

Student Exchange Program

France was always a dream destination owing to its unique culture, history and architecture. An Exchange Programme at the University of Bordeaux was a very tempting experience to have, where I could study while exploring the place in all its uniqueness, inside out. Apart from the opportunity of exploring the lifestyle of a foreign, historic land where great poets and artists dwelled and receded, the idea that I could soak in the culture of this land which has always been an inspiration for my writing habit was thrilling. The remnants of the French Revolution and the drastic changes that occurred in the economy always were of interest to me. But the major aspect of interest was the availability of an event to make new connections, learn, and gain an overall international exposure.

Once we were chosen for the Exchange Program at Bordeaux (France), preparations began in full swing. Initially there was some confusion regarding the duration of the term at the university. Later on we were informed that the duration of the entire course would be around 2 months, which included the presentations, projects, exams and other assessments. We then booked our tickets and applied for the visa. As the visa process went on, simultaneously the other reservations (lodging, transport facilities) were booked. The hectic schedule at our home university made it all the more exciting to plan for the program alongside our academics in December. Packing began post our exams on Christmas eve. The Airlines recommended by our seniors who had been to the same university the previous year was Air France, which we abided by and booked our tickets to Paris, for the 27th of December, 2018.

As planned, we flew from Kempegowda International Airport, Bengaluru to Charles de Gaulle Airport in Paris via Amsterdam, by Air France Airlines. We had some discomfort at Paris due to misplacement of my fellow student's luggage, thanks to the airline's carelessness. We had to extend our stay in Paris for over a day due to this inconvenience caused.

We arrived at Bordeaux and traced our house at Blanquefort. It was a well furnished service apartment we had booked through

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AirBnB, with all the basic amenities in place. Heaters were a must. The area was in the suburbs, quite far away from the main city, at a distance of around 10-12 kms. We settled into our rooms and got ourselves ready to face the harsh, chilly weather at France with over a dozen woollen wear at hand, since the temperatures could go to as low as -6'. We then started getting the documents ready for the first-day-procedures that we'd have to complete at the University.

Founded in 1955 IAE Bordeaux has over 50 graduate programs in the Management and Business fields with more than 1650 students. University School of Management has been an essential actor in higher education of Management for almost 70 years back. Implemented in the heart of the lively and world-heritage listed city of Bordeaux, it offers a wide range of initial, continuing and international education in France and abroad.

It had a decent building which had a supercold atmosphere inside, but all the faculty and the students were warm enough to make outsiders feel welcome. The Point of Contact for us was Ms. Juliana Faye, a friendly lady who could converse in English. But the person who co-operated the most and made us feel at home by her assistance was Ms. Tiphonie Sales, who assisted Ms. Juliana in her office.

Life at IAE Bordeaux was a memorable one, one that we knew we would cherish even after the days were long gone. We had classes routinely from 9AM to 5PM. The most amusing observation was that in France, daylight in winter is only at 9AM and by 5:30Pm it's already dusk. We had students from other countries as well in our classroom, and we had classes with both the first year students and the ones in the second year. An observation of interest is that the First-year students were far more welcoming and friendlier than the second year students. Courses ranged from Logistics and Operations Management, Financial Statements Analysis, Information Systems to Investment and Portfolio Management, Human Resources, Organizational Behaviour etc.

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Over the duration of these courses, we had regular assessments where sometimes we had to work with the other students and communicate and merge ideas and opinions of the entire team in order to make a presentation/group work successful. The need to interact with people who barely spoke English required a lot of patience. We had a great experience and were also successful in bringing across our ideas to the entire class.

The lifestyle at France was completely different, and people only spoke in French. An English-speaking man/woman was very rarely spotted. In spite of knowing English, most of them refused to speak anything other than the local dialect. We quite a many times faced issues in delivering what we wanted to communicate without the help of Google Translate. Like any other Western country, France had its own culture that people dwelled in. The casualty of the behaviour towards others, being self-occupied, owning dogs as a part of their family, etc.

Winter in Europe sets in in the end of December and prolongs until the end of April. The weather was extremely chilly, with frequent downpours daily. The temperatures dropped during the evenings and early mornings. The food consisted of bread called by different names; crossiants, patisseries, doughnuts, madelines, napoleon etc., all basically being made of bread. Indian restaurants were way too expensive. The transportation facilities we stuck to were trams and buses. There were frequent trams that connected every part of the city to the other parts. They were very comfortable. The weather wouldn't permit us to go on a sight-seeing spree the initial days at Bordeaux. On sunny days, we'd visit monuments and churches reflecting a long lost era and all the glory of the past. Shopping streets were buzzing with sales due to the Christmas and New Year seasons. The shops had everything ranging from souvenirs to food to clothing and gadgets of different varieties, all described in French.

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We visited Switzerland, Spain, Belgium and Germany during the weekends since all of them were just a few hours away, and could be accessed by buses easily. It was amusing to know that there was tremendous diversity in each country, though they weren't really distant from each other.

The museums were a major point of interest since they awoke a sense of the French Revolution and the changes the country witnessed over time.

Additional activities included sports, opera etc.

The return journey was looked forward to by all of us, owing to the weather and food habits. We took a flight on the 26th of February as booked before from Paris, and reached Bengaluru the following night. The overall experience was very interesting, informative and a great learning experience. The exposure to other cultures and the opportunity to interact and develop networks of great value, and the experience of gaining deeper insights on the beliefs, principles, lifestyles, mediums of communication of other cultures was a great one.

The expenses involved included the tram/train/bus/flight tickets, food, accommodation, tolls, ID card fees, stationery charges etc. The assessment was standard and was based on our performances in the tests, MCQs, Group work, presentations, projects, interactions in class, case studies etc. To conclude, the experience at IAE Bordeaux was a good one, and offered a variety of experiences in terms of learning, interacting, participating, developing, communicating and maintaining networks.