

Exchange at Audencia School of Management in Nantes, France

General information

During the first two blocks of the year 2015-2016 I studied at Audencia School of Management in Nantes. Nantes is the sixth largest city of France and is located near the region of Bretagne in the northwest of France. My name is Chantal, I am a 20 year old Dutch Economics and Business Economics student. I went abroad during my third bachelor year from September to December 2015.

I hope that this report will help you a little while preparing your adventure which is your exchange. Keep in mind that you are preparing yourself for one of the best experiences of your life! You will most likely remember this period abroad for the rest of your life. As cliché as it might sound, after spending four months in France, I know now that this cliché is true.

Preparation

Since France is part of the European Union and I am also an European citizen, I didn't have to worry about things like visa etc. However, you still need a valid passport or identity card of course, so it is important to check if all your documents are valid for the entire period of your exchange. For Dutch students I have an extra tip: you can get an amount of 100 euros a month because you do not use your student ov-card while you are abroad(apply for it on the DUO website). It would be a shame to miss out on some extra money just because you didn't know about it! During my preparation I was always glad when people gave me tips like this. Now it is my task to pass them on 😊

Once the application process for going on exchange was complete and my destination was known, there were three main things that needed to be arranged; the application for the Erasmus Scholarship, the application at the host university and housing. I will discuss all three of these processes below.

1. Erasmus Scholarship:

The Erasmus scholarship is available for all students that go on exchange within the European Union. As the application is not a lot of work, I would recommend everyone who qualifies for this scholarship to go through the application process. Depending on your destination you can get up to approximately 1000 euro, which comes down to about 250 euros a month for a four- month exchange period. You will be asked to fill in some forms and collect some signatures from both your home university and your host university. My tip for you: make sure you know when the Education Service Centre at Erasmus University(where you have to get the required signatures) is closed! Apparently, they have different opening times during summer, which is when most of you would be preparing your exchange. So, look up their opening times, if you don't want to end up in front of a closed door twice like me ;) As for Audencia Nantes' signatures, you can just send them by email and they will sign your documents for you.

2. Application host university

Keep an eye on the application deadline for Audencia, because it is not the same as the application date at Erasmus University. Audencia contacted me with a link for the application website and an elaborate explanation about the process. From the studyguide you can pick the courses that you want to take, but I will write more about that later on.

3. Housing

For housing I have a very important advice: if you do not have a French guarantor, do not try to rent a private apartment! And if you don't speak French, that is an extra reason not to try to rent in the

private sector. It is a better idea to rent something in one of the many student residences in Nantes. Audencia will give you the links to their websites in their housing leaflet. These residences are used to receiving foreign students and do not require you to have a French guarantor. Most of the time they also speak English, which might be useful. However, you should check the location of the residence before booking your room. Some of the residences are located far away from the city centre or Audencia or both. Public transport connections are really good however, which will make living far away less of a problem. Especially the tram is very useful and it runs until 3am on Saturday, so going out is still possible.

Arrival

As I turned my relocation to Nantes into a family vacation with my parents, I do not have any experiences with arriving at Nantes Airport or train station, because we went by car.

I do advice you to arrange your housing before you leave, so that you will have somewhere to go straight after your arrival. It is perfectly possible to book a room in a student residence from home, you do not need to be in France. However, if you end up in the situation that you do not have anywhere to stay, you could go to Audencia and they will help you find something last minute. Keep in mind though that many students arrive around the end of August, including many international and exchange students, so many rooms will already be booked. Therefore, my advice is to book in advance.

Once you moved into your new room for the next four months, you might have the possibility to apply for CAF, which is like a rental subsidy. Most students living in a student residence qualify for the CAF. My advice is to apply for it as soon as possible after moving in, because it can take quite a while for everything to be arranged. I applied the first week of September and I received the first payment in November. But they made the payments in reverse, so I received four months of rental subsidy in the end. Most students can get approximately 170 euros a month. Although the process of applying for the CAF was very long and slow(remember we are in France, so administration moves slow;), it is definitely worth it. Some more tips regarding the CAF: if there is a reception desk in your residence, ask them if they can help you with the application forms. And most important tip, go to the CAF office to deliver your documents! Sending them by mail will slow the process down even more and there is a high chance of your documents getting lost.

Another thing you should try to arrange as soon as possible after your arrival is your public transportation card. The public transport company TAN offers several different subscription programs, which will allow you to travel relatively cheap with all the trams and busses. Although the easiest way to apply for these programs is online, it is a good idea to first visit the TAN office to get advice about which program is the most suitable for you. Don't be scared, they do speak English.

As for the arrival at Audencia, they organized two introduction days. These days were nice to meet other international students who were in the same program and to get an idea of the school.

Courses

I took 8 courses at Audencia, including French class.

Course name	Description	ECTS
Management control	Planning and budgeting. Includes variance analysis.	5
Financial analysis	Analyzing the annual reports of companies, using balance sheets, income statements, cash flow statements and financial ratios.	5

Human Resource Management	Learning about the concepts of HRM. What makes a good HRM manager? How to motivate employees?	5
European Business environment and culture	In what environment do businesses operate in Europe? (To be honest, the course should have been named business environment and culture, without the European part, because it was not really about Europe, more about the worldwide business environment in general)	5
Project management	What does a project manager do? What does managing, planning and executing a project involve?	3
Organizational change management	Learning about change in organization. How to make people accept change, how to change successfully	3
International project finance	Learning about the concept of project finance, which is a method to finance very large (infrastructure) projects.	3
French		3

In general, I think it is fair to say that the level at Audencia is lower than the level at Erasmus University. Contentwise, the courses were more practical and less theoretical at Audencia. They were also less mathematical, because everything was more management-oriented. However, in a way it was good that the courses were of a lower level, because this gave me the opportunity to also explore the area of Nantes a bit. Another difference between Audencia and Erasmus University was the way of teaching. In Audencia, almost every course included group work in some way. The teaching method in Audencia consists of one teacher with a class of approximately 30 students. They do not work with massive lectures like in Rotterdam. However, I feel that this might be better given the content of the material. In Rotterdam, the material is more theoretical and mathematical and usually does not require a lot of discussion, which makes the massive lectures an efficient method of teaching. With the management content of the courses in Audencia, more discussion between the teacher and the students was required, which makes the smaller class set-up the better and more efficient option.

I used the courses from Audencia to incorporate into my elective space. I believe that the content at Audencia has a completely different focus and perspective than the content in Rotterdam and therefore the courses at Audencia are not suited to serve as exemptions from obligatory courses in Rotterdam.

Finances (monthly budget)

IN:		OUT:	
Study financing	€280	Rent ¹	€655
OV-card compensation	€100	Groceries ²	€240 (±60 a week)
CAF	€170	Public transport	€37
Scholarship	€250	Social life	€40
(rest was financed from savings)			

1: this residence was one of the expensive ones. Much cheaper residences do exist.

2: Due to a food allergy my grocery budget might be a bit higher than average, because of the higher price of some of the allergy-proof products. A food budget of between 40 and 50 euros a week might be enough for the average person.

The social life number is an approximation. If you go to a bar, the drinks are usually quite expensive. However, most parties organized by the student associations of Audencia include free drinks in the entrance fee(±10-15 euros).

Personally, I did not have any unforeseen costs. However, there is one category of costs that I have not included in my monthly budget, namely day trips. I made several day trips during my stay in Nantes for approximately 150 - 200 euros, which comes down to 37.5 - 50 euros a month on average.

I did not include mobile phone costs in this budget, because I kept my Dutch phone number, so I don't know anything about phone costs in France. From friends I heard that you can get quite cheap subscriptions for mobile phones. Pay attention if the subscription you choose allows you to call foreign phone numbers as well as French numbers. Some subscriptions are very cheap, because they only allow you to call and text French numbers.

Daily life

There is this idea that the French do not want to speak English and will always keep speaking French. However, my experience is that nowadays this is not true anymore. Especially the younger generations are usually able to speak English. But they very much appreciate it if you at least try to speak a little bit of French, even if it is just 'Bonjour' and 'Merci'. Another useful tip: always ask if they speak English in French(Parlez-vous Anglais?). This may sound weird, but this way you do not "scare" people by addressing them in English. The French people are very friendly(outside of Paris that is ;)) and always willing to help.

Because everyone is in the same situation(alone, in a strange country, international student), it was very easy to make friends. Most of the international students arrive in Nantes alone, so basically everyone was looking for new and nice friends to spend their exchange period with.

Nantes is a very beautiful city, quite busy but not overcrowded. I would describe Nantes as a vibrant city; there is always something going on, somewhere to go every day and every night. The population is quite young and there are many, many students. If you have the possibility, plan your arrival date in Nantes about a week or at least a few days before the first introduction days. This will give you the opportunity to explore the city. I am sure you will love the city already after just a few days ☺. For me, the best times were when I went to explore the region around Nantes. I visited the cities of Rennes, Saumur and Angers. All three of them are beautiful and I would especially recommend Rennes. In addition, I visited the Mont Saint-Michel with a trip organized by ESN Nantes. Firstly, while in Nantes, keep an eye on the offers of the ESN. They organize great trips that are not very expensive. Secondly, don't miss the chance of visiting Mont Saint-Michel. It is a wonderful place that you must have visited once in your life in my opinion! The city of Nantes has a lot to offer; the mainstream touristic stuff(castle, cathedrale etc), but also many bars for a great night out. Furthermore, the area around Nantes offers an enormous amount of possible destinations for daytrips.

In conclusion, going on exchange and living abroad for a longer period of time proofed to be a good opportunity to meet extraordinary people from all over the world! Good luck with the preparation of your exchange period and most importantly, enjoy your time abroad and have fun!