

Year Abroad Report

I spent my year abroad studying at Sorbonne Université in Paris and had a great time. Overall, it was a positive experience and one I would recommend to anyone studying at Warwick! It was an amazing chance to meet different people, discover the French culture and experience life in a new city. Despite various challenging moments, I would say I learnt a lot about myself during my year abroad and if I was to go back, I would definitely make the same choice.

Administration and General Info:

I'm going to be completely honest... French bureaucracy is a bit of a nightmare. There are quite a lot of things to look into prior to moving (and once you've arrived too), so to avoid any unnecessary hassle I would recommend making a list of the admin tasks you need to sort out before moving abroad at the start of summer or at the end of term 3.

Before moving I also found it quite useful to print out any documents I might need copies of (e.g. passport, ID, birth certificate, insurance, confirmation of accommodation). When registering for accommodation or university enrolment, you tend to need a copy of quite a few of these documents, so having a paper copy at hand as well as a copy on your laptop can make the admin side of the year abroad a bit smoother!

When I arrived in Paris, I chose to keep my UK SIM as I didn't want to go through the hassle of changing my number (most Erasmus/exchange students use WhatsApp as their main form of communication anyways so it actually worked out fine!) However, I did choose to set up a French bank account. This came in handy especially since I got a part time job in France before moving to Paris and then during the second semester. I opened an account with BNP Paribas - you don't need to pay any fees and you get a free €80 when you sign up with them. When you move to Paris you can just go to your local branch (I went to the one just outside the university in Jussieu) and they will give you all the info you need to get set up.

For transport, I would recommend getting the Carte Navigo pass (imagine R étudiant) for the year. It covers all transport (bus, metro, tram, RER and even regional trains) not just in the city centre but all of Île-de-France. If you're only doing one semester in Paris, it might make more sense to get the monthly pass - you can take a look at the options online and you can see what makes the most sense for you. The annual Navigo costs around £300. This may seem quite

expensive but when you're using it everyday (multiple times a day) you end up saving money compared to individual tickets or buying weekly/monthly passes. Some people choose to use the city bikes instead, so this is something else you can look into if you prefer.

In terms of the Visa, unfortunately I can't help much on this front but happy to answer any questions based on what friends and other people I met had to do. From what I heard it's a relatively straightforward process and you can find the relevant information quite easily online.

Accommodation:

I was offered accommodation through my university (Sorbonne Université) at a CROUS Residence in the 13th. It was about a 20 minute commute to the university by public transport which was quite convenient. There were tram, metro, RER and bus stops all within walking distance of my accommodation.

I can guarantee that living in a CROUS residence is the cheapest accommodation you will find in Paris. If you're looking for something quite affordable and without hassle, then this is a great option. It's quite basic but it saved me having to organise my own accommodation and I managed to save quite a lot on rent. My residence was made up of studio flats which I wasn't a huge fan of at the start (it didn't feel as sociable as having shared kitchens), but I did get used to it and there are other ways to meet people within your accommodation if you're willing to put in the extra effort.

As a student in France, you're eligible for CAF (financial aid for accommodation provided by the government). I would recommend signing up for this as soon as possible when you arrive - I signed up in the first month and so was covered for the remaining 9 months I was in Paris. The process tends to take a few months before you receive confirmation, but the rent deduction is backdated to when you submit your application. I recommend following up with them around November time by setting up an appointment to speak with someone in person at the CAF office. Despite submitting my online application very soon after arriving, it wasn't processed properly but by going in person I was able to sort this out quite easily. It's a bit of a pain but definitely worth the effort and patience!

Living in Paris:

Personally, I loved living in Paris. I know that living in a big city isn't for everyone but I really enjoyed the fact that there was always something to do. Having lived there 10 months, there are still things I feel like I haven't seen or done!

A lot of the museums, galleries and monuments in Paris are free for under 26 year olds if you are studying in Paris (or from an EU country) so I really recommend taking advantage of this! Paris is such a beautiful place to live and very rich in culture. There are plenty of exhibitions, shows, music events and more catering to lots of different audiences so you're bound to find things in the city to your taste.

The city can feel quite intense at times so don't feel bad about having a night in for yourself too!

ESN Paris and the university's Erasmus network also organise events and have recommendations of things to do. This could also be a great way to meet new people and expand your network in Paris. It's a bit different to Warwick in that Sorbonne doesn't organise a "Welcome Week" or social events for students, but being such a large student city, there are plenty of organised events outside of the university that students go to. It just takes a bit more time and effort to find them.

If you want any recommendations on things to see, do, places to eat, etc. please feel free to drop me an email at anna.dmitrewski@warwick.ac.uk and I'll be more than happy to send them over!

Academics:

The style of teaching at Sorbonne was quite different to that at Warwick. Lectures would be 2 hours long, TDs (smaller tutorial groups) were 1.5 hours long and TPs (computing labs) were 3 hours long. The terms are also longer (but then you finish in May as opposed to June/July) and exams are more frequent. Instead of having all exams at the end of the academic year like at Warwick, you have a mixture of in class assessments called CCs (contrôles continus), midterms (partiels) and your final exams at the end of each semester.

The quality of maths at Sorbonne is very high and it can be quite intense. However, I wouldn't let this put you off. When deciding on doing a year abroad, it's really important to think about your priorities and what you want to get out of it. If your focus is to experience life in a new city, meet new people from around the world, learn a new language - then a year abroad would be a great opportunity to do so. I would also consider if you want to do your year abroad as a BSc or MMath. It's worth speaking to your tutor too and seeing what they advise. If you have any follow up questions regarding this, feel free to contact me and I'll be happy to discuss further.

Language:

One of the reasons I chose to go to France was because I wanted to become more fluent in French. If this is also one of your goals during your year abroad, I would recommend making French friends early on or getting a part time job (I found a job as a babysitter through the Mes Services étudiant page). It can be easy to fall into the trap of speaking English all the time, as this does tend to be the language of choice amongst Erasmus students, but if you make a conscious effort to practice French whenever you can I promise it will be worth it. In hindsight, I wish I had focussed more time on making French friends at the start but it can be quite difficult so don't beat yourself up about it if you find it tough (particularly with the language barrier). In the end I've been lucky enough to meet people in Paris I consider close friends from various different places so don't put too much pressure on yourself as these things have their ways of working out.

I would also recommend doing the FLE (français langue étrangère) classes on offer at Sorbonne. The university offers classes from A1 (beginner level) up to C1 which you can take for credit (3 ECTS per semester). You can also take the B2 DELF/C1 DALF preparation classes on offer (no ECTS) which help prepare students to get the official language certifications for French fluency. Even if you are not planning on taking the official exams, it's another chance to improve your fluency and meet other international students. Plus the courses are all free of charge. I decided to take my C1 at the end of my time in Paris and I'm really glad I did in the end.

All of my lectures and seminars were in French. At the start it takes a bit of getting used to, but the terminology is quite straightforward to pick up and similar to the English equivalents.

Ultimately, I think doing a year abroad is an invaluable opportunity and one that I really recommend. Good luck and feel free to reach out if you have any questions!