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Practical Advice

Visa
Visa was around $100. Remember that you have to go to the consulate, in person, twice: once to give them your registration, once to pick it up. Make sure you have ALL your paperwork, necessary copies, etc. because they will refuse you if you don’t. It takes about a month to process. The “check” in the country was non-existent, I don’t think they looked at my picture so no need to worry about it.

Packing
I wish I had thought more about what kind of traveling I wanted to do. For example, I wish I brought more hiking clothes and shoes because I ended up having to buy some in France, luckily it was not that expensive.

Also, bring an umbrella! It rained every day for the first two months and umbrellas are pricey at around 20 euros.

Arrival
Our arrival was a bit stressful and, if possible, I’d recommend arranging to be picked up. When we arrived in Paris, trains were almost entirely shut down. Luckily, we were able to catch one of the last trains to Lille. Our landlord was in the building across the street, so was able to quickly come and show us into our rooms.

A good tip when dealing with landlords in France is to write down everything that is wrong with your room upon check-in. It is not sufficient to have verbal confirmation because in the end you could be charged hundreds of euros for damage that is not yours.

The orientation was kind of a blur, but they had a lot of useful information so it is a good idea to go. IESEG does have a Buddy system, though it is somewhat hit-or-miss. One of my friends had an excellent buddy who became a close friend and helped us with cellphones, bank accounts etc. but there were others who only offered to meet for lunch once and were never heard from again.

Academics

The University
IESEG is not so much a campus as five buildings. While it is technically part of Catho, you won’t be using their campus at all.

Take advantage of the International Student club. It is really well done and the students are a great resource for any questions you might have.

Courses
The classes at IESEG are very different from Cornell. There are intensive and extensive courses. Intensives last one week, with a final on Friday, they are worth a single credit. Extensives last the entire semester and vary in credit. You can take any mixture of the two that equals fifteen credits, which is the minimum required by Cornell.

I took all intensive courses and personally did not like the style because I felt as though if I didn’t already know the material there really was not enough time to study it. Several of my classes presented material on Friday morning, then I had to have a good handle on it for the final in the afternoon. Because it ended up being fifteen different classes/topics, it felt a bit like a blur.

Grading is also very different; assignments are graded on a scale of 1-20, with 10 being a C and 15 being an A. Feedback is difficult to come by, unless your professor is used to the North American style of teaching. Finals are usually 100% of your grade and attendance is mandatory. I received my grades between May and June.

Because IESEG is a very international university, they have many visiting professors. Unfortunately, this means that some professors are great while others fall short. Also, because they are visiting, they do not always take the time to get to know their students or make sure everyone is on the same page. My favorite professors tended to be American or Belgian because they tended to be more engaged with the class and more passionate about their subjects.
Life Abroad

Living costs
Estimated monthly budget whilst on exchange
- Housing: 590 Euros + 45 Euros/month electricity
  (In Lille, you shouldn’t pay over 300 – this is a problem with Les Estudines)
- Food: Maybe around 70-90 Euros a week shopping at Carrefour (grocery store)
- Transportation: Depends on how much you travel! 25 – 50 euros for a 1 hour train into Paris depending on how far in advance you book it.

Language
I recommend taking a college-level language course prior to arrival. It will make your life so much easier. I took French in high school, which allowed me to get by, but more exposure would have been even better. It is possible to come in with no language exposure, but it makes things more difficult.

Banking
I used SG as my local bank. They spoke English and everything was easy enough so I don’t have any complaints and would recommend it.

Housing
I stayed at the Les Estudines dorm in Lille and definitely did not have a good experience. It was more expensive than many of the other students’ residences and it was in bad neighborhood where I did not always feel safe.

I would recommend living somewhere around Vieux Lille, it is a really nice area.

Transportation
I really enjoyed being able to walk everywhere easily in Lille. However, if necessary, the metro is .80-1.50 per ride and our place was close to the Gare Lille train station.

Health and Safety
As I mentioned, my neighborhood was not the best in Lille so I did not always feel safe. However, as in any big city, it is just a good idea to be aware of your surroundings and educate yourself on the culture. For example, I found that I was frequently cat-called when jogging, even during the day, but this is much more common and even expected in France. Don’t walk home alone at night, avoid finding yourself unprepared in areas that you are not familiar with, and be smart about your behavior and actions.

Overall exchange experience
The best thing about my semester abroad was being able to build friendships with people from all over the world. Also, it was great being able to travel Europe so easily.

The most challenging aspect of my experience was my living situation. This was exacerbated somewhat by the language barrier.

Some tips for future students:
- Take a French class before studying abroad
- Study in Southern France rather than the North

Overall, this was an eye-opening experience. Lille was not my favorite place, but I would definitely do it again and recommend studying abroad to others.