

Lauren Stephenson – Exchange Jan-June 2008 ISC Paris, France

Pre-departure

Pre-departure was the most stressful experience out of the entire Exchange process. Visa in particular was stressful as no guarantees by the French Consulate were given, communication with the consulate was minimal (on their behalf) and the paperwork required for the Visa application was difficult to compile and produce. Generally it should be a smooth process however when you are studying and working full-time, time is not on your side. For me I had no issues with my passport as I had a valid one and did not have to go through any process.

Support from ISC, the partner institution was good however frustrating as times to gain confirmation on certain things, such as subjects to be studied, accommodation, and arrival pick up support, etc. However I learnt relatively soon after I arrived to France that this was also a cultural issue and not just the institution. For one example, in order for me to book my flight into France I needed to know what date my classes were to commence. There was no point in arriving too early as this was a waste of money and time and there was also no point in arriving weeks after the commencement of my classes. As the system over here in France is different to Australia and more specifically CSU, the semester starts in two periods, a month apart from each other. Therefore if I arrived one month too early it would have been a waste of rent money as well as my time being in France if my classes were not to start until a month later. I sent numerous emails to a number of contacts at the partner institution requesting the correct information. No one responded this was in October before I was to fly out. Therefore my stress levels rose to ridiculous levels as flight prices were sky-rocketing as well as most flights being booked out. I finally received a response from the partner institution stating my classes commenced on the 7th January 2008. I received this information in late October 2007. Hence why my flight cost a fortune (>325000AUD) and was booked only 2 months out from my departure.

Support from CSU was good, with reminders and lists of things to do a great help. In a way I kept expecting more for me to do and expecting the worst, ie I had not filled in the particular paper that was vital for my exchange, etc. My Exchange officer at CSU was also a great help, always answering my silly questions which were often repeated because I kept forgetting! All in all, the pre-departure experience was smooth however extremely stressful at times.

Preparation is the key and I wish I had applied for paperwork and Visa's earlier than I had however due to other issues, such as uni work, full-time work and slow communication from the partner institution this was not possible.

Travel

Travel arrangements were the most expensive expense for me, with flights to Europe being ridiculously expensive. I booked my flight rather late which did not help the situation; however this was not due to my bad time management. The partner institution was terribly slow in replying to my emails as to when I was required to be at the School for the commencement of the term. Dates were confirmed only 2.5 months out from when I was expected to commence classes; hence I had no idea when to arrive into France for classes.

My advice to future students is to book earlier. If they are studying 3rd year subjects they will start in the earlier dates, however if they are only studying 2nd year subjects then they will start later. However I can not of course force the partner institution to be better in their communication efforts with incoming students, so really this is a situation that can not be controlled.

Another issue I faced was luggage restrictions as to Europe you can only take one main suitcase and it can not be more than 23Kg. This was ridiculous as I was moving overseas for 6 months. Add to that I was moving to Europe in winter so naturally had to pack my heavy winter clothing.

This meant I had to pack less things and buy more over here, which is expensive with the AUD not buying too much of the EURO.

Insurance *travel insurance, health insurance, medical tests/forms to be aware of*

Travel insurance was reasonably easy to acquire. My tip is to take to premium. Hopefully you will never need it however it is always best to cover yourself. It is expensive though with mine being around >500AUD for 6 months. I bought a combined travel, property and medical insurance cover which is the best.

Campus *accommodation & meals recommendations, campus layout, accessibility*

The ISC campus is very small. I can only describe it as two grey buildings on the edge of Paris. It is not in the prettiest area of Paris however it is a school with classrooms and I guess that's all you need. It does have a small cafeteria with cheap and yummy food. Besides that the school really isn't a place to hang around and socialize as there is the rest of beautiful Paris to explore. The campus (2 buildings) is easy to get around and layout is simple. So getting lost is not an issue here. However I must make a special mention of the 'Bibliotech' which is a Librbyary. Unlike what CSU offers it's students, the library at ISC is a small room. Yes I know you won't believe it, however it is only just a small room with a few shelves of books. So don't expect to be able to escape to the library to do some work... there is no room to do so!!

Course Information *subject list, restrictions, comparisons, pre-requisites, study advice*

I must make a specific comment about the interaction with the Business Faculty at Bathurst. I had major issues with gaining credit for my subjects at CSU with my ISC subjects. Even prior to my official application I was faced with a lot of resistance by the faculty which put me in a position that I could not even apply for the program in the first place. It was not due to my academic record at all, it was purely because the subjects on offer at ISC were not exact matches to the CSU subjects I was required to gain credit for. My understanding of the CSU Exchange program was to offer CSU students academic and personal opportunities that CSU alone can not provide.

The Business Faculty was not flexible in this case for and could not see that ISC could offer me academic opportunities that CSU alone could not and hence nearly blocked my application. To me this was ridiculous. ISC was a Business Management School- an expert in the field I was studying, my Bachelor of Business Studies.

On the other hand, the School of Communications Faculty was incredibly supportive and immediately gave me credit for my subjects from my Communications (PR) degree. This made it even more confusing as to why the Business Faculty were so reluctant to approve my subjects at ISC.

On the other hand though I do have some major criticisms of ISC as a partner institution. As English is my native language I chose subjects in English. However the level of these subjects is no where near as difficult or informative than at CSU. I think this is mainly due to the fact that most students in this class have English as a second language and still are grasping the language, let alone study in it. ISC to be is not difficult in terms of academic standards. However I have learnt a lot by being here and meeting so many different people, particularly lecturers who have hailed from across the globe. It has certainly shaped my perspective on business and communications in a more holistic way than I think I previously had at CSU.

Transport *public and around campus*

Since the ISC campus is on the edge of Paris an Imagnine-R is a must. It is an automatic pass which can be debted out of your French bank account per month for a flat fee. I think from memory it's about 40Euros a month and is well worth it (although sounds expensive). To get the

card you need to ask for the Imagine-R form from any major Metro station, fill it out and send to the Metro company in Paris. It works out really well as on weekends you can get free travel to outer parts of Paris such as Versailles on the Imagine-R. I must recommend this is one of the first things you must do as the sooner you get it the better off your life will be around Paris! To fill out the form you need to understand and write French, so may need help from the school if you cannot.

Expenses – *university associated fees, personal expenses, exchange rates, where to shop, best prices, money saving tips*

Expenses were purely personal whilst on my exchange. The one thing that got me each time though was the exchange rate. So before you go, best to have budgeted everything into Euros so it won't be so much of a shock when you get there and see your money halve! Also, Paris may be a very touristy place and expensive however once you get off the touristy track you can survive and live very well. Best way is to ask around at school of the great places to have coffee, have a drink at night and have a cheap dinner and lunch. Look out for cafes and restaurants that offer "formules" as they are the best way to get value for your money. Also best to avoid the 1st and 8th districts.

Holiday Travel *destination ideas, tips*

Take advantage of being in the heart of Europe. Take advantage of cheap flight deals as you see them. Sign up to receive e-newsletters from SNCF (the major travel company in France) and Expedia.fr as they offer some great last minute cheap deals. Also make sure you take advantage of the speed and convenience of the TGV trains. Buy a special "Carte 12-25ans" from SNCF for 50Euros. This enables you to get cheaper train tickets all throughout France. Visit Lille, Reims, Rennes, Montpellier, etc! France has so many amazing places to visit and all you need are day trips. My international student friends and I often had a free weekday with no classes so we would take a day trip to one of the many cities in France. The longest train trip was on average an hour! So take advantage of it while you're there and don't waste your time on just seeing the sights of Paris!

Social Activities *university clubs, international student activities, sports*

ISC has a fantastic social life whether it be school hours or out of school hours after dark! The ISC parties are notorious and amazing! They often hire out cool nightclubs in Paris with very good DJs! I cannot say I had a bad party at ISC the whole 6 months I was there. So take advantage of the arranged parties, it's also a great way to meet other students at the school as often enough the French students drop their guard at these parties and you can make friends for life (which I have!). It's also a great way to see that even people on the other side of the world know how to party just as hard (if not harder) than us Australian's!!

Cultural Information *culture shock, language barriers (if any), do's and don'ts*

Biggest shock and challenge was the language. As I had only studied French for a couple of years at school I really was thrown in the deep end. However you can survive. Just try your hardest and try not to get disheartened when you have bad days! And yes I experienced cultural shock- more so than I thought I did. However it was not depressing, more fascinating and something you just have to laugh at! The French are strange however it makes you realize how strange Australian's are too!

Weather *what to prepare for, how to cope with extremes*

If going in winter.... prepare for the cold!! Take warm clothes and be prepared for it! What to bring from home/what not to bring – luxuries to keep homesickness at bay, unnecessary items bought from home

I guess everyone is different... some people say bring photos from home (it made me too homesick to see photos from home), some people say bring toys or iconic figures from home. Do what ever you feel you might need. Just don't get too wrapped up with all things Australian as you will probably live most of your life in Australia, so live all things French while you are there!

What you may need to buy *accommodation needs (blankets, irons etc), clothing*

Once again this is different for everyone. I didn't have to bring a thing, however some people lay need to depending on their accommodation arrangements.

Relationships *leaving old friends/making new, homesickness etc*

The first month or two is the hardest where you miss home and your friends, particularly when you see photos of them on Facebook going out and spending time together. However my advice is to get out there, make new friends in Paris. You only have this opportunity once and for me I have made friends for life in Paris! I can not take that back! So don't get too caught up with what's happening back home, immerse yourself in your new home and celebrate it for the amazing experience it is!