

## Erasmus Report: Paris VI

My experience during the Erasmus year at Sorbonne was overall positive. I would recommend anyone to go live abroad in a city like Paris. It is an opportunity to meet incredible people, discover the French culture, and live great experiences. I found it very exciting to have to start from zero and build myself a new life. There were also challenges, but opportunities like this one come very few times in life, and I think I made the right decision taking it.

Unfortunately, my year has been impacted by the COVID-19 sanitary crisis and the measures that France took in response. On September restrictions were easing, but a new coronavirus wave changed the situation. I was abroad from September to May, and Paris was under a severe lockdown from November until May. To begin, universities, clubs, restaurants, museums, indoor sports facilities, and shops were closed. There was also a curfew at 6pm and you could only go outside your house in a 10km radius. I must admit it was not easy to live under those conditions, but I think it helped me learn to stay positive and make the most of each situation.

In the following sections I will comment on my experience and tips for future Erasmus students in Paris. If that is your case, I hope you find this information helpful and please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions at [ger.lopez\\_m3@hotmail.com](mailto:ger.lopez_m3@hotmail.com).

### Life in Paris

The best thing of going abroad as part of the Erasmus program is that there are thousands of students in the same situation as you. There are several group chats where students organise events throughout the year. There you can meet lots of people from all over Europe that are in the same situation. In my case, I made a group of Spanish friends who lived nearby, and we stayed together the whole year. It was quite convenient because even with the lockdown we were able to meet for dinners, watch movies, discover the city, or throw small parties.

However, I encourage anyone to mix with the locals since that way is how you are going to learn the most. In my situation, the courses were online, societies were shut down, and sport teams were cancelled for the year, which made things more difficult. Otherwise, I suggest doing as many activities as possible. At the end you are only going to be on an Erasmus year once and you must get the most out of it. Paris is a big city filled with young people and so there will always be things to do and people to meet.

In terms of the destination, I am very happy to have chosen Paris. It is such a beautiful city that even after 10 months visiting around, there are still some places I have not seen. It is also a very lively place, everyone I met was full of energy to do any kind of activities. Before coming I heard several times the stereotype of 'Parisians not being nice' and I have to say it proved to be completely wrong for me. It is true that I did not manage to properly meet any Parisian, but throughout the year everyone behaved politely, and I could tell they appreciated the efforts I made towards learning their culture and language.

## Expenses

Paris is known for being an expensive city. If you do not manage properly your money, you can easily spend +400€ a week. Going to a restaurant can easily cost you 30€ per person and the average price of a pint is around 8€. As a student, however, there is a lot of government support that make life way cheaper. In terms of accommodation, there are subsidised residencies (CROUS) all over Paris that cost less than 100€ a week. You are also eligible for rent aid (named CAF) available to all students (40-75€ a week). Entrance to all museums is free, and there are a lot of incredible museums to visit. In terms of food, supermarkets are not much more expensive than in the UK, but there is a chain of student restaurants where you can eat a whole meal for 1€. On top of that, you get the Erasmus grant and university fees are almost 7 times cheaper.

## Accommodation

I was lucky to get the accommodation sorted out by my university the year before. I got a CROUS residence in the 13<sup>th</sup> district. The location was not the best, but it was close to the centre, and very cheap. I was also lucky to have my group of friends in the same building, so we were able to meet during the lockdown.

If you do not get a CROUS residence, I would still suggest living in a private residence even if it is more expensive. There you will have communal areas to meet people whereas if you live in a regular flat you will have to make an extra socialising effort. It is also worth expending a bit more money to live in the metropolitan area of Paris. Spending more than 30 minutes just to go to campus can be very discouraging. Do not expect anything too luxurious, most accommodations are quite small if you do not want to spend a fortune. I guess that is also part of the Parisian life.

## Academic life

My academic experience was not satisfactory overall. The level of Sorbonne in mathematics was similar to the one in Warwick. However, they were extremely unorganised. Nobody introduced us to the university or explained us how things worked out there, and if you asked the academic coordinators any question, most of the time you would not receive any answer. Modules on the website did not have any description so I had to choose based on their titles. They were also not updated from the year before, so I had to change my module choices on the first week of the term. For module arrangements, like timetables, it was better to talk directly to the teacher because coordinators would not answer.

We had way more contact hours than in Warwick. Each 12 CATS subject would have 2 hours of lectures and 3 hours of seminars a week. The academic year was also longer, around 12 weeks per term, and there are two exam sessions (one for first term modules and one for second term). In that sense, the learning experience was slower paced than in Warwick, which could be helpful in the harder modules. Most of the professors were very good and helpful when asked questions. However, each subject was assessed in a different way that was decided by the professor. This led to a mismatch in grading depending on the teacher. For instance, everyone got good grades in Topology but only a few were able to pass Complex Analysis.

## Language

If one of your main objectives is to learn French properly, you should focus the first few weeks on making French friends. I did not do that, and my French did not improve as much as it could have. It was hard for me partly because of covid restrictions (online lectures, no societies...) and partly because my level of French was very low since the beginning. Lectures and seminars are in French, but you will not have any problem understanding those, it is speaking what really becomes tricky.