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Fall 2015 (September-December)

My Student exchange program was taking place at the ESCP University, Paris, France. Before joining this program I had a lifetime dream to live in Paris for a few months and to practice the French I have learned in high-school, So, When I came to choose a University I “didn’t have” many options... in France there were 3 options for student exchange program in all of the top 3 Business schools of France but only one of them (ESCP) is located in the city itself.

ESCP stands for: Ecole Superior de Commerce Paris. It is a private business school that has 5 branches all over Europe: Berlin, London, Madrid, Torino, Warsaw and is considered very highly in the business school’s list in France. The French students that are attending this school need to be very good students with high grades but also with an ability to pay for the school.

It is located in the 11 quarter, just next to Republic Square and in the middle of a very hip and cool neighborhood. The University is pretty small, it is an interior yard surrounded by 5 building Campus that looks a bit like it was taken out of Harry Potter story.

The University has many activities and very active associations that even as an international exchange student you can participate. The school is very international and everybody speaks English. More than that, The International students are almost half of it’s population. Some international students stay for one semester and some for a full year as part of their Erasmus program (A program inside Europe).

The city of Paris is divided in spiral to 20 quarters and it’s most cool and young quarters today are 9-11. More than that, the 11 quarter is next to the 3 quarter which called: Le Marais and is the best quarter in town (where I lived). Le Marais was consider for many years the Jewish quarter where the Jewish community used to live so, you can still find there many synagogues and some Israeli food restaurant (Like the Miznon of Eyal Shani... and other Falafel stands) but the population today is mainly young designers, Gays and artists.

I stayed in Paris for 6 months from the end of August to the middle of February (gone through all the frizzling cold mornings...) but the studies were only 3 months out of it.

During my studies I had a very busy schedule because I took 6 courses and in each one of them you have a group project (with 3-6 students) and after school we used to do some site-seeing or some wine tasting...I was very busy with that...

I will try to break down some of the relevant topics for someone that is considering going there:

**The city-** Paris is the most beautiful city in the world! (in my view). The art and style is everywhere and affects everyone. Today more and more people can communicate in English with foreigners but in my view one of the biggest charms of the city is the French language. In order to encourage people to absorb the language and the culture, the city provides a free entrance to all museums to young adults under the age of 26 and there are French courses in every neighborhood and many people that want to exchange language by meeting and speaking English & French. And every first Sunday of the month, all the museums are open and free for the public.

### **Transportation-**

I think that one of the things I will miss the most is the public transportation and especially the Metro. A single ride in the Metro cost 1.80 Euro and a “monthly free rides” (חופשי חודשי) is 70 Euro. It is not cheap but it is the cheapest and most convenient way to get around in the city. The monthly free pass is called “Navigo” and includes: Metro, buses and the RER which is the inter-urban train that today brings you to the near suburb (including Disneyland...!). The Navigo is being done on the spot at any big Metro station but require a home address (So you should do it after settled in). The Metro is open everyday 05:00-12:30 and during the weekends until 02:00. I felt very safe in the Metro even late at night but I stayed mostly in the heart of Paris.

### **Accommodation-**

Renting an apartment in Paris can be very tricky.

There are many options but the only formal one (described at number 4) requires a lot of hassle:

- 1) Many of my other international students found an apartment with local French people as roommates near the school in a range of 850-1500 Euro a month. The arrangement was that they lived in the living room...(The sofa opens to a bed at night and they had a small closet for their stuff) that was a nice solution for them because they weren't at home many hours and only needed a place “to crash”
- 2) There is always the option of Airbnb, Paris is full of short term apartments and if you don't mind to live in 20 square meter that could be a good solution
- 3) The dorms- from what I have heard it is very convenient and not far from the school, you need to register to it very early on and to be ready to share your room with other people.
- 4) Renting an apartment by your self requires a French guaranty (someone with a French bank account that will be willing to be your guaranty) and the contract is signed for one year although it is written by law that at any given point the

tenant can give a one month notice and to break the contract. The price range in this case is very flexible and it depends on the neighborhood, I can say that in "Le Marais" it was a range of 1200-2400 Euro for a one bed room apartment 40-75 square meter.

### **Living costs-**

Paris is an expansive city but it has also many options:

The food and shopping at the Super-market are third of the prices here, for example:

- One Baguette is 1.40 Euro
- A bottle of wine is 2-7 Euro

But restaurants are pretty expensive a lunch menu is usually 12-14 Euro and the average for a good meal with wine and dessert is 30-40 Euro.

More than the low prices, what I have learned in Paris is the Parisian (or maybe European) way of consumption- To buy what you need today for dinner fresh from the market and not to have food waist! So I highly recommend to adopt that as well and to visit the authentic and colorful markets that are spread all over the city.

### **Terror attack and self security-**

I was there at November 13 when the big terror attack has happened. It was a very scary night and it made me realize that although we always say as Israelis that we are familiar with terror, it was still very different for me.

First of all, not like in Israel, they didn't have many police or armed people in the streets before the attack so until the attack was over it was about 4-5 hours that we were in a lock down. And also after that they were in such a shock and frightened that the Metro didn't work for the whole weekend and people didn't leave their homes for 3 days. My school even got canceled and an exam was delayed...how would think about that in Beer-Sheva...But after the weekend, The Parisians wanted to get back to normal quickly! So almost as a propaganda all the coffee places and restaurants was full but no one set at the outdoors...but it was also very cold period...

After the attacks the government has declared a "VigiPirate" (Pirate flag) situation that means that the police has the authority to stop people in the streets and to break into houses without a warrant.

Also they started to put guards in the entry of all the stores but it is funny because the guards don't carry weapon and I am sure they are not trained in "Krav-Maga" so I don't believe they could stop any thing but shoplifters.

Besides that I always felt very safe in the streets of Paris at all hours walking alone or speaking Hebrew on the phone! It is really not an issue.

**Visa-** as an Israeli citizen you don't need a visa to visit Paris unless it is more than 3 months and if you want to have a student visa that allows you to open easily a Bank account and to rent an apartment. It is a 2-3 weeks process very easy once you have all the documents they want you to have.

I have so much more to say about the experience and how much I have learned on the European and the French culture in special, I would love to give practical tips like which cellular company you should use and how to meet new people so feel free to contact me and to let me the opportunity to talk more about my dream that has come true because I know my friends and family can't stand when I start a phrase with: "So, in Paris..."

Donc, Salut et Bon Courage! (It means goodbye and good luck but in the Parisian way...)

Rachelle.

