

Introduction

I am currently in my fifth year at the Telfer School of Management, studying marketing (with co-op, hence, I am in fifth year). I applied to take part of this exchange in January 2024, and I was accepted in March. I completed all my core Telfer courses prior to leaving for exchange, so I only had electives left and I saved them for my exchange. However, I had a co-op term during the Spring/Summer 2024 semester, so I was not able to apply to any exchange locations with semesters that start at the beginning of August. My exchange is in northern France, the institution I am studying at is EDHEC, Lille campus.

Academics (Program + Timetable)

Program and Courses

At EDHEC, the exchange students are referred to as “incoming” students. I am currently an incoming student in their BBA program (bachelor’s degree) in the International Business, English, track. I am considered a fourth-year student in the program, so I’m usually referred to as a “BBA 4” student. Some of the other exchange students I have met are enrolled in various years of the BBA program, Masters, or Pre-Masters programs.

Some of my peers were able to apply to certain streams, but during applications I was only able to apply to the institution, not a specific track. I was accepted into the institution as a BBA 4 student.

In terms of courses, I am taking EU Business Law (24 hours), International Marketing (36 hours), Contemporary French Business and Society (36 hours), Project Management (24 hours), Omnichannel Marketing (36 hours), and IMC in a Digital Age (36 hours) for credits. In addition, I am a “free listener” (auditing) Beginner 2 French. I am auditing French because the course unfortunately does not count as a credit towards my Telfer degree, and I wanted to improve my French. So, the course will not appear on my records.

All the courses are primarily taught in-person with mandatory attendance. Some sessions are taught online through “Collaborate” which can be found on EDHEC’s online learning platform, Blackboard. In class attendance is tracked by a badge system where you must scan your badge in each classroom. Free listeners are required to attend all in-person classes for the course they are auditing.

Each course is weighted in “ECTs”, while uOttawa uses the term “course units”. All my courses have a different weighting, but 30 ECTs is equivalent to 5 courses at uOttawa (or a full course load). I am taking around 31 ECTs for credit, excluding the French course I am auditing.

During course sign up, you can see the number of hours of each course. This refers to the number of hours you will spend in lecture. For example, EU law is a 24-hour course. So, there are 24 hours of lecture. Typically, the classes are structured in 3-hour blocks, so there is a total of 8 sessions (lectures) spread throughout the semester.

Timetable

At EDHEC, international students are welcomed with international integration day as well as orientation for the program. The orientation session happened on August 29, 2024, and lectures started during the first week of September. Course registration occurred in April. Final exams are during the second and third weeks of December.

EDHEC has “fall” and “winter” semesters, similarly to uOttawa. Throughout the semester, there are “bank holidays” in November, it is marked on your timetable. However, there is no reading week for BBA 4 students. There are readings weeks for BBA students in other years.

At EDHEC, there is no consistent timetable, and it is subject to change. Each course also has a different start and end date in terms of when lectures will start/end before final exams. Since there is mandatory attendance, students must check their timetable regularly in case there is a change. In my experience, it has happened once or twice, but usually, a week or two in advance. Administration warns us that there is a possibility of a change within 24-hours, however, it is rare. Still, I recommend checking the timetable regularly.

Furthermore, the actual classes have a very sporadic schedule. There are weeks where I have had nine hours of lecture in one day, but two or three days of no classes. I have also experienced having multiple lectures for one specific course over two-three weeks, and then not having it again until another month.

Secondly, I have had lectures/sessions and “directed work” blocked off on my timetable in the same day for the same class. Before starting classes, I thought “directed work” were sessions with TAs (teaching assistants), however, that is not the case. Usually, professors will continue lecturing or give you time to complete group work or a class activity (at least for the marketing classes).

All in all, it can be very difficult to adjust to this type of scheduling. It can also be quite draining to pay attention to and sit through six hours of the same class (this occurs when a lecture and directed work session scheduled in the same day). However, my professors usually give students 10–15-minute breaks throughout the lecture. This schedule has also given me days of the week with no classes. “Breaks” in between classes and weekends have given me ample time to travel. Within a month, I was able to visit 6 different countries (including France). Lille is relatively close to Paris and Belgium and a few other countries. Especially when you take advantage of the high-speed trains.

Procedures Upon Arrival

Upon arrival, I had to check-in with the property manager of the house I was renting a room in for my studies. I had booked this appointment prior to arriving. My dad came with me from Canada, and we were able to evaluate the house for any issues and collect my keys. Unfortunately, my shower head was not working properly so I did not have a working shower for

a week. Make sure to check everything in your house, especially if you live off campus (which is what I currently do). This includes appliances and locks in your house.

In terms of administration, your visa must be validated once you arrive in France, and it must be done before EDHEC's welcome activities or else you won't get your student card. To do this, you need to buy a virtual or physical visa stamp. Physical stamps can be purchased at tobacco stores but be careful with store hours as many shops are closed on Sundays or have limited hours. I find that stores are generally not open as late as they are in North America as well in case you arrive late at night.

I validated my visa once I settled into the place I am renting as you need to provide an address for the validation. I wanted to ensure that my house lived up to my expectations before doing so. The validation is done online and EDHEC's International Student Office (ISO) provides the link and information to this before school starts. They were very helpful in answering my questions, so I recommend reaching out to ISO if you have trouble understanding how to fill out the form. The visa validation form also acts like a temporary residency permit.

As I mentioned before, EDHEC hosts an international integration day and orientation sessions for students to welcome them to the school and the program they have been admitted to. If you are a bit shy or introverted, you may feel a bit overwhelmed on integration day because all the students were put in random teams to participate in different activities and "compete" against each other. However, it can be a fun way to meet fellow students, they also provided dinner! There was also time to network during the orientation session and I was able to meet friends I currently have classes with.

Budget

Travelling to and from Paris (and Lille)

To get to Lille, I drove to Toronto and took a plane from Toronto (YYZ) to Paris (CDG), and then a train to Lille. I booked a round trip with Air Canada in June, and they were around ~\$1000 CAD. If you book earlier, you might be able to get a better deal, but I didn't want to book anything before I had my housing secured. The cost of the high-speed trains varies depending on the train line you use and how far in advance you book it. However, you might be able to find random deals.

France's railway system is managed by SNCF, and they are associated with several railway providers such as TGV Inoui, Ouigo, and the Eurostar. Ouigo tickets are usually the cheapest, and Eurostar tickets are usually the most expensive. They are all high-speed trains, but it can take 1-2 hours to get to Lille depending on the train you book and the route it takes.

Tickets can be purchased on the SNCF website, but I also like to book tickets using a third-party service called "Trainline". Expect to pay on average \$50 CAD when travelling to and from Paris. However, it can be up to \$100 CAD or more, and potentially much less. I have travelled from Paris for around \$20 CAD. I've had friends who found deals by bussing, but the bus can take up

to three hours if you have the time to take it. Once you have a French phone number and address, you can purchase a 1-year membership of a “youth adventure” pass from SNCF to get discounts on train tickets.

Housing

For housing, expect to pay around at least \$900 CAD a month, and prepare to pay for six-months of rent and to sign a 1-year lease, even if you are only attending EDHEC for one semester (four months). Although, the EDHEC Lille campus is referred to as the Lille location, it's not actually in Lille (or the downtown core of Lille). It's located between the communes of Roubaix and Croix. On campus and off campus housing is available. I live off-campus, in Roubaix. Roubaix is considered one of the more affordable areas in France. However, it's not the most glamorous (that's not to say you can't find a home you'll be comfortable in).

My rent is 525 euros a month, which is around \$785 CAD. I live at 27 Rue Dammartin, 59100, Roubaix, and I found the place on Studapart, a housing platform recommended by ISO. Out of fear of scams, I chose to only use sites ISO recommended. Although my rent is only \$785 CAD per month, the property manager did not agree to signing a contract unless I committed to start paying from the last two weeks of July. I had searched for housing for 2-3 weeks, and many landlords had a six month or nine-month commitment condition.

In addition to the rent itself, and the additional rent I paid before moving in (I moved in on August 26, 2024), I pay using TD wire transfers which TD charges \$50 CAD for. Furthermore, my property manager makes me pay the fee their bank charges recipients for receiving money through wire transfers. This is an additional ~\$18 CAD. Another thing to note is that there are platform fees with using Studapart and property managers will likely charge you a contract fee for drafting up the lease. Expect another \$200-300 CAD (or more) on top of the charges I already mentioned to cover those.

The house I live at is pretty good in terms of the amenities included in rent for the price. I have my own bedroom (with a lock) and a private washroom (shower, toilet, and sink. I specify these because some rooms found on Studapart may have a private shower but not a private toilet). The house is equipped with Wi-Fi, heating and hot water, a kitchen, and laundry machines. My house is approximately a 20-minute commute whether I walk or take the tram. The tram stop is around an 8–10-minute walk from school. The closest metro station is around a 20-minute walk. I don't take the bus to school because Google maps has never given me an efficient route using it, so I cannot provide information on it.

The rent for a private studio on campus (dormitory) is around 545 euros, not including electricity, but spots fill up very quickly. Shared rooms that are slightly cheaper are also available. ISO hosted a housing webinar in May and spots filled up within an hour after the webinar. Since I was too late, I needed to find a place off campus. However, there aren't too many restaurants and grocery stores that are very close to campus (within 15 minutes on foot),

except for a bakery, that I know of. The closest grocery store to my house is around a 12-minute walk or a six-minute bus ride, and there's a convenience store less than 5 minutes away from me.

Commuting from Lille will take almost the same amount of time as commuting from uOttawa to Barrhaven. So, consider your housing location wisely. I suggest taking the costs of commuting (in terms of time and public transportation costs) as well as what's nearby. The monthly pass for the public transportation card (called a "Pass Pass") is around \$200 CAD, so it's slightly cheaper than a UPass. Lille's public transportation agency is called "Ilevia". I also suggest using Google maps to look at public transportation routes and what grocery stores are nearby when searching for accommodation.

Food

In terms of food costs, I would say the meat, such as chicken, can be 2-3x the price you find in Canada (at least for halal chicken). However, some items, like bottled water and bread can be cheaper or around the same price you would find in Canada (after the conversion rate). For example, I have found 1.5 L water bottles for 0.32 euros, less than a Canadian dollar for one bottle. I tend to buy food out a lot, so it'll be at least \$20-\$30 CAD for a meal, and less than \$14 if you buy from the bakery near campus (Patrick Hermand).

Your food budget will depend on how much you cook at home and where you buy food from. Lidl is known to be a discount grocery chain, so it's cheaper than Carrefour stores (a corner store brand). For general home goods, "Action" is known to be cheaper and there's a big one in the Leclerc mall in Roubaix.

Application Procedures Before Arrival

Before coming to France, I had to register for courses, secure my housing, book flight tickets, and apply for a visa. EDHEC's ISO sends informative emails and hosts multiple webinars throughout the year to give more information on this process, so I will only go over the details for this briefly.

For visa, Canadian citizens are automatically granted a short-term visitor's visa for the Schengen area and France is included in the area. However, since the study term is four months, a temporary long term student visa is required. Canada is an "EEF country" and EEF countries have specific application instructions. First one must apply for an EEF certificate, apply for a visa online through France's visa portal, print out the application form associated with it, and drop the form off to a visa application centre with passport sized photos and other required documents.

Again, ISO has more information on the process. You can apply for your visa at a maximum of 3 months in advance, I believe I applied in June, two months before my departure date. The sooner the better because you need an appointment to file your application. You can book the appointment online, but the website did not work for me, so I physically went to the Ottawa visa application office and explained my situation. The office is a bit stringent with allowing visitors

without an appointment in and my phone calls would not be picked up. Regardless, I was met with some kind workers.

Some things you should keep in mind during the visa application is that you need to submit a transcript. You also need to submit an official transcript to EDHEC earlier in the year, I suggest purchasing one in French to submit to EDHEC and during your visa application. Another thing to keep in mind are the fees, there's a fee to pay for the EEF certificate and for making an appointment at the application centre (and to pay for parking as well). Lastly, on my application I indicated that I would be staying for four months so the visa that was granted expires exactly 4 months from the day I indicated that I would land in August. If you need a few more days to pack and finalize any last trips, add more details on your initial visa application.

The last significant procedure to note is that I got my birth certificate translated to French at the Translation Agency of Ontario. You may need the certificate to apply for a bank account and social services in France. I purchased the basic translation as I was running out of time before leaving. I also got a copy notarized by a third party. I have not run into any issues with using the notarized, basic translated copy (or a combination).

Housing

Please refer to the "Budget" section of the report which also outlines the houses amenities, costs, and location details. Note: I could not filter the gender of my roommates on Studapart if that's important to you.

Other Tips

Travelling + Budget

Compared to taking a plane from Canada to any country in Europe, moving around within Europe is relatively cheaper. However, don't underestimate travel costs. Although trains can be cost effective, they can still get expensive. \$50 CAD on average for trips to Paris and Brussels isn't bad. However, my return tickets to London St. Pancras were a bit over \$350 CAD (on the Eurostar). So don't underestimate transportation costs, even though it'll be significantly cheaper than commuting directly from Canada in comparison.

Another thing to note, is that although the high-speed trains are great, depending on how far a location is, it can take 5+ hours to commute (especially if there's a transfer). Lille to Amsterdam is five hours by bus, and around seven hours on the train to Geneva. It's not too bad if you take a night train (sleeper train) or if you wake up early (like 4 am perhaps) and you're your breaks/weekends efficiently. I've heard of some flights being as cheap as 20 euros, but I've also seen them be hundreds of euros depending on where you are going and how far in advance you

book. So, if you would like to save as much money as you can, try to plan your travels accordingly.

For accommodation, I have been saving money by doing day trips, staying at relative's houses, and staying at hostels. On average, expect to pay 50 euros a night for a hostel (I have stayed in hostels in Geneva, Brussels, and Milan). It can be more or less, especially depending on what's included in the hostels, and I stayed at some popular ones.

Lastly, aside from trainline and the SNCF apps, some resources that I have heard can help scan for transportation deals are Sky Scanner, Omio, and Kayak. I have never used Omio or Kayak, but my French roommates have. I have also never used Bolt (alternative to Uber), but I've heard it's cheaper and quite popular here.

Phones + Phone Plan

I use SYMA mobile, it's a prepaid phone plan. You "recharge" it every month. I get a lot of data included and it's only 20 euros per month. However, I have issues with using my data when travelling outside of France (although data outside of France is included in the plan). Keep that in mind if you are considering this carrier.

CAF + Amelie Étranger

CAF is a housing benefit that students can apply for. Amelie Etranger is the international student's portal for health insurance as public health is available to all students (including exchange students in France). The ISO will help guide you through the application processes for these.

Banking

You can apply for a bank account in France. There are banks with English speaking advisors that visit campus during welcome week. SG, Societe Generale, is one of those banks, and they even have an office on campus in case you have questions. However, the hours are limited.

I mention banking in France because you need a French or European bank account to access reimbursements from social services like health insurance. It can also make daily life easier if you use it to pay rent, make daily purchases, transfer money to people, etc.

One bank I signed up for before coming to France was Wise (I also got a Wise card). The reason for this is because Wise cards can hold up to 40 currencies at the same time which makes travelling convenient. Wise also charges a one-time fee for each money transfer into the account and for converting CAD to EUR. Although this one-time fee applies for each transfer or conversion, there are no other fees when using your converted currency compared to using your regular credit card from Canada (unless when making ATM withdrawals).

TD charges a fee for each purchase using a TD card on top of the fact that you are paying "extra" CAD to make up for the exchange rate. Before I got a Wise card, my friends who already had