

AHASoc: Placement guides

Paris (France)



I did my Year Abroad in Paris and studied at Paris IV-Sorbonne.

Travel

Public transport in and around Paris is efficient, generally inexpensive and extensive. There are three main ways of negotiating the public transport system in Paris: metro trains, RER trains and buses. Buses and metro trains are generally speaking best for travel within the city and its nearest suburbs, whilst RER trains, though they do also serve the centre of the city, are also very good for travelling further out of the city and to airports.

Metro trains: There are around thirteen different lines which rarely leave you within a ten minute stroll of a station. A single ticket on the metro costs €1.60, or you can buy a *mobilis* pass (a day pass) which is €3.20 for youngsters on *jours fériés* and weekends or €5.80 on other days. A metro pass (a *navigo*) makes sense if you will be using public transport a lot, although it is fairly easy to navigate Paris' streets and a lot of the places you will need/want to go to are within easy walking distance of one another. However, there is an initial charge of €5 to buy a *navigo*, which can be found in train stations, metro stations and in some *tabacs*. Once you have paid the €5 it is 56.60/month for zones 1-2 (see metro map) and 91.70/month for zones 1-4. The metro runs from approximately 5.30am to 1am.

Buses: The network of buses in Paris is also very efficient and possibly slightly more salubrious than the metro system in some places. Metro tickets are transferable to bus journeys and buses run from around 5.30am to midnight.

RER: These trains have five different lines, A, B, C, D and E. The best way of getting out to Charles de Gaulle (which is served by EasyJet, Air France and British Airways, amongst many others) is to take the RER line B. It is €8.40 for a single to CDG and the RER runs from 4.56-00.15.

<http://www.ratp.fr/>

Cycling: Cycling is a wonderful way of getting around Paris, due to the vast network of cycle paths throughout the city:

http://www.paris.fr/portail/deplacements/Portal.lut?page_id=7361

If you are not lucky enough to have a bicycle of your own in Paris, there is a large network of *vélib* stations dotted around the city where you can hire bikes. You must have at least €150 on your card to be able to hire a bike, as this is the amount the *mairie* will debit your account with if you do not return the bike in the allotted time. You may buy a subscription as a more hassle-free way of using *vélib*. See: <http://www.velib.paris.fr/> for more information.

Accommodation

Accommodation in Paris in general can be very expensive. In order to rent a flat, you will need to register with an agency, who will usually charge you around €250 agency fees once you have signed

a contract for a flat. Be careful of agents who try to charge you the fees before you have signed the contract as this is not uncommon in Paris. Agencies and landlords tend to favour people who have a steady income, putting students at an immediate disadvantage, so if you want to rent a flat, come very well-prepared with photocopies of your passport, your parents' passport, your parents' payslips for the last few months, tax returns, proof of permanent address in your home country and so on. Also, before you leave home, try and arrange a guarantor who, if they are not French, at least lives in France, as this is often a requirement for renting in Paris, as well as the obvious guarantors from your home country. You will also need proof you are a student so bring photocopies of student cards also.

If all this administration does not sound like your cup of tea, Paris has a wide range of *foyers* which host hundreds of students every year, and renting a room in a *foyer* does not require quite the volume of administration that renting a flat does. These *foyers* are for the most part single sex and run by nuns. Due to the religious nature of these *foyers*, the rules are often very conservative, including restrictive curfews and visiting hours etc. This might put you off straight away, and the curfews are of course a disadvantage, but *foyers* are a wonderful way of getting to meet plenty of French people of your own age, as well as other international students.

This is a useful site for organizing accommodation:

<http://www.paris-sorbonne.fr/fr/spip.php?article3888>

Studying:

Paris has around thirteen different universities, four of which come under the heading of the Sorbonne, Paris I, III, IV and V.

In order to sign up for modules, you must go to the relevant UFR (secretariat), pick up a course catalogue and then sign up with the *Licence* coordinator. It is very important to remember to fill in St Andrews' Learning Agreement with your chosen modules and to send it back as soon as possible.

You will probably have more class time at the Sorbonne than in St Andrews, and do not be surprised to find yourself in a lecture at 8.00am on a Monday morning, as French students seem to like to start early! Classes can also frequently last two or three hours.

The French marking system can be quite harsh, so do not be disheartened if you get lower grades than you would normally get in St Andrews. Allowances are sometimes made for Erasmus students, however, and often when French students are asked to give oral presentations, international students will be allowed to write an essay instead.

Paris IV-Sorbonne has a beautiful library and in order to access the library, you must have a library card; your student card will not suffice. To get a library card, you will need a passport photo and your student card. The *mode d'emploi* of the Sorbonne library differs somewhat from St Andrews library. In order to get a book out, you must look it up on the catalogue, fill one of the leaflets out that will be by the catalogue with all the relevant information (classmark and so on), and take it to the relevant *guichet*, which will be indicated in the classmark. You will then wait about twenty minutes for them to find your book, and then you have to take it to another office where it will be stamped and you will be allowed to take it home with you. *Guichet* staff are for the most part very friendly and helpful.

I think a guide to a Year Abroad in Paris could be considered incomplete without at least some reference to the strike which took place in the second semester. The possibility of a strike involving both professors and students had not occurred to me, and although no classes and no reading might appeal initially, it can put you in a difficult position academically speaking when it comes to bringing all your credits together at the end of the semester.

A great way of getting to know other students in Paris is '*Parismus*' which is a student-organized group which provides general information and also arranges social events and excursions for Erasmus students in Paris. There is a facebook group you can join which will keep you up to date with up-coming events.

For more information, see: <http://www.parismus.com/>

Work

If you want to work as well as study during your Year Abroad, the American Church (65, Quai d'Orsay, 75007) is a good way for Anglophone students in particular to find work. You can also pick up a copy of FUSAC at the American Church, which is especially geared towards Anglophones and is full of advertisements for jobs