seen everything turn from grey to green and felt the temperature rising while it was still snowing in Norway. The river L'Allier runs through the city and there is a park alongside of it which is perfect for recreation. The town is as mentioned quite small but it offers the most of what you will need, while being the perfect sized town to live in without a car. You can walk pretty much everywhere - to the grocery store, the library, the school, the post offices, the pubs, the train station and so on. It is also located with many big cities just a train ride away. We will recommend buying a Student Discount card at the train station (Euro 49), which gives you up to 50 % discount on train rides - it will pay off.

The IBF program in Vichy offered a very different way of learning than back in Norway. We have for instance no books, syllabus, homework or submissions. The information given is very "French" - a bit limited, often a little too late and really not that thought through. The lecturers have various knowledge and experience of English, which sometimes can affect the ability to understand. It is especially in the French language course this is the most challenging. The level of the courses is also surprisingly lower than what we were used to from Norway. There were longer periods of time during this stay where it actually seemed more like a summer school or a holiday than studies at a higher level.

In Vichy we studied French, Web Management & E-business, International Trade and International Marketing in Europe. Except from French, we both had some previous knowledge within these fields from HiØ. This is not necessarily at all; everything is very basic and simple. The first two weeks there are intensive French lessons which are extremely valuable, especially if you do not speak the language. After these two weeks, there are only French lessons five hours a week, which is too little when learning a new language, so you should try a bit on your own in the everyday life. Maybe even get a French friend who you can teach English in exchange for French lessons. People in Vichy are so friendly and outgoing so that it will not be a problem.

In Vichy you can choose either to live private or in a student residence. We lived in the latter and would strongly recommend that because of the social aspect. Are you lucky enough, you can be surrounded by other international students and before you know it you have created your own little family. Our rooms are about 18 sqm and contains kitchen, bathroom and living-/bedroom. We paid about 350 Euro, including internet which is delivered remotely. I believe it is cheaper to share an apartment, so if you are travelling with someone you could think about it, because it will come with more facilities, like an oven, a washing machine and maybe a lot more kitchen supplies. In France it is also possible to apply to the government, so-called CAF, to get some of your rent covered. This amount can be everything from 80 to 150 Euros per month, so it really helps. But if you want to do this, remember a copy of your birth certificate in Norwegian and in French (the easiest is to fix this before you leave Norway).

The courses in general were very easy and there is not much to learn, academic spoken. So if you are looking for a place with high level of education this is not the place to go. However, do you want to experience something new and learn about things that are not written in any books, this is the place to go. You learn so much being on your own in a new country and you meet people from all over the world in just the same situation as you are in. You will make friends you will never forget, and have contacts all over the world. You will learn so much about different cultures and personalities. We can now proudly say that we have friends in U.S., Canada, Slovakia, China, South Korea, Germany, Hungary, Estonia, France, Spain, Czech Republic, Netherlands and Switzerland. We would strongly recommend to study abroad, either for one semester or two. As a Norwegian student with all kinds of economical aids there is no reason not to go. If you are afraid of leaving the loved ones at home we can assure you that by the time you are starting to get settled down in your new country, it is almost time to go back home. It is a short period of your life, but the memories you get will last a life time.

Dagny Wicklund & Elin Østli

L'Allier



Black & White Night



Barbeque at school



An international mix at Grande Marchè



Vichy by night

