

ERFAHRUNGSBERICHT ZUM AUSLANDSSTUDIUM/ EXPERIENCE REPORT FOR THE SEMESTER ABROAD

1. When, where, and for how long have you been an Erasmus student?

I have been an Erasmus-student in Paris (Université Paris Diderot) from September to December 2018, so I spent one semester there.

2. LAND UND LANDESTYPISCHES/The Country and its Characteristics

Please describe the region in which you lived as an Erasmus student (surroundings, traditions, people, etc.).

The region was urban, as Paris is a very big city. So, the surrounding was quite anonymous but in general the people were very nice and helpful, though. As France is known for its cuisine, I enjoyed the good food and the wine but from time to time I had problems to find a meal in a restaurant because I am vegetarian. In general, I think many French people are quite conservative when it comes to their cuisine. Furthermore, I did not really see much innovation when it comes to environmentalism and compared to Berlin, this does not seem to be one of the most salient topics for the people. (just my first impression, for sure it could be different than that!) For example, as well in the Cafeteria in my university as in the one on the campus where I lived ("Cité universitaire de Paris"), you got your coffee in a paper cup, regardless of whether you drank it right there or wanted to drink it on the go. Furthermore, there was a lot of plastic cutlery in the cafeterias at the university and in cafeterias and bakeries in general. It seemed to me as the comfort of not having to clean dishes was rated higher than sustainability. This made me thoughtful.

3. FACHLICHE BETREUUNG/Academic Advising

Did you get help from the partner university during your stay abroad? Were there programs for incoming students? What did you think of the courses offered

by the partner university? How did they work with your Learning Agreement (could you take all the courses you wanted?)?

Unfortunately, there was nothing like a “welcome week” where you could get to know other students of your discipline. (If there was one, it could not be found easily on the website, as me and my friends had looked for it.) There was no program offered especially to Erasmus-students either. As I knew people from the HU who also spent their Erasmus-semester at Paris Diderot and got to know a lot of people at my student accommodation, I did not stay alone. But if I had lived by myself and had not known anyone from my home-university, it could have been difficult to get to know people as there was no offer from the Diderot University!

There were many interesting courses offered by the partner university and I was happy with the courses I took! But the administration at the Diderot University was really complicated. We were told that there was a website where we could see all the courses (like Agnes) but neither my friends nor me were able to find this website. Instead of this we had a little booklet with the study-program described and all the courses that were offered during the semester ... the only problem: there was many important information missing! Indeed, all the courses were listed and an information about the content of the course and the professor was given. What was missing, was: the time when the course takes place and the building and room-number ... very important information when you want to plan your time-table! The inscription could not be done online, so my friends and I visited four different offices before we were inscribed in every seminar. This was a bit stressing and confusing, but at least, the staff of the university was very nice and helpful and tried their best to guide us a way through this organizational maze. In the end, many courses matched with my Learning Agreement and I did not have to change very much, even though I am still not a hundred percent sure if the “Anrechnung” will really work how agreed upon.

4. SPRACHKOMPETENZ/Language Proficiency

Did you take part in preparatory language courses at the university? In which language did you study at the partner university? Did you improve your language skills during your stay abroad?

Some courses I visited were in English and some were in French. I did not take part in any preparatory language course before my Erasmus-semester, but I visited the course "français oral" during my Erasmus-semester. The course was very interesting, and I liked it that there were students of many different countries, so we could share various experiences. This did not only improve my speaking-skills but also my knowledge of other cultures! In general, I really improved my language-skills, especially when it comes to speaking. After a few weeks I already felt much more secure while speaking and in the end, my French was quite fluent. (but maybe I should add that I had C1 Level before!)

5. WEITEREMPFEHLUNG/Recommendation

Would you recommend this partner university? Please explain why or why not.

I would recommend the university when it comes to the courses that are offered, especially when you are interested in Maghreb, colonial or gender history. Especially when it comes to the Maghreb and other Muslim regions the offer is much bigger than at the HU! In terms of the administration I would not really recommend the university because you cannot do anything online and must do a lot of paperwork, you have many different contact persons and seemingly small things (like an inscription) can take a lot of time. Nevertheless, the administration-staff is very relaxed and when you adjust yourself to the procedures, you may take it easy and laugh about it.

6. VERPFLEGUNG AN DER HOCHSCHULE/Meals at the University

How expensive are the meals at the university cafeteria?

Are there sufficient options for people with allergies, vegans, and vegetarians?

The meals at the university cafeteria and restaurant were not expensive at all! (3,25€ for starter, main dish and desert!) and there was free water at the university restaurant which I think should be taken as an example by German universities!

But unfortunately, the negative impressions of the university cafeteria and restaurant predominated! The food was not labeled and when you asked the staff about the food, they mostly did not really know what it was. Asked the question "what is this?", the answer often simply was "it's meat" or "it's vegetarian".

People with allergies could not eat in the university restaurant as they have no chance to get to know if the food contains allergens! I also would not recommend visiting the restaurant to vegans as there is almost no vegan offer! There never were vegan main dishes and even when it comes to the side dishes, vegans could have problems as they mostly contained cheese or other dairy products. The things that vegans could eat there are probably only fries and maybe vegetables (but they are probably cooked with butter, so I am not sure.) If you are vegetarian, you sometimes have options in the university restaurant but not always! There was not a vegetarian main dish every day! And when there was, for example, a quiche and I asked the staff, if the quiche is vegetarian, they mostly did not know. Usually they answered with "yes" and when I continued to ask: "but is there fish in it?" the answer was also "yes", as if it was self-evident that every vegetarian eats fish. I often ended up in only eating a big plate of fries and a salad. In my opinion, you cannot blame the staff of the restaurant for this situation. The management of "CROUS" (the company that runs the university restaurants) should offer a better education for their staff and concerning the menu, they should finally try to arrive in the 21. Century! Also, when it comes to the quality of the food, there are many things to improve! It was often quite tasteless, and the vegetables were overcooked. Furthermore, there was often no sauce, so the food was very dry! One last good thing, I must add, is that there were microwaves in the university cafeteria! So, you had the opportunity to bring your own food.

7. ÖFFENTLICHE VERKEHRSMITTEL/Public Transportation

Did you use public transportation? How expensive is it? Is it advisable to have a bike?

I used public transportation nearly every day, as I went to university by tram. The public transportation is cheaper than in Germany which is a very good thing! Unfortunately, I was not entitled to buy a student ticket because only students under the age of 25 are allowed to use them! So, instead of 40 € per month, I had to pay twice as much! In general, the public transportation network is very good in Paris and it does not take you much time to reach a different part of the city. Unfortunately, the metro is closed at night (from around 01:00 until 05:00), every day, even on the weekends and taking the night-bus takes ages, so I often

had to walk 40-50 minutes at night after meeting a few friends in the city. There is a bicycle-sharing-system called "velib" which is very cheap! (1€ per month), so if you like cycling, I really would recommend this, especially when you have to go home at night.

8. WOHNEN/Accommodations

How did you find your room/apartment/flat-share?

How is the price-performance-ratio?

When it comes to the accommodation, I was very lucky! I applied for student-housing with my Erasmus-application and at the same time, I applied to the "cite universitaire de Paris" for a room in the German house, the "maison Heinrich Heine". I was accepted at both accommodations and finally chose the room in the "maison Heinrich Heine", which was a really good choice because I got to know a lot of nice people there and the "cite universitaire", which is a campus with many dorms of different countries, is a very beautiful and interesting place that offers a lot of activities. The prices for a room in a dorm are relatively moderate! I paid 430 euros and other friends, who lived in dorms of "CROUS" (comparable to the German "Studierendenwerk") paid the same. In general, I would recommend "CROUS"-dorms because they are not very expensive and have beautiful rooms! At the cite universitaire, there are cheap dorms as well, but there are also dorms where a room costs about 700 euros! (But when you apply you can give a price-limit!)

I think the price-performance-ratio when it comes to dorms is not that bad for such a big city! (around 400-450 euros for 10-15 square-meters), but when it comes to apartments and flat-shares it is a catastrophe! No one will be surprised when I tell him / her that living in Paris is very expensive! A room of 7m² can cost around 700 €! I would absolutely not recommend looking for an apartment or a flat-share but applying for a CROUS-residence or for a room in a dorm at the "cite universitaire"

9.KULTUR UND FREIZEIT/Culture and Leisure Time

Which cultural opportunities in the city did you experience? How are the options for museums, galleries, sport events, bars, and restaurants?

In Paris, there are a lot of cultural opportunities to explore! Everybody knows for example the Louvre, Arc de Triomphe or Notre Dame. I visited (among other things) Notre Dame, Sacré Coeur (which was one of my favorite spots!), the museum of migration and the Centre Pompidou. And even if you don't visit a special building, it can be enough to only walk through the city to be impressed by its historical buildings, the beautiful houses and the whole atmosphere! Unfortunately, like regarding the transportation ticket, you do not get any discount when you are older than 25 and the differences of the prices can be huge! Walking up the Arc de Triomphe, for example, is for free when you are younger than 25 and EU-citizen. But when you are older, it costs 12 euros! And it does not matter at all if you are a student or not! This applies to a lot of touristic attractions and to cultural institutions like museums as well. I would go that far as to call this age discrimination! It gives you the strange feeling that you should no longer be a student at the age of 26, that you should earn enough money to afford these sometimes-tremendous prices! I do not want to say that there should not be a discount for young people, this is a very good thing! But I think that the income should also be considered, so there should be discounts for apprentices and students, too! When it comes to bars and restaurants, there are many offers and ways to also save money! For example, you can make a restaurant-reservation online by app (e.g. La Fourchette), save up to 50% and also see how other people rated the restaurant! I would strongly recommend this and advise against the spontaneous visit of a restaurant in a very touristic spot! Here you can get very expensive, small and sometimes unenjoyable plates for very high prices! When it comes to bars, there are many good options and many bars have a happy hour until 9 pm or sometimes even 10 or 00! But when you visit a bar not during the happy hour, I would recommend ordering wine instead of beer because beer is very expensive, and wine is cheaper and in most cases very enjoyable!

10. AUSLANDSFINANZIERUNG / Financial Situation

How much did you spend per month?

I did not take any notes concerning my spending, so I cannot give detailed information about that! I would estimate that I spent about 900 € per month (430 for the rent and about 500 for food, leisure time-activities, the public-transportation-ticket and insurance.)

[I agree to the publication of my report]

A handwritten signature in blue ink, consisting of several loops and a long horizontal stroke.

Berlin / 28/02/19/ Meriam Bendakir