Erasmus experience

In 2018 I had the opportunity to spend the Fall semester at ESSCA in Angers, France. Angers is a small but beautiful city in western France with a population of around 150,000 people, a lot of whom are young students, since the city is home to a number of universities. During the four months I spent there I had a wonderful time and I wouldn’t trade this experience for anything.

**GETTING THERE**

There are several ways to get to Angers. I flew out to Paris Charles de Gaulle airport with AirFrance. The tickets were expensive, but the cheapest airline didn’t offer flights to CDG. I stayed in Paris for a few days and took a TGV train to Angers after that. It’s definitely a good idea to buy all tickets as soon as you possibly can to get a better price. However, make sure you know when your accommodation will be available before you buy your ticket.

When I arrived in Angers, a member of the student welcome team picked me up and drove me to my accommodation, which was a big help. The team was very friendly and helped us a lot with settling in.

**ACCOMODATION**

When I was first contacted by ESSCA after my successful application, they provided a catalogue with a lot of useful information about the school, life in the city of Angers, and also about the accommodation. There was quite a wide range of dorms available to choose from, with different price points. I chose Couffon Pavot, which is a newly renovated dorm close to the city centre. I had to pay 265 euros/month for my 9m² room. I also had to pay individually for the last few days of August I spent there and for the whole month of December even though I left on the 22nd. However, if you apply for the CAF support, you can get a considerable reduction of the accommodation cost (for me the reduction was 97 euros/month). I definitely recommend applying, even though the process is really frustrating. The school provides a tutorial for the application which is especially helpful for international students who don’t speak French.

My room was very small but nice and new (we were the first residents after the renovation), I have no complaints about it. I had my own small bathroom and kitchen inside my room, which might sound a little congested but I didn’t mind. I had to pull down my bed from the ceiling which was weird at first but I got used to it very quickly.

The dorm also had a gym and a music room free for use, and a laundry room. If I remember correctly, one load of wash cost 2 or 3 euros, while the dryer was 1.5 euros.

I’m really satisfied with my choice of accommodation, I definitely recommend living near or in the city centre instead of near the school, it’s much easier to get home from parties late at night (you can walk home from basically anywhere in the centre) and just generally everything is
closer. The only complaint I had about the dorm is that the vacuum cleaners were super hard to get a hold of and the staff didn’t really speak English.

SCHOOL
ESSCA is a prestigious private business school that has campuses in multiple French cities, Budapest and Shanghai. The building looks really nice from the outside, and it can be reached by bus in around 20 minutes from the city centre.

I was not completely satisfied with the classes. Most of them were split into two parts (sometimes completely unrelated to each other), and we had a lot of work to do for both parts. Some classes had exams (midterm and final or just final) and some were evaluated by continuous assessment.

We definitely had to do a lot of work during the semester, I had to do so many presentations by the end I lost count.

There was a lot of useful information and skills I learned, but some of the teachers didn’t really impress me in terms of language skills (all my classes were in English), teaching methods and attitude. I also found it a little unfair that we never got any feedback or result for our work, they just gave us a mark weeks later (or you might not even see any marks before you get your final grade) without any in depth explanation. There is a heavy emphasis on group projects, and all members get the same grade so that is something to be mindful of.

I was in my fifth semester of International Business during my exchange. I took the following classes at ESSCA: International Trade and Export Diagnosis, Human Resources Management and Corporate Social Responsibility, Coordinating Marketing Strategy and Operations Management, Contemporary European Politics and French Language. My favourite was definitely the European Politics class, the professor was great and all the classes were interesting and enjoyable.

Most of the classes had one double lesson a week, that means 3 hours with a 10-15 minute break inbetween. Attendance is compulsory in all classes, you can miss two classes before you get penalized. The schedule can be different every week, you have to check it each day. If you want to take French language classes – just a heads up, they’re at 8 am, twice a week.

The final exam is quite different in the way that you only have one chance – everyone takes the exam at the same time, and if you fail (you only get the results around a month later), you have to resit the exam at the end of the next semester. There are also multiple exams on the same day. For us, the whole exam period lasted three days.

At the end of the semester, the school held a very fancy gala at a huge venue, which was a great experience.
MISCELLANEOUS

When it comes to transportation, it is unavoidable to buy a bus card. I paid for the whole 4 months at once when I bought one (that cost around 122 euros), which turned out to be a bad decision because we received a coupon for the bus card later from the school, which I now had no use for. So I recommend buying the bus card for one month when you arrive and then paying for the next months later when you can use the coupon.

There is also an option to apply for free bike rental (if you have a French bank account) which a lot of international students did.

If you decide to apply for CAF, you have to open a French bank account, which the school helps you with. They have a partnership with Bank Populaire, so that’s where I chose to open my account. They charge 5 euros monthly for fees, but they give you 15 euros when you open your account. But you are free to choose a different bank if you want to.

For the CAF application, you will also need a French version of your birth certificate, which I recommend getting before you leave, but a scanned version will be accepted as well (just know that your family will most likely have to forge your signature for the authorization if they have to get it for you when you are already abroad).

Grocery shopping is more expensive than in Hungary. The biggest Carrefour is far from the centre, but it can be reached by bus. I only went there once on the first week to buy some necessities, I usually did my shopping in the Lidl close to one of the bus stops on the way to school. There is also a supermarket right across the school.

The city of Angers is really pretty, the most recognizable landmark is definitely the castle (which is free to visit on the first Sunday of every month by the way). The city centre has some beautiful old buildings, churches and paved streets that are perfect for a weekend walk. It is also fairly safe, I never felt particularly unsafe when walking at night, even alone.

If you want to explore nearby French cities, you can get a carte jeune for TGV or a TGV Max card. The carte jeune is for students under 27 years, it costs 50 euros and is valid for one year but grants you 30% off of all French train tickets and 25% on international trains. The TGV Max card costs 79 euros for a month but grants you unlimited free tickets. However, in my friends’ experience you have a limited range of tickets to choose from, and often you cannot find a return ticket if you want to go somewhere. It is good to plan in advance which places you would like to visit, so you can consider which solution would be the most suitable for you.

I also highly recommend using Flixbus, it’s much cheaper than trains, and you can find discount coupons in the school.

When it comes to making friends and meeting new people, you have the opportunity to get to know both international and French students. In my case, most of my classes were with French
students only, but the international student community was amazing and I met so many incredible people and we had so many great experiences together.

The school places a big emphasis on the integration of the international students, we had a super nice welcome team of French students who helped us in the first week, from picking us up from the train station when we arrived to organizing an integration weekend for us with fun activities.

All in all, I had an amazing time in France, I never even had a day when I wanted to come home (apart from missing my friends and family of course). I definitely recommend spending your Erasmus exchange in Angers, you will not regret it.