

Exchange in Nantes, France (Fall 2015)

General Information:

I spent my fall semester – from the beginning of September till 19th of December – studying at Audencia École de Management in Nantes, France. Nantes is the 5th biggest city in France and is especially known for its green environment and its young population (many students!). The cool thing about Nantes is that it has the historic part in the city center (e.g. Chateau des ducs de Bretagne, Cathedrale Saint Pierre) and its modern part on the island of Nantes, where you can find 'Les Machines de l'île' - The machines of the island. Apart from that, Nantes is rich in culture. In summer there are a lot of festivals (so make sure to be there end of August) and there are a lot of art events, museums and parks as well. The reason I put France as my first choice was so I could improve my French. The nice thing about Nantes is that their French is similar to the TV French (similar to the Dutch 'algemeen beschaafd Nederlands'), which really helps with learning the language. At Audencia I followed the Grande École Programme, which is equivalent to a French student's second year of 'master' studies. However, the only reason that it is called masters, is because French students first go to two years of 'prep school' after high school, before they enter university. Almost all international students at the GE programme, were like me, 3rd year bachelor students. Furthermore, Audencia is ranked among the top six business schools in France. It was really interesting to take business & management courses, as we do not really have them at ESE.

Preparation

I found preparing for my stay in Nantes quite difficult w.r.t. housing. Audencia does not really have a campus which means there is no housing on campus available. However, they do provide you with a link to a blog for students, where you can find links to housing possibilities and lists of possible host families. In Nantes there are many residences. These are easier to find, but more expensive than regular rooms. I would suggest you to find a room early and try to find a place in a CROUS residence (info on blog), as the rooms are quite cheap. In my case it did not turn out so well, as I started looking too late and I didn't have any idea of how it works in France. I tried looking for a regular room, but they come with a lot of administration, so I ended up living at the residence Les Estudines de la Beaujoire, which was really nice, but really expensive. I did not consider living at a host family, which I kind of regret. The rent is relatively low, there are no time restrictions for when you have to be home (I did not know this), if you are lucky you have a really nice host family and it might help with your French. Also, try to find a room in the city centre or on the island, which is really convenient for when you go out.

Other than housing you don't really have to prepare anything. Just make sure you arranged everything with DUO (for Dutch students), such as cancelling your OV vrij reizen, uitwonende beurs etc. and make sure you get your Erasmus+ grant. If you are a European student, you do not have to buy a French health insurance, as most health insurers from the EU cover you in the whole of Europe.

Arrival

The nice thing about Audencia is that they have the IC team (to integrate internationals) who also offer to pick you up from the train station/ airport when you arrive. Unfortunately, on

my day of arrival, nobody was able to pick me up. However, they did send me the list of buses I had to take from tan.fr (public transportation in Nantes). Travelling from the airport to my residence went quite smoothly, because the public transport in Nantes is simple and works well. For example, 1hr ticket only costs you €1,80 and is valid for both trams & buses.

Courses

As I explained above, the courses at Audencia are mainly management/ business courses. Personally, I did not want to choose any courses that I already had in IBEB (at Audencia they're called; financial analysis , management control). Which in the end was a smart choice, because the courses I took were also relatively easier and focused more on creativity as well. In the GE programme, you can choose whether you want to take your courses in French or English. I chose English, because my level of French was quite low. If you already have a decent level of French (~B2) then French might be a good option.

I took the following courses:

- Strategy & Entrepreneurship (5ECTS): I took it because I wanted to learn more about entrepreneurship, but unfortunately the course was quite similar to the 1st year IBEB course Organisation & Strategy. However, the teacher was really good and a lot of in-class participation which made it more 'fun'.
- Initiation to Entrepreneurship (3ECTS): This course was linked to the one above. I found this course the most creative / challenging as we had to come up with our own business + make a business plan.
- Human Resource Management (5ECTS): This course was completely new for me and was about the manager's role in the company w.r.t. its employees. The class was relatively easy, however, again because of a nice teacher and in-class participation the course was more interesting.
- Introduction to International Project Finance (3ECTS): I found this the most difficult course, but also the most informative one. It basically teaches you which parties are involved when e.g. a transportation network / a water facility has to be build. You will learn about different contracts, risks, loans, investments, sponsors etc..
- European Business Environment and Culture (5ECTS): The course description seemed interesting, but the class turned out to be very boring and bad, because of the teacher.
- Business Simulation (3ECTS): This course was quite 'fun', as you had to work in groups and compete in a virtual business game against other groups.
- Digital Marketing (3ECTS): This course was quite easy, but creative as well. In a group you had to come up with a digital marketing strategy for e.g. a relatively small local company.
- French - Intermediate (3ECTS): It helped a bit with improving your French and requires you to keep using French every week. This course was taught at ~B1 level.

Monthly Finances

Costs:

Rent: €655,-

Public Transport: €37,-

Costs of living: €200,-

Social life: €100

Travelling: €50-€100

Phone costs (from calling / texting with Dutch nr): €5,-

Income:

Uitwonende beurs: €279,-

Ov uitkering: €100,-

Erasmus +: €250,-

Subsidy for Rent (CAF): €175,-

Rest: Student loan / savings

As you can see the rent of the room made my exchange most expensive. However, this was only because I had 'bad luck' and a lack of information on how to find a room. Luckily there is the possibility to get subsidized. It takes a lot of administrative work (you have to get a French bank account as well + fill in CAF forms). I had to wait 2-3 months before I got my first CAF payment, but it is definitely worth the money. I did not take a French phone number, because at school/home you have wifi, and if you really need someone you can just text them for a few cents.

Daily Life

My first weeks in Nantes I mainly spent exploring the city, visiting festivals and attending introduction events from the IC team. When school started a lot of time during the week was spent there, as there is compulsory attendance. Also, as mentioned before, you will encounter a lot of administrative work in France. In Nantes I joined the student soccer team, which was a really big part of my exchange. Not only because of the practices + matches, but also because of the social activities that came from it. It was also a good way to hang out with French students, as in school you mostly hang out with your international classmates. They have all kinds of sport(team)s at Audencia. They say you have to pay €50,- for some student (sports/activities)pass, but nobody actually does it, so sports are free. I became really good friends with one of my teammates and with her I could also practice a lot of French. The weekends we mainly used for travelling around Bretagne (the ESN-Nantes events are a cheap way to do this!). We also had a week of holiday in October, which we spent in Paris and one of my Dutch friends came to visit Nantes. Nantes is also a nice city for going out. In the centre there are many bars and on the island there are many clubs. Audencia organized small drinks on Mondays and OBs (open bars) almost every Wednesday on the island where you could socialize and party with your fellow exchange students. Overall I would definitely suggest to go to exchange on Nantes if you like the French language/ culture. There is a lot to do and you really get in touch with the French culture. You have to keep in mind that France is quite expensive, so if you would just want to go on exchange for partying I would choose a cheaper place in Europe.