

Grenoble Year Abroad Report 2020/21 by Laura Meier

I have written this report with the aim of helping people who have already decided that they want to study at Grenoble. The main difference between my report and the reports of other students is that I have focussed on a few issues I had while away.



Grenoble in autumn

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Applying for Grenoble:

Year abroad applications have two parts; applying to Warwick and applying to the host university. The application to Warwick starts in around November of Second Year and hopefully you find out if you've got a place over the Christmas break. The application to the host university only starts once Warwick have "nominated" you, and you will receive an email from the host university once they have received your nomination. My first email from Grenoble was on the 27th of April. In fact, the first email I was sent went to my junk emails and I didn't find it before it was deleted. This, along with a lot of miscommunication meant that I thought we just had to email Berengere the learning agreement so I missed the deadline for applying online. Having to ring Berry in tears to explain why I hadn't applied, and beg to be let onto the course was something you should avoid ever having to do.

CHECK YOUR JUNK EMAILS!!! And email Berry if you think you might have missed something.



Views from the Bastille

Learning Agreement:

Completing the Learning Agreement is an introduction into how utterly frustrating French bureaucracy is. At the end of April in Second Year I got emailed a blank Learning Agreement, which I had to complete and email to the Grenoble coordinator (Berengere Duc in 2020) by the 30th May, along with two extra documents that gave limited help in completing the said Learning Agreement.

You should also get a link to a search engine of all of the modules at Grenoble (<http://formations.univ-grenoble-alpes.fr/fr/index/resultats-de-votre-recherche-de-cours.html?#nav>).

This may initially sound useful, however you need to know what you are looking for in order to search for it, and annoyingly Grenoble don't just provide a list of modules exchange students can take.

Another caveat of this search engine is that unlike Google, which narrows down the results the more words you add, this search engine adds more results for every word you add, searching not only the module titles, but the module descriptions too.

In addition (yes there's more), many modules can be taken in different semesters (numbered 1 to 10, the UGA only has 2 semesters each year, you will be there for 5 and 6), and are listed individually for every semester, and quite often are repeated multiple times for no reason.

My search for "Calcul intégrale et introduction aux probabilités" yielded 1294 results, which is fine if you know the exact title, however if the title has changed, you have no hope of finding it easily.



Snowy days



Modules:

I would recommend sticking to the Maths L3(B) courses and then you will be able to take two 3ECT (=6CATS) modules in the first semester and one 3ECT module. I did the intensive FLE (French course for Erasmus/International students) in the week before lectures started and although it was 4 hours a day for 5 days, most of the other students I'd met were also doing it and this meant I didn't have to do it during the semester in the evenings (once a week, 2 hours, for 10 weeks).

I also took a 3ECT German module in both semesters. It was taught in French and because they were smallish classes (mainly online sadly due to Covid), my French improved a lot during the class as well. Another plus is how impressed everyone is when you tell them you're learning German in French! I'd

done German at GCSE but had forgotten pretty much everything and I had a few German friends so it was fun to be learning German at the same time.

One thing to bear in mind with languages is that you can't start at A1.1 level if you've ever learnt it before. I went to the languages office to ask, and made sure I said that I'd done it at school for a long time, but I couldn't remember much. The lady there said A1.1 was fine but then when I got to the first class, the teacher there (I believe it was Catherine Felce) was very rude and told me to leave once she found out I'd done German before. Luckily another girl also got kicked out who helped me understand what the teacher had said. We had to go home and take a language test to see what our level was, then sign up to another class. However, because the semester had already started, lots of classes were full.

I ended up with a teacher called Katrin Henze in the first semester, who was decent. At the start of the second semester, we had Maren Lorenzen, who wasn't as good because she didn't make you turn your camera on (a non-issue when there's not a pandemic!), so nobody made an effort. But then after a couple of weeks of the second semester our class got Marion Banihachemi instead. If you want to take German, I would really really recommend trying to get a class with her as she was honestly an amazing teacher - the whole class loved her and made a big effort so classes were more enjoyable.

I can't say anything much about the sports modules except I had friends who were signed up to do them who ended up having them online because of lockdowns!!

I have included my completed learning agreement at the end of this document, although you need to check the module codes haven't changed (they may be different if you wish to do it in a different semester).



UGA campus - surrounded by mountains



Swimming in Lac Taillat

Finding an Apartment:

I decided that I wanted to live in a colocation (sharing an apartment/house with other tenants) in order to practise my French and I'm happy I chose this. My friends who were in student residences had very mixed experiences:

- Student residences in France are very different to Warwick. The main ones Berlioz and Ouest are similar in a way to Rootes but they are a lot more basic. The kitchens are quite big but only contain a hob, a sink, a table and a bench. You keep everything in your room and carry it to the kitchen when you want to cook. You also have to take your rubbish back to your room with you.

- The first time I visited Berlioz I was shocked, but I had friends who lived there and we used to have meals together so I got used to it. The price (of all the residences!) also reflects the lack of amenities so if you want to save money and live on campus it's not an awful option.
- Most French students choose to live in colocations so if you live in a student residence you will probably live with lots of international students. This is not a bad thing. International students all arrive in August/September with (usually) no friends. You're all in the same boat so it's easy to make friends, and everyone is always up for a good time.

I travelled to Grenoble with my parents in their campervan, so I waited till I could visit apartments to choose one. There probably wasn't as much choice as there could have been, especially since I wanted a living room because what's the point of living with French people if you never see them!

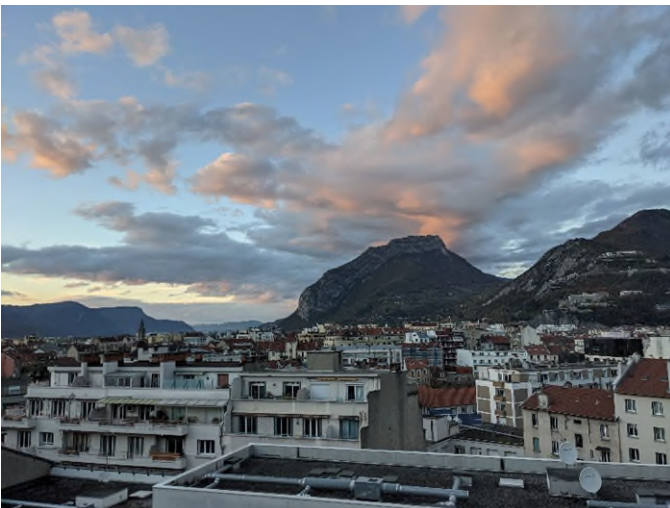
It took me a week (and 13 other places) to find the right apartment. Be warned that if you want to go down the colocation route, you may need 6 months of your parents' payslips, copies of their passports and also their tax returns (😞) to prove that they could pay if you don't. I'm not convinced they ask French students for this or whether it was just because I was English lol.

There is also the conundrum that you need a French bank account to pay the deposit/prove that you will pay, and you need a French address to open a French bank account... I solved this by paying the deposit in cash that my dad could withdraw using his credit card, but be prepared that you might need this, and my Revolut account (see "Opening a Bank Account and Flat Insurance") wouldn't have let me get out 400€ at once.

I actually found somewhere I liked early on, and the landlord asked for these. I was very lucky that my sister was at home to send copies, but this took a while and by the time I'd sent the correct things, a French girl who obviously had French parents as her guarantor had said she wanted it and the landlord went with her instead.

I lived with a French girl whose parents owned the apartment. She was in first year, and we were very different people but even so, my French improved so much which is mainly thanks to her. We never spoke in English, watched lots of French films/shows together (I would really recommend trying to watch French original shows with no subtitles), and if I had any questions, she loved to talk about them with me.

I lived nearby the C tram stop Foch Ferrié, and really liked the location. It took me about 15 minutes to bike to campus and it was also near the centre of Grenoble. When you have a bike in Grenoble (see Métrovélo) everywhere is easy to get to.



Views from my apartment



Opening a Bank Account and Flat Insurance:

I opened an account with Revolut before I left England. You can transfer money (£) for free to your Revolut account and then exchange it. I think there are no fees during the week to exchange, and then at the weekends the exchange rates are slightly worse. There's a limit on the amount you can exchange per month with the better rate, but I only went over this once which I could have avoided if I'd planned better.

My only issue with Revolut was that I was transferring large amounts of money to and from the account for my rent etc, and around halfway through the year they started sending me notifications asking me to prove that I got my money legally. This turned into a massive issue because after providing info on my Erasmus grant, they also wanted my parent's payslips which my mum was hesitant to give me. I started ignoring the notifications until they froze my account and my mum was forced to give me her payslips and bank statements showing that she did indeed transfer me money every month.

I'd still recommend having an account like this before you arrive in France, as it's useful before you get your bank account set up, check MSE Top Travel Debit Cards or something similar to find out which bank is best in the year you go.

I went with BNP Paribas and, after reading other people's experiences with opening an account, I was pleasantly surprised. I simply went into the bank, said that I wanted to open a student account and booked an appointment for another day.

I believe I needed proof that I lived in France, proof that I studied in France and my passport. The appointment took about 20 minutes and I also got my flat insurance (15.42 euros a month I believe) through BNP as well (they have connections with Cardif IARD), although read my "Returning Home" section on my experience with shutting down accounts and cancelling contracts.

InteGre Society:

The UGA has a really great society for international students called InteGre. Check out their website before you go to Grenoble for more information!

They have buddy schemes called Tandems and Parrains.

For the tandem, you apply saying any languages you can speak fluently, and any you want to learn, then you're matched with another student who wants to learn your language and is fluent in the one you want to learn.

Parrain means godfather and is a mentoring scheme where as a newbie in Grenoble, you're matched with a student who's studied there before.

I signed up for both schemes in about June/July while still in England. I received a Parrain almost immediately, which wasn't very helpful as neither of us were yet in Grenoble. We sent a few emails and then exchanged numbers in order to speak on WhatsApp, but they never replied to my message on there and I wasn't too bothered about this.

I eventually got an email saying I had a Tandem partner and her details in the October (Toussaints) holiday. I sent her an email introducing myself but unfortunately this was when the first French lockdown (that I experienced) was announced so she replied after a week saying that she couldn't give much help in the context, but we could talk if I wanted to. I probably should have continued messaging her but I didn't and so neither the Parrain or Tandem schemes were successful for me.

However, the guy I was seeing while in Grenoble got a Tandem partner and was very successful with it. They used to meet up regularly over lunch to chat and his partner came to a few of our parties/would sit with us at lunch if we bumped into him, which was nice to speak in French to him.

InteGre also run many hiking trips etc at the start of term and we went on a couple and met some friends that way so I'd really recommend going along. They also run language cafés but these were mainly online in my year so I didn't go to any.



Group trip to Aix-les-Bains



Metrovélo:

Surprisingly, Grenoble is the flattest city in France and as such, lots of people cycle around.

You could bring your own bike, but bike theft is quite high in Grenoble so I wouldn't recommend. There is a company called Metrovélo who rent out heavy yellow bikes that are pretty much billed by everyone in Grenoble as not worth stealing.

Ironically, my Metrovélo did get stolen and I had to pay a 200 euro deposit and file a police report. All the bike racks were full so my friend and I left them outside a restaurant with only the wheel lock on (you'll see everyone doing this) rather than using the D-lock and when we got back, mine had disappeared. (I got another Metrovélo under the same 1 year contract for no extra cost - discounting the 200 euro deposit that I lost!)

Even with this, I would still recommend renting a Metrovélo and convincing your friends to get them too. We used to train at outdoor gyms (either near the river between the campus and Grenoble or at the gym on campus) and then bike together to a CROUS restaurant on campus for lunch, or all cycle to Lac Taillat near campus for a swim.

After returning to Warwick, I'm sad that it's not easier/more socially accepted to cycle from Leam to campus/around campus, as I felt so much fitter in Grenoble being able to cycle everywhere. (It would be an odd day if I didn't use my bike!)



Metrovélo number 2!!



Cycling to Lac Taillat

Returning Home:

You may think that leaving France means that you can leave all the bureaucracy behind, but I found this was very much *not* the case for me.

I tried to go in person to close my bank account, but I still had a little money in my account and because I didn't have another French bank account (with a RIB - French bank details), they couldn't transfer that for me. The lady told me that I could transfer the money and email the bank to close the account so I ended up returning to England.

I had a few outstanding recurring payments and it took ages before I sorted these out and got my balance to zero. My BNP card would take a few days before any payments would come out, so I would stop using this card a while before you want to close your account/leave France. I then emailed asking for my account to be closed, and they replied saying I had to send a letter but I insisted that I had been told I could close it via email and they eventually said that it would be closed within two weeks.

My insurance was all sorted out through the bank, and I didn't realise, that it renewed itself annually on the 1st of January (even though it was for students and I got it in August!). I tried to cancel this by email but I was told I had to send a letter saying it would end in January. Obviously, I didn't want to pay for 5 months extra, but in the end, this sorted itself out, mainly because I closed my BNP account so they couldn't take any money out, and I sent them a letter I found online which quoted a French law about being able to cancel an insurance contract after one year (which by this point it was).

I also had the Free 2 euro mobile phone SIM contract which gave me free texts and calls in France but no data (I didn't need this as my English SIM had international roaming included in my plan). This was a nightmare to cancel as well. I tried ringing/emailing but in the end had to send them a letter all the way to France just to cancel a 2 EURO contract!

I actually didn't really use this SIM because you can just use WhatsApp with your English number. The main reason I got one was because I needed it to apply for CAF but actually, I had a friend who couldn't be bothered to get a French number and just wrote down a random number when he created his account. I won't explicitly say you should do this, but CAF never contacted me by phone, only by mail/email, and my friend never had the hassle of cancelling the phone contract so you can take away from that what you want.

The moral of this section is that you before you leave France you should really try to cancel any contracts you have!



Hiking up Chamchaude above the clouds



Night in a cave

Conclusion:

I've mainly talked about all the issues I had on my year abroad, but this is because I feel previous students' reports have been really helpful in terms of general living, so I didn't see the point in repeating everything they have already said.

Don't read this report and be put off - I had the most amazing year! Even with Covid being a massive problem what with not being able to see my family or Warwick friends for a year, not being able to ski (lol priorities) and having a continuous curfew/lockdown from October until May/June, I *still* made friends from so many countries, improved my French, managed to travel to Lyon, Annecy, Montpellier, Marseille, Geneva and Aix-les-Bains, and got to live in a beautiful city with superb views of the mountains.



Trip to Marseille and Les Calanques

I promise you'll have the best year! Bonne chance!!