

AHAsoc: Placement guides

Rodez (France)



“I worked as an English-Language assistant in Rodez in the Aveyron department of France. I found the pre-departure information provided by the School of Modern Languages was helpful to an extent, but perhaps somewhat lacking in the everyday advice. With this brief guide, I hope to provide advice that will make your transition from life at home to life in Rodez that little bit easier.”

Travel

Rodez is located rurally, but by no means does this mean you'll be cut off from going home or heading out sightseeing in other places during your free time. The train and coach station is a 10- to 15-minute walk from the town centre. The town is well served by trains, coaches, local buses and an airport, as well as taxis and car hire services.

Trains

Rodez has a large train station, the Gare SNCF, from which you can travel to cities like Toulouse and Paris. Trains to the former run several times a day, from early morning 'til fairly late. It would be a smart move to pick up lots of different timetables when you first go the station. A one-way ticket to Toulouse will cost around €21 (11-16 euros with a 12-25 card). The journey lasts approximately 2.5 hours, but it would also be wise to bear in mind that industrial action on the railways is common in France, so play it safe and check for any problems before you travel. You can purchase a carte 12 - 25 for 50 euros which offers reasonable reductions and should pay for itself - even for the modest traveller - after a few trips. It is advisable to buy this quickly in order to maximise savings throughout the year. When boarding a train in France, remember to validate your ticket in the yellow machine present on the platform at all stations in order to avoid a fine or stern ticking off, dependent on your ability to charm.

Coaches

Coaches in Rodez arrive and depart from the Gare routière, which is right next to the Gare SNCF. Sometimes coaches are a better way to go sightseeing, as they can be more frequent and go to different destinations. Again, gather timetables early on for future reference.

Local Buses

Rodez is again well served by a local bus service which connects the town centre with the train and coach station and all the suburbs and surrounding villages. A single fare within the town costs 80¢

and fares vary for travelling elsewhere outwith. Please note that there is **no shuttle bus service to the airport** and you will have to either organise a lift from a kind colleague or pay the taxi fare of €20... again dependent on your ability to charm!

Airport

The local airport is called **Rodez-Marcillac** and is about 15 kilometres north- west of the town centre. The airport is served by Ryanair from late March to late October, but these flights cease during winter. Direct routes available with Ryanair are to London Stansted and Dublin. Surprisingly, Scots and Northern Irish assistants may sometimes find it cheaper to come home via Dublin than London. During the winter you can fly from **Toulouse-Blagnac**. There is a shuttle bus which runs frequently between Blagnac and the main train station in Toulouse.

Taxis

Taxis may be the only way for you to get to the airport in Rodez. If this is the case, expect to pay about €20 each way. There are normally a few vehicles available at any given time of the day on the taxi rank on the Place d'Armes in front of the Cathedral. You'll also find an up-to-date list of bookable taxis on a Google search, or if you ask at the Gare Routiere, they can provide you with an extensive list.

Car Hire

There is a branch of AVIS car hire in the centre of Rodez, on Avenue Victor Hugo. Sometimes sharing a car with a couple of friends and going away for the day or weekend is not as expensive as you might think - plus you have the freedom to go wherever you like. The man who works there is really friendly. If you wish to hire a car, you need a credit card for the deposit and it costs approximately 80 euros for the day (not including petrol).

Financial Information

Please remember, your first month or so in France will be the most expensive. If you choose/need to rent an apartment, you will have to pay rent, a deposit equal to a month's rent, and also pay for food, various smaller fees and so on without being paid fully until the end of October. Electricity and internet or a phone line can add up, so ensure you think about these costs first if you decide to go about renting a flat. Make sure you have enough money to do all of this in your home account. This sort of teething period can really pile pressure on you, and you should be aware that it won't last long and that advice is always available, especially from the staff at the CLAJ and your teacher colleagues. Don't panic. Also, you will not receive a full month's payment until the end of NOVEMBER. Although you receive a payment at the end of October, it's not a full month's salary and won't last as long as you'd expect (obviously depending on your spending habits)!

Bank Accounts

You will need to open a French bank account to receive their salary as an English-Language assistant. It's advisable to do this within your first few days of arriving in Rodez. Convenient banks in the centre of Rodez include Crédit Agricole and Banque Populaire, but check the advantages of each bank might be before you make your decision. Expect to pay minor monthly charges you wouldn't pay at home, for example to have a debit card. In order to open a bank account, you will need the following:

1. Photographic I.D. (Passport)
2. Photocopy of Birth Certificate (translated, ideally)
3. Proof of accommodation (proof-letter signed by your landlord or headteacher)
4. Proof of employment (Your work contract and a letter from your school secretary)
5. An opening deposit (roughly €100, but will vary)

You may need to make an appointment to set up your account, and you should arrange this as soon as possible. Once you have your account set up, expect to wait about a week for your debit card, which you will need to collect from your branch. As soon as the bank establishes your account, ask for several copies of your **RIB (Relevé d'Identité Bancaire)**.

RIB -Relevé d'identité bancaire

You will constantly be asked to provide copies of your RIB during your time in France for most large financial or contractual actions you undertake. For example, paying your rent by direct debit or setting up an electricity account will require a RIB. The RIB is simply a strip of paper which contains your account number, branch sort code and other various information, which can be obtained either from your branch or from any of your bank's ATM machines in receipt-like form. It is definitely advisable to stock up on these as you never know when you might need one.

You may be asked and it may be most convenient to have cheques to pay for rent or utility bills. These are convenient as you are able to pay from the U.K. if something is due. However, if you write a cheque without sufficient funds in your account, it does not bounce as in the U.K. but it is actually illegal, and in extreme cases, fines and ultimately jail may be imposed. This is extreme and won't happen to you, but just bear in mind the system is a bit different here.

Salary

An English-Language assistant's salary in 2008-9 was about €780 net. This is paid to you by the regional (Midi-Pyrénées) arm of the Ministry of Education. Pay slips will be delivered to the main school you work in. You will normally be paid on a Thursday at the end of each month. Please note

however that your first full payment may not be until **the end of November**, though you may apply to receive an *avance de salaire* (don't ask why it's called an "advance"!) equal to roughly 50% of your monthly salary at the end of October from the secretary in your school. This is why giving your bank details to the school as quickly as possible upon arrival is so important.

Other Financial Information

1. At the time of writing, St. Andrews University regards British Council English-Language assistants as Erasmus students. This means that your **tuition fees will be waived** and you will have nothing to pay here in Scotland. Although this will make no practical difference to Scots students, **all** students should inform their financiers (Student Loans Company, SAAS, etc.) of their obligation to go abroad as part of their studies upon applying for loans and grants in the normal way.
2. If you decide to rent a flat, you can apply to the CAF (Caisse Allocations Familiales) for **support equal to approximately 50% to 60%** of your monthly rent. This will be paid directly into your account, and you should apply for this as soon as possible. You are entitled to back payments of 3 months, so you should apply before the Christmas break otherwise you will lose your entitlement for October. Be prepared for this to take a long time and follow a continual paper trail. It's worth it though if your rent is a reasonably large percentage of your salary.

Accommodation

Some assistants have accommodation organised by their school, either *in situ* or elsewhere - write to your school well ahead of your arrival to enquire about this. Staying in a room in a school may not be the pinnacle of modern comfort, but it's a starting point, if even just for a few weeks, and is usually free or very cheap. Accept if offered!

Renting a flat

You can get a furnished, comfortable studio or one-bedroom flat in the town centre of Rodez for an average of €300 (not inclusive of bills). You may of course decide to share with friends instead. Unless you are familiar with renting in France, you'd be daft not to go to the **CLAJ** (Comité pour le Logement Autonome des Jeunes) for help. This is an extremely helpful agency run by staff who are refreshingly pragmatic and really helpful (Veronique), who offer priceless advice and do much of the groundwork for you for a **one-off fee of €25**.

Go to the CLAJ with:

1. All the information you took to the bank, **plus** :
2. Copy of RIB

3. Guarantor letter from your parents or landlord at home.

You will be invited to view appropriate flats with a CLAJ agent, and you should express interest to the agent. Do not sign anything until you have considered your choice and have discussed it with the agent. You can then expect to organise the monthly direct debit and month's deposit with your landlord, whose RIB you will need for the direct debit. Try to arrange to meet your landlord at the CLAJ, as the agents there will ensure you understand everything that is happening before you make commitments.

Things to set up and where to go

Here are things you may want to, or have to, set up when you get a flat:

1. **Home Insurance** - you can get this very cheaply from your bank. Crédit Agricole's basic policy is about €3/month. Banque Populaire 50 euros per annum, but they will refund you the extra months if you tell them you are moving house.
2. **EDF account** - the CLAJ will do this for you.
3. **CAF support** - take all the bank info, plus a RIB. You will need to complete an earnings form for the past two years - it could be wise (and faster) to put "€0" to avoid complication... You are just a poor student.
4. **Mobile phone** - your best bet is a pay-as-you-go with Orange or SFR, and think about buying a cheap handset, not just a sim card, so you can keep your home mobile running all the time.
5. **Phoneline/Internet** - available from either SFR or France Telecom-Orange. Please note you may have to ensure the previous tenant has closed his/her phone line before you can open one.) Go for a monthly-basis internet contract which you can terminate when you want. It may cost slightly more per month, but it saves you bother if you don't have a firm leaving date. Ensure you leave sufficient time to terminate this at the end of your stay. You may have to confirm in writing, and this may take several weeks.
6. **Library account** - This will help you enormously with your year abroad project. Just go into the library with the usual documentation, and the student joining fee will be roughly €12.
7. **Television** - If you have a TV, remember you don't need to pay for a TV licence in France.

Shopping

Getting groceries is no bother in Rodez. You can get everything you need, and while France can currently be quite expensive for food, if you know where to go you can keep your grocery bills down.

1. **Supermarkets** - in the town centre are Monoprix (approximate equivalent: Sainsbury's) and Shopi (Morrisons). A 20-minute walk away, or a short bus ride, takes you to Leclerc (Tesco) and Super-U (Asda).
2. **Market** - there is a market every Wednesday- and Saturday morning in the town centre. Great for fruit, vegetables, cheese, sausage and local specialities. Relatively cheap, and definitely worth a visit. It's at its best between roughly 8-midday.
3. **Smaller shops** - there's a huge choice of boulangeries, boucheries, patisseries etc., so make the most of your time here and use them. If you *must* have a curry or a Bounty (or even Irn-Bru!) there is a shop run by an English couple called *Specialités de Grande-Bretagne* in the town centre.
4. **Shopping shopping**- if you're looking to do more serious shopping, Rodez has a selection of boutiques but not so many mainstream shops. Toulouse has a vast selection of department stores, and Albi also has a slightly wider selection, depending on what you're looking for.

Leisure

As you will only be working up to 12 hours a week, you might want to investigate what Rodez and the surrounding area has to offer in terms of leisure activities. Unremarkably the best source for this type of information is available at the tourist office, but just to give you an idea, riding, kayaking laserquest, gyms, dance classes and walking groups and bowling are all available. If you head to the MJC (community centre) at the top of rue St. Cyrice, you can find some ideas. It can be a good way to meet people and you can have fun too! It's also enjoyable to do for example, bowling with the other assistants to get to know each other.

Eating and Drinking

You're in France, so finding somewhere nice to eat or drink in town isn't really a problem. For coffees/teas, look out for Jeff de Bruges. For meals, try *La Taverne*, *Les Colonnes*, or *Divan*. Popular bars are Tex-Mexx (a younger, lycee crowd), *Divan* (the locals' snug wee haunt) and *The White Rose*, which, despite initially appearing desperate to attract a more cosmopolitan crowd, being so-named in rural France, is actually a friendly and unique place to enjoy some *Ricard* whilst watching the rugby. All restaurants and bars in Rodez are reasonably priced. All bars are at their most bangin' on Thursday nights. There are also two clubs situated outside of Rodez: Le Retro and Club Laurys. There is a bus to the former, but it takes about 20 minutes and drinks can be expensive. However, it's worth going at least once!

Be sure to try **Aligot**, the most famous dish of the Aveyron department.

If you like kebabs - and kebabs in France are proper Turkish ones - then Rodez is a veritable Mecca for such foods. (Excuse the Islamic pun). Look out for the rue Betaille if you are drunk and in search of a kebab-frites. One in particular to be recommended is Le Riyad at the bottom of rue St. Cyrice- the owner is particularly friendly ☺

Other Information

Here are some other pieces of advice I felt would be useful to future assistants. I made a note of them during my year in Rodez:

1. **Laundry** - furnished flats often don't come with washing machines. If this is the case, make sure to find a laundrette close to your accommodation when you arrive. Usually, the laundrette's machines are coin-operated and you can buy soap powder there. It's normally secure enough to leave your clothes and go away for a drink while you wait.
2. **Skype** - If you have internet in your flat, or even if you use your laptop in internet cafés, it is definitely worth installing Skype. As most people know, Skype allows you to call other Skype users for free, anywhere in the world, which makes staying in touch with friends and family very easy. What some people don't know is that **Skype also offer landline packages**, whereby you can call a landline at a rate which is significantly cheaper than calling from a landline or mobile. I paid about £2.50 a month (and no hidden charges or fixed contract) for unlimited calls to UK landlines - a phenomenal deal for thrifty assistants, especially in the first few expensive weeks.
3. **Personal safety** - Rodez is a friendly and safe town, with very little street crime. Pickpockets and violence are not a real worry here. However, do be careful, as living so rurally in France can attract a lot of unwanted attention, **particularly** for girls. You may notice girls behave and dress differently, Rodez is quite a conservative town, so be a bit aware of how you come across to avoid unwanted attention. This is not an issue particular to Rodez or the region - you just need to remember that a foreign culture and understanding of social norms may be very different from what you're used to at home. So it's best to err on the side of caution to avoid misunderstandings and embarrassing situations, and stay with friends initially until you get a feel for the area. As with anywhere, it is a bad idea to accept lifts with people you don't really know, especially if going to one of the clubs outside of town: it is out in the countryside and if you encounter a problem, there will be no way back to Rodez!

ADDRESSES AND CONTACTS

Below are the contact details of all the most important places mentioned in the above guide, as well as some general websites which make life easier for you. If it's not here... Google it!

Remember that when calling from abroad you have to drop the initial "0" and add "0033".

Aéroport Rodez-Marcillac	rte Decazeville 12330 SALLES LA SOURCE Tel 05 65 42 20 30
Aéroport Toulouse-Blagnac	BP.90103 31703 BLAGNAC CEDEX Tel 0 825 380 000
AVIS location voiture (car hire)	5 avenue Victor Hugo 12000 Rodez Tel 05 65 68 00 66
Crédit Agricole (town's main branch)	30 Place de la Cité 12000 Rodez Tel 08 10 81 12 77
Banque Populaire Occitane	2 Place de la Cité 12000 Rodez Tel 05 65 77 13 40
CLAJ - Comité pour le Logement Autonome des Jeunes	21, Rue Bonald 12000 Rodez Tel 05 65 77 14 05
CAF - Caisse D'Allocations Familiales	31 Rue Barrière Rodez Tel 08 20 25 12 10

If you'd like to know anything else about Rodez or the Aveyron department, please don't hesitate to contact either Simon (sar36) or Maddy (mo65) and we'll try to answer any questions you may have.