

**“Wish I’d Known” Survey
Caen, France**

PACKING AND TRAVELING

Specifically, what kind of LINENS did you need to bring?

- None. They are supplied by the CROUS.
- Bath towel, washcloth, dishcloth, dish towel.
- I brought towels. Bed sheets and blankets are provided for you if you live on campus.
- No linens were needed, they were provided. They had sheets, two blankets and towels (but do bring your own towel) I did bring a sheet, which I used to lay on the beach in Ouistreham! ☺

What are you glad you packed from home?

- Pencils with erasers, ENGLISH-FRENCH dictionary, Walkman, photos from home, 50c Kennedy half dollars
- Photo album of family and friends, ENGLISH-FRENCH dictionary, CD’s, 501 French verbs book
- Film, batteries, music, little alarm clock, little locks/padlock, ENGLISH-FRENCH dictionary, journal, books in English, pictures, U.S. money, portable CD player, hiking backpack, pencils w/erasers, shout stain stick, umbrella, sewing kit, elastic clothes line
- Definitely bring flip-flops for the shower!!!
- LOTS of rolls of film, if you are a picture-taker. Don’t develop your films here though (in Caen) since it is much more expensive to do.
- Make sure you take along some sort of a bowl, cup and some utensils; even though plastic you will need them at some point.
- Take a towel, for when you’re going to the beach
- Stock up on batteries, because it gets lonely in your room at night. If you can bring a mini radio with batteries that will be even greater, since you’ll hear some French music and might even want to buy a CD at the store!
- Bring more T-shirts and casual sweat pants or normal pants. At class you don’t really have to dress up, so jeans will do too. There are a couple of times we went out so bring some club/bar clothes
- DO make sure you have some **traveler’s checks** buried in your suitcase because whenever you travel you might get money stolen if you’re not careful!

What do you wish you had left at home?

- I wish I had brought more comfortable clothes instead of dressy ones. Don’t foresee dressing differently because you are going to France—Be Yourself!
- I wish I’d left more clothes at home, I brought too many!
- I didn’t need as many shoes. Really 2 pairs of sneakers and some more fancy shoes is all you need

Do you have any travel tips to pass on (planning advice, safety considerations, guidebooks, train vs. bus, etc.)?

- For a year stay, buy the 12-25 Card for the SNCF. Bus—Ligne Verte is very reasonable. Get a book on France and web sites for youth hostel information.
- Do not trust anyone! Even those who sweet-talk you!!!
- Plan on dressing in layers (long sleeve t-shirts are nice), have a raincoat and/or waterproof winter coat. You can buy bus tickets at cheaper prices at the Maison d'Etudiant (if you buy several); get the carte 12-25 for train/planes.
- If you are going in a group or more than one person, when landing in Paris, it is useful to reserve in advance a shuttle...you can do it online at <http://www.parishuttle.com/>...fill in all the necessary info, I don't think they ask you for credit card number though (even if they do, they won't charge it but you pay them cash whenever they drive you to the train station). (Currently it is 25euros/person and less for more which is cheap!!!) Make sure you print out the sheet where they have the phone number and your registration number thing. For destination where you want to go, put Gare St. Lazzare that's all...When you get off the plane, get your bags and all that and call that phone number from any public phone, I'm pretty sure they spoke English too and just tell them you arrived, they'll tell you what gate or exit door to pick you up at, go there and wait for them. It is very convenient and much, much cheaper than getting a taxi to the train station!!!
- It was very convenient and you do pay in cash with euros, so make sure to transfer some money before you leave from the states!
- When traveling around France, it is very convenient to just have a backpack along, so make sure you bring that, even as a carry-on luggage on the plane.
- When you're in the train station...take your ticket out whenever they let you get on the train and there are those yellow pole-machines in the beginning of the tracks. All people need to "stamp" their tickets by sliding in one of the ends of your ticket in...all it does it put some number there, but remember to do it before you get on the train, so they don't make a problem! I guess it's kind of like verifying it.
- Make sure you get some euro coins before you get in Caen (you can ask at the train station in Paris), so you can take the Tram to campus, not a taxi...it costs 1.20 for one-way trip (Taxi will cost you about 8euros!!!) Or if you can right away buy a ticket for 10 trips...it saves you a lot in the long run!!! As you are exiting the train station (when you arrived from Paris) in Caen, there are some railroad tracks like, right in front of you. Go on the station platform and there is a machine that you can put in money and then select (rotating and pressing on the round knob) 10 voyages for about 5 euros. You can only put coins in though!!! A ticket-like card will fall in the slot underneath. You should get on the tram that goes to the RIGHT as your back is toward the train station! The stop is called Grace de Dieu, or you can just ask anyone that looks like a student on the tram where to get off for L'Université. When the tram stops on the station, on each door there is a round button-like thing, press it to open the door and as you enter there is a little machine you can slide in your card...it's no rush, you don't have to do it right away so go in the tram with your luggage, chill out and then get to the little machine...there are several of them around the tram. When you want to get off on the station of the Université just push

that little button on the side of the doors where you can hold yourself...it's red I think. I think it is about 4-6 stops before you get to the university. Ask though, people will help you!

- Before you even start traveling around France, if you ARE going to travel extensively with train it is worth getting the 12-25 card which reduces ticket prices for you 50%. The card itself costs 80euros so if you're only going to travel twice or so it is not worth it!!! However, know that since you are (if you are) under 25 years of age, you get automatically 25% off on train tickets—know and remind them about it, if they don't reduce them (but they usually do). At the train station, where it says information or even the ticket sellers have a little blue 3-fold where it tells you the days when you can save with your 12-25card or just with the 25%. There are some times (not many) when you can't get the 25% if you don't have the card. If you do have the card, during those times, you can only save 25%. I hope that makes sense. It's like a discount card...present it each time you buy tickets! In order to buy it you have to go in the train station where it says Information and take a ticket...the wait IS long, so make sure you have enough time...it is summer and people go there to plan their trips. I think you'll have to have your ID, passport and address of the school where you are living right now—make sure to bring those.
- If you know where you want to go (around France...Belgium, Germany, Amsterdam) they can tell you routes, prices, times!
- If you are planning on taking RYANAIR (from <http://www.ryanair.com/>) make sure you know how much time you have in between your class sessions so you don't have to end up changing flight days, because they charge you a LOT for this and make SURE you know where the flight will be landing...we wanted to fly from Paris to Milan, Italy—our flight was from BEAUVAIS, which is 1.5hrs away from Paris, which we didn't know...then we landed in Bergamo which is actually 45min away with a bus from Milan!!! All this takes time and money; so make SURE you have lots of those two. Please research where you're landing and departing from, and allow yourself enough time to get there!!! It is cheap if you know what you're doing...if not it WILL cost you. Make sure you have enough time between flights, because things in France are a bit slow and talk as much French if possible—don't rely on ENGLISH!!! They respect you MUCH MORE if you attempt speaking their language...talking from experience!
- I highly recommend you read about the places you want to go. It's easy to go to your local library and rent the Let's Go series (most recent preferably) or even go to the site <http://www.letsgo.com/>. Also good guides are by RICK STEVES (www.ricksteves.com)...you don't need to buy those, not the cheapest plus you won't need them after you're back from France...so take it from the library, write down things you need to know, places you need to visit, prices and times they're open. Rick gives good advice on when to go visit places, when it's less crowded...especially for Paris. You need to prioritize what you want to see first and then go.
- In Paris, if possible use the metro...it's MUCH cheaper than a taxi. You can buy a "carnet" which is 10 tickets at once, for whenever you want to go a lot of places. Get a metro map also (I think from the person that sells you the tickets) which shows you where all the famous things are at and it's all kind color-coded so it's easy to read.

When you get the ticket for metro, all you do is slide it before you go in those rotating little doors and MAKE SURE to take it from the other side. It's fun!

- When you're in the metro and crowded places make sure to put your backpack in front of you, instead on your back and always have your hands on it. There are A LOT of pickpockets!
- TIP FOR THOSE WHO KEEP THEIR WALLETS IN THE BACK POCKET: put a small comb horizontally in your wallet's crease, where the two halves fold and put in your pocket bottoms up...try to get it out and the comb teeth doesn't let it come out...but the robber doesn't know this. However it is much safer to put it in a little purse under your clothes (I personally never used it though it is good to have if you are sleeping in a hostel!)
- HOSTELS: bring a blanket and pillow cover—you can put dirty clothes in there, cover stuff to sleep in—it's multi-functional! Sleep on top of your backpack if possible! Go for the cheapest places with caution, you would only sleep there...so why pay a lot?!

What places would you advise future students to see and why?

- Mont Saint Michel, Beaches of Debaument, American Cemetery, Rural Normandy. All are very famous Normandy landmarks.
- The Memorial from W.W.II. Go to Paris and see everything there.
- Paris (of course), Etre-Tat, Honfleur, Deauville/Trouville, D-Day beaches and cemeteries, countryside around Caen, south of France—in Provence (Bouche-du-Rhone), along Mediterranean coast where the sea meets the Pyrenees.
- Paris—must see la Tour Eiffel—to save money you can climb up to second level (costs 3.30euros or so) and then you pay about 4-5euros to get with elevator up to the top), l'arc de Triomphe (for students it was 4.50euros to get to the top...we choose to only take pix on the outside...to get to it, there is a little subway on two sides, don't try to cross that circle of traffic, it won't work!!! ☺)
- Take lots of pictures, it's not everyday you go to FRANCE!!!

MONEY AND COMMUNICATIONS

How much money in U.S. currency would you recommend students have at their disposal for their whole time abroad?

- \$50 a week, or \$200 a month
- \$2,500—I had \$1,000 when I left for France and it was not enough.
- I would figure around \$500/month, especially when you need to pay for your own meals and traveling
- It is very much up to the person, how much will you spend in shopping, drinking and traveling. A MUST is to make sure you have some 100euros in the beginning when you arrive, for unexpected needs, some food, taxi (IN FINAL case you need it), for a shuttle if you are going that way, make sure to have some coins (about 5-7euros worth) BEFORE you get to Caen!
- I think I withdrew about 1000 while I was here, for travel and all other needs I had.

*How much money did you have in foreign currency when you left for your program?
Was it enough?*

- \$200 or 1200F is plenty
- Around \$200—plenty, but nice to have until you find an ATM. I exchanged it at the airport.

*How did you manage your money (credit cards, traveler's checks, bank accounts etc.)?
How and where did you access your money?*

- I have a check card from the states, and used an ATM card to take money out. I also have a bank account here plus a credit card (carte blue) for cashing my checks and putting money away.
- ATM machines are easy to find. I advise everyone to make a budget before you leave and keep a very close record of your spending.
- I had a debit card from my U.S. account (took money out when I needed) and checked my balance on the Internet. I also opened an account in Caen at BNP Paribas and there they gave me a debit card that was very useful because I got few charges when taking out money. To get money into this account I simply took cash out with my U.S. card on an ATM and deposited it. I suggest doing this especially if you stay the whole year. I also had a credit card.
- It is nice to have a credit card for BACK UP only!!!
- Main source to get cash for me and others was a **CHECK CARD**!!!—I bank at M&I but other banks work too. This is the card you can use for TYME machines, in the U.S., from your checking account. Savings account cards won't work...I don't think! You can withdraw anywhere really...there might be some charge, that's why when I needed cash I got 200euros at a time and make SURE you take good care of where you put them...don't leave them unattended, out in the open in your dorm room!!!!
- Before leaving the States set up your access on the net so you can check your balance from over there, or have someone you trust here (when you call them) check that for you! It is important to not overdraw!
- I never needed to write a check, so don't bring those.
- Another thing with the check card you can also buy things in some stores...if not all—find MONOPRIX—it's cheap and buy yourself some fruits/breakfast for the week! (It's like Wal-Mart—with clothes and food.)
- As for the credit card—only once I needed it but it didn't work. We rented a car and I needed it not to make a payment but as an insurance if we trashed the car! ☺ They needed, I think, 500euros...they don't withdraw it but rather make sure you have that kind of money. Otherwise you do pay upfront...if you do that with a couple other people it's not expensive at all. They're cars are very gas effective...we went around 200km with ½ tank!!!!

How much money did you spend on books?

- None. Unless one would like to buy a dictionary or grammar book which is about 300F or \$50.00.
- For my level, I was not required to buy any books. I did buy some recommended books though.

- I bought one book for less than \$20. I bought my school supplies there and some dictionaries, etc.
- Buying books for myself/classes, or what? For classes you don't need books...they give you copies/handouts—make sure you keep them for tests at the end, it's helpful! I bought a French-French dictionary and French grammar, Le Petit Prince, le Petit Nicola—books for little kids—all together about 50-60euros.

How did you communicate with the U.S.? What would you recommend to future students (e.g. calling card, set up e-mail account and where, etc.)?

- DO NOT BUY INTERNATIONAL CARDS! FNAC has a rechargeable, country specific card, 1FF = 1 minute, cheaper to call home. Plus you can recharge up to 200 minutes, but must have a French credit card.
- Set up a free account with mail.yahoo.com—for some reason Hotmail doesn't work very well in France! Ask the vendor where you purchase the phone.
- I emailed by using the computers on campus and called home using a phone card (bought in local "tabacs" or in the (CEUIE office).
- E-mail all the way!!!
- For phone calls you can buy those "EuroCard" that the people called "animateur" who are in charge of the trip organizing and that room where you relax in between classes. They were about 15euros and are worth it!!! They're a bit tricky to get used to with the dialing but they work, once you get them. In the lobby, down in Batiment G there is a phone booth, but you can use any public phone to call the US...and they always tell you how much minutes you have left. DO NOT CALL Paris or elsewhere with those because it eats up your money like nothing!!!
- As far as post cards—stamps to send something here are 0.90euro cents so it's kind of expensive, you have to buy the stamps from a machine in the Student Services, down the hill from the campus...they'll show you where this is.

SCHOOL WORK

How did your academic experience abroad differ from your U.S. experiences concerning:

Relations with professors/Classroom Instruction?

- Very little contact other than in classroom.
- Completely different. No office hours, no relationship at all, no communication. All note taking.
- A relationship exists just in class, have no office hours. In general I had good teachers, but occasionally some were moody and condescending—but don't let it bother you.
- Professors are very nice...but make sure whenever you talk to them or strangers to say "VOUS" not "TU"...very, very impolite!

Grading?

- On a scale of 20, all one needs is a 10 to pass, but VERY hard to obtain.
- Ridiculously difficult.

- On a scale of 20: 10/20 is average, 9/20 is not good and 19/20 or 20/20 is rare.
- It's easy if you keep up, but doesn't necessarily mean you have to study like crazy!!!

Study habits?

- Every night for 2-3 hours and all day on Sunday.
- I found that studying here was very difficult.
- Studied during the day and before I went to bed. It was fairly quiet in the dorms, but I feel it's most important to talk to people, you can learn a great deal that way; that's why you're there.
- Just make sure you do the homework, they like it, plus they give you good evaluation when you do.

Library?

- A waste. One can only check out 1/20 of the books. The rest have to stay in the library.
- I used the campus library—very nice, just make sure books aren't late.
- No library...we never visited it...don't even know there is one!?

Computer Access?

- If living in the right site computer access is just slow. If not, it can be impossible.
- Okay. Do not need to type papers. Sometimes you have to wait 30 minutes.
- Not as easy to get to a computer as at UW-L, sometimes you have to wait and can't do it on weekends depending where one stays.
- There are computers in Batiment G, where I stayed, on the first level...you have to give your ID to the LOGE and they give you key. First off though you have to go to the college building where there is an actual computer lab with lots of computers and create a log in and a password. First they have to give you the "internet access" permission—little yellow card, they give you some time in the first couple of days. It's not the quickest and the keyboards are a bit off...with the w,q,e,t....you'll see!

Other?

- Use the computers now found in Vissol—just for International Students.
- Take something you'll need for a minor or a major...the credits DO transfer!

What enabled/hindered your successful academic experience?

- That I need to do whatever it takes for me to gain what I need to know to reach my goals.
- Enabled: talking to/asking other students about homework, etc. and talking in French. Hindered: procrastination, staying alone.
- Good background...however there were some high school students that didn't know ANY French and were placed in the beginner level, so you don't have to KNOW the language to go to this program, which is nice because this would be a very good start in the learning process!!! So don't be worried if you are only a semester into French!!!

SOCIAL LIFE

How did you meet students from your host country?

- Walk up and talk to them.
- Got involved in SUAPS and Melting Pot activities. Do not sit at Oxygen B your entire experience abroad—you'll only meet other Americans and Anglophones.
- At CEUIE (in my classes), through other organizations
- We stayed at the dorms, so there were a lot of Americans that lived there too...you don't really meet a lot of French people during the summer, but mostly Africans, Moroccans, Indians. French people you'd have to go out and meet on your own...not in the dorms. Don't stay in your room at all!!! You should be out doing stuff, checking out downtown, sitting at a coffee place, if you want!

How did you like to spend your free time and why? Is there anything you regret not doing more of in your free time?

- Relaxing. School is stressful! Maybe listening to French music, but it wasn't always possible.
- Walking around downtown is fun—shopping, see all that you can!
- Running, walking in parks, in cafes with friends, went to markets and around town. I regret not exploring Caen and its surroundings more.

What opportunities for social, recreational, and cultural events that the host university or program offered did you like the best? Why?

- The BCI had a welcoming dinner, and I liked that. I met practically everyone.
- SUAPS, the Melting Pot, weekend excursions.
- Do SUAPS (it's like intramural sports that you sign up for in the beginning of the year—they have dance, swimming, rowing, ping-pong, and a lot of other activities and it's free). It's a great way to meet French people.
- There was a fitness center (salle de musculation) but it's closed over the summer! Anyway there is a lot of walking everywhere and you do get your fair share of exercising...and there is always running! ☺
- The trips were good...the activities specifically for Normandie were very cool and right on campus. Others were offsite.
- Some of the trips, I think you pay for with your "tuition money", others you have to pay cash over there (some are 35/25euros)

What piece of advice would you give future students regarding their non-academic life while abroad?

- Do not work as an English teacher in the local schools. That's all I hear Anglophones complain about...school/work.
- Do not spend all of your free time in Caen or especially Oxygen B.
- Get out—go out with friends, see things. Don't be shy (French aren't the very best socially) and be positive and keep your temper about French ways.

- Be careful with Moroccans, they will try to sleep with you (if you're a female of course) in every way possible. Make sure you are with friends whenever you go out DURING the night/evening. Never leave alone with people you just met...it's quite dangerous! On the streets at night, you have to be EXTRA careful. The tram's last stop is at 12:30am so make sure you take that or order a taxi from the bars.
- O'Donnals is an Irish bar and it was very fun to hang out there...we met a lot of English fun people too. French bars that I went to weren't all that great really and too smokey!!!

CULTURAL ISSUES

Are woman treated differently in your host country than in the U.S.? If so, what advice would you pass on to women who are thinking of studying in your host country?

- Women are treated more as materials than people. Women should come prepared for ANYTHING.
- Beware of French men—seriously! They sweet-talk all day just to take advantage of you at night!
- I think families are more traditional, especially with the role of the wife. Don't be afraid to tell someone to leave you alone and walk away (foreign guys on campus target many foreign girls). Don't give them your number or place of residence girls!
- Yes, they look at you like no other, especially when you're dressed up—they might whistle at you and make comments—DO NOT pay attention and just walk away!

Are minorities—racial, religious, sexual identity—treated differently in your host country than in the U.S.? If so, what advice would you pass on to members of any minority group that are thinking of studying in your host country?

- Minorities are treated differently. France is very racist and even though the law prohibits discrimination, it still occurs.
- Some people treat anyone who is not French impolitely.
- French people don't seem very religious and the majorities I don't think attend church. Most that do are Catholic.
- Hadn't noticed.

OTHER COMMENTS

- I suggest studying in Southern France and just visit Caen to see the War Museum and D-day Beaches.
- Things are as structured there as here, don't worry if you don't know everything when you leave or if you're confused when you're there and are frustrated. Things will fall into place. Really take the opportunity to talk to people in French. Go to the open markets.
- THE BEST EXPERIENCE: We rented a car (it was about 70euros for the whole weekend!!!!) with 2 other girls and took a drive around...visited Bayeux, Etretat, Dauville/Trouville...we went over le Pond du Normandie....IT'S HUGE!!! It costs 5euros, by the way, to pass it! This is a GREAT way to explore some cities by yourself, not to be rushed the bus is leaving at some time. Buy a map of Normandy

or whichever region you want to go to (it was about 5euros) and make sure you ask some of the locals or teachers where it is nice to go and what you should see before you leave. We saw and did TONS of things in one weekend. DON'T sit around if you're not going on a trip with the others of the class or if you just don't want to go with them!!! TRAVEL! If you want to do this, get one of the "animateurs" people that organize the trips to help you call on the phone and find out the prices and all that...gas money and limits!

- This beach is a MUST visit...you have to get a bus from (Bus Vert which with your ID costs only 3euros one way...I think? Not sure) the train station, or if you find the bus station in Centerville you'll be even better off...there is a schedule for LINE #1 in the bus stations where buses stop (across from kind of all the bars, where you get off of the Tram in Centerville). We went on Sundays after we bought some bread, fruit, and fromage from the Centerville market...it's cheap and lots of choices—ask the locals or your teachers for sure on those. They're fun, there are clothes, food, anything!