

Mathematics Year Abroad: Paris (2023)

Tom Bidewell



I'm Tom, a 3rd year mathematics student who spent Second Year studying at the Université Paris Cité. I had a fantastic time: making lots of new friends all across the globe, learning a new language, experiencing French culture, as well as exploring subjects outside of maths such as computer science or linguistics.

Accommodation

Finding good accommodation in Paris can be a little tricky and I would advise sorting this out as soon as possible. In the end, we subscribed to a letting agency called "Paris Attitude " and I cannot recommend them highly enough. They assigned an employee to help us through every step of the process and gave us invaluable advice on the best arrondissements. I loved my apartment in the 6th, which was particularly well located being

a 10 minute walk from Notre Dame, but given my time again, I would look further south, around the 14th. Rents will be cheaper and there seemed a more residential feel meaning bars and restaurants won't keep you up. Many websites will recommend avoiding the northern parts of Paris such as Clignancourt and Barbès Rochechouart and whilst there are much nicer parts of Paris, my friends who lived there never had any trouble and actually enjoyed the location. I would also recommend getting your visa sorted as quickly as possible as this process took a very long time and wasn't the easiest thing to navigate. It's essential this gets done, one person I knew on a year abroad in Paris, not at Warwick, had to move back home after Christmas due to not having their visa.

University

The structure of the degree I chose at Warwick meant this year didn't count towards my final degree classification and so Warwick were fairly relaxed about the modules I took. To begin with I took solely maths modules but found a lack of decent applied content and so I branched out taking modules from computer science and linguistics. Université Paris Cité were also happy for me to take modules at both undergraduate and postgraduate level. I would add however, that the level of the courses was quite far below that of Warwick so if you're particularly concerned about the level of material taught, I would recommend looking more at Ecole Normale Supérieure (ENS) as these are supposed to be much harder than other "normal" universities in France. I also took French lessons at the university; the grammar course was excellent but the oral course was pretty poor with the professor talking to us for the whole 2 hours and very little inter-person discussion. The style of teaching was also quite different to Warwick with modules taught in much more of a school classroom setting and lessons taking 2hrs. The length of the lessons took some adjusting to but eventually you become accustomed to it.

Internship

Provided your lease permits it, a summer internship is a great way to experience French working culture whilst also being in Paris for the summer, perhaps my favourite time of the year in the city. I found that getting a research internship at a university was relatively straightforward, emailing a supervisor and then an informal interview. The only issue is the abysmal pay of €4.05 an hour although I don't know how the private sector compares.

Social Life

Parisian social life is fantastic! There are so many cool parks, museums, galleries all over Paris as well as city wide evening events such as La Nuit Blanche and La Fête de La Musique. For the museums, I found that just showing my student card was enough to get in for free wherever I went, so not being a member of the EU was not an issue. For those that are into night life, Paris has many cool bars which can be pretty cheap (€3 pints!). There are also numerous night clubs that were good fun too. Outside of Paris, Versailles is definitely worth a trip, both the chateau and the gardens, and Fontainebleau is also beautiful, not just for the hikes and climbing but also for the chateau.

Life In Paris

Day to day life in Paris can be quite expensive especially when it comes to grocery shopping. The price of meat is particularly high, so much so I pretty much went vegetarian during the last 4 months. Gyms are also expensive and the cheaper ones (roughly €20) are always busy and don't have enough free weights (i.e. one squat rack for an entire gym). The metro is good however, it definitely feels more spacious than the Tube. Most people I know got a Navigo pass and it was well worth it. A word of warning about the paper tickets, you must keep them on you the entire journey. One time I didn't and got fined around €60 despite efforts to explain the situation. Also don't keep the paper tickets near your phone as this causes them to stop working - a lesson learnt the hard way after being unable to use a pack of 10!

Getting back home to England is relatively easy. I predominantly took the Eurostar as there's no weight restriction on your bags and was just a much smoother process. It can be pricier than flying but if you book early enough it's not too bad. Of the two airports I would recommend Charles de Gaulle as there is a metro straight there (RER B). I did try flying from Orly once but it's quite far from the city and you have to pay an extra €10 for their shuttle train back into Paris.

In all, I had a fantastic experience. There were tough moments however. The strikes caused a lot of lectures to be moved online or canceled due to either no public transport or other university students blocking access to department buildings. The bin men striking also caused large piles of rubbish in my neighbourhood which was particularly disgusting. Luckily no one I knew was affected by the riots. I also found that getting most things done involving a company or university was a hassle with people either passing you onto someone else, not replying to your emails/calls or not doing what they'd said they would. After a time this became increasingly frustrating and tiresome.

I hope this report has been useful for you. It was a fantastic year and I would highly recommend taking a year abroad to any 2nd year students. I've made friends for life, learnt another language, explored many new subjects. I've grown so much as a person and wholeheartedly encourage you to consider a year abroad.

Feel free to contact me if you have any questions about Paris: thomas.bidewell@gmail.com