

Hi, my name's X and I'm a third year International Management student studying on exchange at ESSEC Business School in the fall semester. I chose this school primarily because of its location, but it also has a global reputation for being one of the top business schools in France. ESSEC has two primary campuses in France, one on the border of the city and one in Cergy, which is where I am currently studying and is about a 40-minute train ride into the center of Paris.

Academics and About ESSEC

I am currently taking eight courses (equivalent to 30 ECTS) on exchange and have classes Monday to Wednesday. The lectures here are mandatory to attend, and they are in three hours blocks, however, you do get a 30-minute break halfway. This school offers a wide range of business courses across many specializations, for example some of the courses I'm taking are: innovative merchandising, e-Business, consumer behavior, conscious and mindful leadership, and purchasing management. First round of course selection happens in the summer and during the first week of school, you can add/drop or modify your schedule. The teaching method at ESSEC is highly participative and practical knowledge developed through case studies and group work. A final group project is also very common in place of a final exam. The professors at this school are experts in their field which really translates well into the classroom and they are very passionate about their topic.

Unlike the University of Ottawa campus which is composed of different faculties, ESSEC is solely a business school; therefore, the campus is quite small, but the atmosphere is very lively with events like student pep rallies, live piano music and networking sessions happening every week. The culture at ESSEC is similar to a family, where everyone knows everyone, and you smile and say hi to at least three people when travelling in between classes. The school also has a gym, weekly fitness classes like Zumba, body pump, etc., and recreational sports like badminton, basketball and soccer. There is also a campus bar which is quite popular after class hours. The drinking culture is definitely more prominent in France than in Canada and it's quite ordinary for students to meet up after class for a beer before going home.

As a top business school, specifically known for its Masters in Luxury Management Program, ESSEC connects a high concentration of its students with employers in the luxury industry. For instance, student internship opportunities to work for companies such as Chanel, Hermes, Dior, Guerlain and Les Galleries Lafayette. In addition to being a lecturer, my professor for e-Business is a headhunter for the LVMH group and brought a lot of insight of what it is like to work in the luxury industry into the classroom. ESSEC has a career portal available to all students where they regularly post internship and apprenticeship openings. Having campuses in two other countries, ESSEC is also globally well connected with opportunities available in Asia (Singapore) and Morocco.

Important Dates

In the fall semester, there is a mandatory orientation session August 31 and first day of classes start September 4. There is also a fall break from October 30 to November 4. Last day of classes is December 4, and the exam period is from December 5 to 20. The administration office at

ESSEC is readily accessible and are ready to help you with any forms related to registration, VISA/OFII or housing.

Socializing and Making Friends

Coming to a new country and not knowing anyone, surprisingly I can say I didn't experience too much of a culture shock and that was primary due to the amazing people I met during my semester here. There is a total of two Telfer students at ESSEC during this semester, myself and another girl who I didn't know prior to exchange and we ended up living in different residences, so we mainly saw each other at school. I would definitely recommend living in one of the three residences as it's a great way to meet people and it's easier to make plans to hang out outside of school. Residence is not as glamorous as living in an apartment in Paris (which is the other option) but for me it made the process of adjusting to the new environment a lot more seamless. ESSEC also has a Singapore and Morocco campus and is internationally known for its Global BBA program which requires all undergrad students to participate in a mandatory exchange. During my semester here, I met a fantastic group of friends from the ESSEC Singapore track as well as regular ESSEC French students. In addition, I also met other amazing exchange students from Belgium, China, Italy, Spain, Portugal, Switzerland, Germany, Slovenia among others. There is also a buddy system where you get paired up with a French student in the first couple of weeks when school starts. The great thing is they are very approachable, so you can ask them any "stupid" questions and even eat lunch with them. There are also many student associations which host events and parties throughout the semester at school and in Paris, and they are an awesome way to meet French and other exchange students. Personally, I didn't experience too much of a culture shock and adjusted pretty well, mainly because there is always something going on and you're constantly surrounded by people.

Budgeting:

Accommodations and Transit

There are definitely many costs associated with exchange. Accommodations being the most significant. Most people are either living in an apartment in Paris or in an Alegessec student residence organized by the school. Living in residence is a great way to meet new friends, but living in Paris would be a lot more beautiful. I am living in a single room in les Hauts de Cergy which is the largest of four student residences. My room has a full bathroom, mini kitchen with a stove, fridge and sink, a desk and a single bed. The price is 590 euros per month and Wi-Fi is an additional 20 euros per month. Getting from les Hauts to ESSEC is only a 10-minute train ride (2 stops), but it is not possible to walk. A monthly transit pass costs 75 euros. About a 5-minute walk from the residence, there is a grocery store, pharmacy, bank, cinema, post office, and an amazing bakery with the freshest baguettes and croissants; as well as, the train station to go to school and to Paris. The residences and ESSEC are located in a suburb called Cergy approximately 40 minutes from Paris.

Food

In terms of food, if you're a foodie like I am, the train ride to Paris about class is definitely worth it. Life's too short to eat boring food, especially when the food scene in Paris is so diverse.

There you will find every cuisine and especially authentic French food. From Monday to Wednesday, I usually eat at the school cafeteria which offers a daily hot meal special for 3.90 euros between 12:00 to 13:00, or you can also choose from a a kebab, sushi or sandwich shop across from the school.

Travels

Since I only have classes 3 days a week, I try to visit a new city or country every weekend. During my time here, I travelled to: Venice, Bordeaux, Munich (for Oktoberfest), Copenhagen, Lund, Malmö, Lucerne, Rome, Pisa, Florence, Milan, Nice, Cannes, Monaco, London, Brussels, Amsterdam, Prague, Vienna, Budapest and Barcelona. For most of these trips, I travelled with other exchange students I had met at school or in residence. Europe is amazing to travel around due to the proximity of the countries and each city having its own unique culture, architecture and cuisine. There are an abundant of low cost airlines such as Vueling, Transavia and EasyJet. There are three airports in Paris: Charles de Gaulle (CDG) being the largest, Orly Airport and Beauvais Tillé. Beware of flights and airlines, such as RyanAir, (which offer crazy cheap flights, for example, Paris to Barcelona for only 9 euros!!) flying out of Beauvais because it's quite far North of the center of Paris and is only accessible by a coach bus or Uber. Taking the train to neighboring cities is also an ideal transit method, or the bus would be the most inexpensive option.

For majority of my travels, I stay in an Airbnb which worked out great for me as all my Airbnb hosts were extremely welcoming and hospitable. For instance, during my first trip on exchange, we arrived at the airport in Venice at midnight, then took the ferry to the Airbnb home in which our host was waiting at the ferry dock for us and walked us to the home. He then gave us a house tour and pulled out a map of the city, recommending places to see, things to do and local restaurants. For some of my trips, I also stayed in hotels, for example, Ibis and I also used a website called Hotwire which sells 3-5 star hotels at a discounted rate.

Getting a French VISA

So far, exchange has been fantastic, but the process of getting a French VISA to study in France was a nightmare. To avoid this from happening to you, book a VISA appointment with the French embassy as soon as you get your acceptance letter. There's a lot of students going on exchange to France from many universities and time slots for an appointment are limited. For example, I received my acceptance in mid-June and when I went to book an appointment, the first available spot was September 1. My one tip to you, don't add unnecessary stress to your life and apply as soon as possible!

Exchange has been an amazing experience! ESSEC is a great school in terms of the academics, student life and atmosphere. From the art, culture, food, fashion and architecture, Paris never fails to amaze me. The city is so full of life and there is always something to do. In addition, Paris by day and Paris by night are like two different worlds. I am grateful for all the amazing friends I've met from all over the world and my family for their endless love and support during this entire experience. Exchange has definitely opened my eyes and broadened my perspective of the world in amazing ways. The knowledge and experience I acquired on this study abroad

semester is far beyond the learning that happens in the four walls of a classroom. If you are reading this and are considering going on exchange, I would 100 percent recommend and ESSEC in particular. This was my first time travelling to Europe and I fully heartedly fell in love with Paris.