

Studying at ESTACA: A Student's Guide

From Spring 2018 Cohort



Table of Contents

[Preparation](#)

[Student Visa Information](#)

[Credit Card Information](#)

[Housing](#)

Homestay\Apartment Dorms

[On Arrival](#)

Settling In

Transportation

Phone Plans

[Daily Life](#)

[University Life](#)

[Things to Do](#)

[Food and Drinks](#)

Food On-the-go

Lunch and Dinner in Paris

Drinks

[Nightlife - Paris](#)

[French Language and Culture](#)

Preparation

- Fill out your study abroad application in its entirety - this includes letters of recommendation, so don't leave it for later!
- Once you're accepted, get your application to ESTACA done before the deadline, so they can get you the decision and you can continue the rest of the process.
- Apply for the Purdue Moves Scholarship - \$3,000 for a full semester.
- Plan your flight - the earlier the cheaper. ESTACA started January 22nd, 2018 for us (this was our one orientation day).
- If you have any questions, reach out to the study abroad office or Professor Tort, or the previous students!

Student Visa Information

- Once you've been accepted by ESTACA, you have to submit an application to CampusFrance, which will provide verification that the university has legitimately accepted you. This process can take up to 4 weeks, so submit the forms **as soon as possible**.
- Once you have the CampusFrance paperwork, or even a few weeks before you're supposed to receive it, schedule your appointment with the French consulate.
 - Note: The consulates have specific coverage, i.e. the Chicago consulate covers the states around Chicago. You may be able to go to a different consulate, but all Purdue students can go to the Chicago consulate as well.
- Follow the instructions on the consulate's website to make sure you have all the required documentation. This includes a passport sized photo, a passport (obviously), proof of sufficient money to meet your needs while abroad, your flight information to the country, and several other things. Bring the correct number of copies or even extra copies just in case. You will want an extended stay student visa. If you plan on working abroad, set the date for your visa until at least August, as you need 2 months advance warning to extend it. If you know you will be working in another country, make sure to examine the visa rules in that county as well.
- Your visa should take less than 2 weeks to arrive, and you will provide the mailing envelope (you need to use the US Postal Service). Make sure to send it home, not to Purdue. You can't alter the address once it's with the consulate.

Credit Card Information

Ask your bank about how your card works abroad. Some banks charge a fee around 3% every time you make a purchase and a currency exchange must be made. Ask if any travel credit cards are available, PNC and CapitalOne has one with no exchange fee from purchases in a different currency, it just depends on the bank. Taking out large sums of money at the ATM and using cash may be the best way to avoid paying a lot of these extra fees, however, as always be smart how you go about this. Additionally, most card readers in Europe use chip technology, so it's helpful to have this abroad. Also, let your bank know you are travelling to another country so you won't get denied when trying to use it.

Housing

3 options – Homestay, apartment, or student housing

Homestay

Stay with a French family for the duration of your trip. Homestays usually include breakfast, and will have an agreed upon number of dinners a week.

Websites used by past students include

- Hostfamiliesinparis.com
 - Contract is on the website. Payment is an initial lump sum to the company, not the family, and no further payments are made. Security deposit is returned after the stay. Prices for a given number of meals per week are available upon request - I believe it was 33 euros/day with 3 meals a week.
- Homestay-in-paris.com
 - Similar to hostfamiliesinparis.com, specific rules are posted on the website, you input your length of stay and someone will contact you with a family. Meal plans are available from 3 to 5 dinners a week including breakfast every morning and required access to the kitchen. Once you accept the family you must pay a lump sum beforehand via PayPal to homestay-in-paris.com, then all other transactions are done monthly in cash to the family.

Each company will have a different contract, method of vetting families, and procedure for finding and, if necessary, switching families.

Homestays are a good option for seeing part of French culture outside of academics and city life. You'll be able to speak French with them, learn about the city and country,

talk about current events, and have someone looking out for you during your stay. Depending on the family, you may cook with them, go out to concerts and games, explore the city, etc.

Living with a family can cause problems; the company may have a survey or something similar to match your living habits with a family, but communication, expectations, etc. may differ. Be open to speaking with your family about problems if necessary, and know your contract. Try to meet or at least contact your family in advance to introduce yourself and, if necessary, clear up things like kitchen privileges and laundry. Don't feel trapped in one place - there should be options for switching families or ending your contract early.

Homestays will likely be in the city itself, meaning you have a commute to the university. Classes don't start before 9, and the metro is quite easy to use and reliable. If possible, request a family with easy access to the RER C, N, or U, as these lines go straight to the station by ESTACA. Even though train strikes can definitely increase commute time, it is so worth it to stay with a host family.

Apartment

Apartments allow freedom and personal space, and it can be easier to find one close to ESTACA if that's your goal. Living in an apartment will probably include a roommate, likely French. One of the easiest ways to find an apartment is to contact a student who has previously gone to Paris and see if they are still in contact with the landlord. Alternatively, there are some students from ESTACA that will be studying at Purdue that can help you out as well. Before reaching ESTACA you will be assigned a buddy who is a student that studies at ESTACA. Once you are assigned a buddy, it is recommended to contact your buddy since they can know of cheaper options for renting an apartment. Be prepared to provide financial information to ensure you can pay rent, and possibly proof of your visa as well.

Payment may require opening a French bank account - this is easily done, and the French postal system is also a bank, so you can set up an account without looking at companies if you wish.

Student Housing

Estudines is the student housing that houses ESTACA students, as well as students from the other surrounding schools. Rent is 735 Euros/month. This dorm is in St. Quentin en Yvelines, where ESTACA is located, roughly a 10 minute walk.

www.estudines.com

Contact ESTACA for more information.

On Arrival

Settling In

Arriving a week to a couple days early is nice in order to familiarize yourself with your new place and country and help with jetlag! Walking around your home area, grocery shopping, buying housing supplies, practicing your commute to school, and easing into the foreign customs and language are all things you can fill your time with.

Transportation

Tickets

- Tickets can be purchased either from ticket machines or from attendants in the ticket office. The price depends on how far you are traveling and through what means. The machines have a roller at the bottom that allows you to browse through your options on screen. Buying “carnets” of 10 tickets is cheaper than buying individual ones, and are useful if you have friends visiting or find yourself in need of a ticket.

Airport to City

- There are two airports just outside the Paris city limits, Paris-Charles-de-Gaulle (CDG) and Paris Orly (ORY). From CDG, you can purchase a train ticket for 10€ that allows you travel into the city, train switches included. From ORY to the city there is the ORLYbus. This costs around 8€, and you can take this into the city until Denfert-Rochereau where the line ends, then switch to a train from there if needed. The RER station is just outside the bus stop, and the metro station is under a 5 minute walk away.

Navigo

- The Navigo Card is a transportation pass that allows you to pay a monthly fee and have unlimited access of the metros, RERs, and buses in Paris. It costs around 73€ a month, and you can buy it and charge it at any station with an attendant. This is by far the cheapest way to live in Paris and commute to school, and even recommended if you live on the ESTACA campus for the travel benefits/incentive to go to Paris. There are also two types of Navigo. You can get a Navigo Decouverte, in which you are required to have a passport sized photo and pay 5€ for the physical card, or the regular Navigo where you must prove residency in France and they take your picture at the station. Either works the same, the first is targeted for mid-length stay visitors, and the second is for residents. In order to use your Navigo, you simply scan your pass at the entrance to the bus or on select turnstiles at the train stations and enter.

Zones

- Paris is split up into 5 zones regarding transportation. Zones 1 and 2 encompass central Paris and are accessible by metro, while 3, 4, and 5 extend outside the central circle. RER trains cover all 5 zones. Be cautious you have the right ticket if you are riding outside zones 1 and 2, they cost more, and occasionally the SNCF railway company workers will stop you to check and make sure you have the correct ticket or travel pass. If you don't, fines are around 50€. ESTACA is in zone 5 of Paris, so a Navigo covering all 5 zones is needed if you plan to commute from Paris.

RER

- RER trains are a high speed method of transportation extending outside the first two zones of Paris. The RER C is the line that goes directly to St-Quentin-en-Yvelines where ESTACA is located.

Long Trains

- Like the RER, long trains are just different lines that travel outside of Paris. The lines U,L and N are lines that go directly to St-Quentin-en-Yvelines where ESTACA is located.

Metro

- The metro is one very efficient way of navigating Paris. Be wary of pickpockets in crowded areas, but this pretty much goes for anywhere in the city (place all your valuables in front pockets or money belt). All metro entrances are marked in the same way on the street, and most metro stations have multiple exits, so be wary of this also when meeting people or trying to orient yourself in a new place.
- All metros have two directions unless you are at the end of the line. They are named separately and located on opposite sides of the track. Apps like SNCF, RATP and Google Maps will give you metro directions along with which train to take, and there are signs on the walls of the station where you can verify your direction and desired stop. The SNCF app is especially good to know where to stand on the trains and where to exit the trains. Sometimes you have to walk through certain platforms to reach the one you want. This doesn't happen very often but can lead to confusion, just be aware and read the signs.

Bus

- Not many of us took the bus very often, but it is an option for travel around Paris, and it's nice for a change to view above the streets of Paris rather than underneath. Metro tickets work just the same on the buses or you can use your Navigo. Especially when traveling around Paris at night, there are multiple night buses that run during the time the Metro is closed.

Google Maps

- In order to navigate your way anywhere in the city transportation wise, Google Maps is very useful. Google Maps will show walking routes to the metro station, metro lines and directions to take to take to your destination, and you can start it on wifi and it will continue when you're off. SNCF online also has the RER schedule.

Delayed/cancelled Trains (Strikes)

- (Don't rely on Google Maps during strikes, and instead use SNCF app)
- In RER stations, multiple trains will stop at the same platform unlike the Metro. There is a television screen noting which train is coming next and the approximate time. The letters on the screen will also match the letters on the front of the train for the corresponding vehicle. Sometimes, instead of the approximate time shown on the screen, you will see "supprimé," which means for whatever reason your train isn't coming. In this case, you can either wait for the next train (which may or may not be on schedule) or use an app mentioned above, the RER maps on the wall of the station, or an SNCF attendant to find another route. The RER C is the most direct way to ESTACA, but it's not the only option. Late/deleted trains will happen every so often, so sometimes it's nice to take the train before the one that will get you to class exactly on time, just in case.

Phone Plans

Call your provider beforehand to see if you have an international data plan, this might be the easiest way to have data abroad. If you don't though, there are also fairly cheap plans you can buy once you're in France. Sometimes you can use your same phone, but make sure the SIM card is unlocked by whatever provider you purchase from, or else your phone will reject the foreign SIM card. Free Mobile has a 20€ a month data plan that most of us that bought plans in France used. This was a month-by-month payment that had to be cancelled through sending a letter through the mail at the end of your service. The SIM card was a single payment of 10€. La Poste is another good option. It was 19€ for 60 Gb a month. This was a good option too because even if you are in a small french town, there will be a La Poste that is close and the coverage is everywhere.

T-Mobile may tell you that you can use your exact plan for only \$10 extra dollars a month, but this is not true! You will have 2G and it only lasts for 3 months, and after that 3 month period you will go into extreme roaming and have to pay a lot.

Daily Life

Classes typically start at 9. There were usually 3-4 days per week. You will often have 3 hour lectures, 9-12 and 1-4. The schedule changes every week.

Outside of class, you will likely have almost no homework. Honestly. Zero.

If you are living in Paris proper, you will need to take a bus or train to get to ESTACA. Lines C, N, and U go directly to the St. Quentin en Yvelines station, which is a 2 minute walk from ESTACA. On average, it's probably about an hour one way from the center of the city, between waiting for trains, switching lines if

necessary, and the actual transit time. The trains are fairly reliable.

Outside of academics, you will be free to do whatever you want. You will be assigned a buddy, so reach out to them! Visit and explore the city, go to a concert or sporting event, hang out with each other. If you're looking to meet French students, the best way is extracurricular activities or attend social events, conducted by Erasmus student organisation, in Paris (check their Facebook group for daily updates). Again, talk to your buddy about joining clubs or contacting someone who can help.

You'll also be there with a group of other international students. Typically students are from the U.K., Mexico, Thailand, India, Germany, and China. Hang out with them too! They're in the same boat as you, and there's a lot to be learned for both of you.

You should have access to a kitchen wherever you live, including the student living. Groceries in Paris are roughly the same price as the U.S. Meat is more expensive, vegetables are less, most everything else is the same. There is a Carrefour, the major general and grocery store, in St. Quentin en Yvelines. Other stores typically found are Monoprix and Franprix. There are Subways and McDonalds and Burger Kings, but there also sandwich shops, creperies, and local restaurants.

University Life

Classes are not semester long events like Purdue. You will have classes for 2-8 week periods, typically with two lectures a week, and possibly a lab or recitation style class in addition. There are several professors that teach within the AAD program, and you will likely see them for more than one class. Classes are 3 hours, and will not always be consistently scheduled each week. You will not have homework like at Purdue.

Instead, you may be given an assignment during class, and it's expected that it will be completed by the next time you meet. You may or may not be able to finish this in class.

All of your classes will be with the other international students, typically around 20-25 students. Unless you take another ESTACA course outside of the program (which is possible!) you won't have classes with the French students.

You will almost always have an hour to two hour break for lunch. There are food trucks in the back of ESTACA, or you can pack your own or go over the train tracks into the town proper where there is a mall area with a lot of restaurants. Unless you live close to ESTACA, you will not have time to return home and come back. There is also a food court associated with the university called CROUS. ESTACA will explain how to use this during your orientation.

Exams are a large percentage of your grade, much larger than at Purdue. These will happen at the end of the course module (when lectures are done for that module). In general, modules can end in the middle of the semester as well. Don't fall behind because you don't have constant homework. You may be surprised how much your understanding is based on having to do an assignment each week. If the professors ask you to look something up or study before class, do it!

There will be an end of semester project and presentation you will work on with the other international students. Try to branch out and work with students from outside the U.S. This is valuable experience for your resume and career, and it can be very interesting to see the different ways each culture approaches group work. Don't pick a super hard project because there is not a ton of professor direction to help with the project.

Try to go to class. If you have to miss, let your professor know in advance. They will be offended if you skip without warning. You get 2 scheduled weeks off during the semester, and near the end of the semester you won't have class every day. One caveat to this - if there's something you want to do or see that you have to miss for, like the student carnival or an extended weekend trip to Belgium, don't be afraid to do it. Just don't make it a habit, and provide that advance warning to the professor.

Things to Do

Paris proper has a ton of things to do. Walk along the Seine, visit the bars, have a picnic at a park, tour the Louvre, climb the Eiffel Tower, visit shops along the Champs-Elysees, and a thousand other things. Talk to professors, your buddy, your host family, and look for things to do.

Versailles is in between Paris and ESTACA, on the RER C. The grounds of Versailles are a large public park you can walk and bike around for free. There are also several chateaus, like Chateau Fontainebleu, in the surrounding area that are open to the public that can be reached by the RER or bus, and make for a great little museum and park.

Art museums include the Musee du Louvre, Musee d'Orsay, Musee Rodin, Musee d l'Orangerie, and hundreds more. There are several national museums across from the Eiffel Tower as well. Other attractions include Notre Dame, Montmartre and Sacre-Coeur, Place de la Bastille, Champs-Elysées, Arc de Triomphe. Just walking around the city is an attraction in of itself. You are able to get into most museums for free when you show your student ID.

Traveling to other countries is also fairly easy and cheap. Europe has cheap flights (Pay attention to bag restrictions!) round trip, and hostels are plentiful, cheap, and a great way to meet people and explore a city. You can use budget airlines, such as EasyJet, Vueling, RyanAir , or bus services such as FlixBus and Eurolines. Make sure you have the right power converters and ways to keep your stuff safe. Hostels will often have lockers, but keep all important stuff with you if possible. Make sure you have copies of your passport info page, and a safe way to carry money and your phone. Don't leave your phone charging in the hostel. Travel light - you don't want to lug a bunch of stuff with you while you visit the Colosseum.

France is more than just Paris too. The TGV makes traveling to other places pretty easy and cheap. Visit Marseilles, Cannes, or Normandy. Visit a city during a holiday or festival. Don't get locked into seeing the rest of Europe when there's so much unexplored in the country you're in.

Food and Drinks

Food On-the-go

In certain areas of Paris, one can find various food stands. The most typical ones include sandwiches, crepes, and *grecs*. Sandwiches can be quite common everywhere in the world, however, one can find the *camembert* cheese sandwich, a very potent smelling cheese of great taste with lettuce and tomatoes. Anywhere with a sign saying "Boulangerie" will have cheap sandwiches, quiches, and other quick lunch items. These are where students, and working Parisians often stop for lunch mid-day. Paris is not Paris without its delicious crepes: a thin-like pancake mainly served with nutella. Prices of sandwiches can be around 5-7 euros, depending of the area. Nutella

crepes are usually around 5 euros. Finally, the *grecs* can be found late at night still open and are perfect after a late night out. These *grecs* consist of beef shreds, served in pita bread (or a bread of choice) with lettuce, tomatoes, fries, and certain sauces. Of course, you can personalize it for your tastes.

Lunch and Dinner in Paris

There are various restaurants in the tourist places. However they can be quite pricey. There are certain restaurants in the Latin Quarter that are mainly considered “for tourists,” not really accurately depicting french cuisine. The Parisian *Brasseries* usually have good food for lunch and even breakfast, offering a daily menu known as the *plat du jour* at a good price. It is recommended to choose at least one pricey restaurant during your trip to fully appreciate France's cuisine. One can easily search these online, but be sure to reserve some time in advance.

TripAdvisor is an excellent app to use when searching for restaurants, allowing you to filter results for price, type of food, etc.

Drinks

Drinks at clubs can be very expensive, spanning from 10-20 euros for a mixed drink. However, wine is the cheapest drink one can get spanning from as cheap as 2 euros a bottle. A good bottle of wine can be found from 5-7 €. They can be found at different stores scattered around Paris such as *Monoprix*, *Franprix*, and *Nicolas* (a liquor store). Be aware of happy hours throughout various places in Paris, usually between 5pm-7pm.

Nightlife - Paris

There are various places in Paris to enjoy the night. Usually the best ambiance occurs Thursday through Saturday, with most people out on Thursdays. Busy areas during the weekend include the Latin Quarter, Chatelet, and Bastille.

The Latin Quarter offers a variety of bars and club-like bars with various tourists. It is a great place to go bar hopping since they are all tightly packed. Hungry after drinking? No worries, the Latin Quarter is filled with *grec* stands open late at night. Chatelet is located at a 10 minute walking distance from the Latin Quarter passing the Hotel de Ville. Chatelet offers larger variety of bars because of its larger area, with various seats located on the pedestrian streets. If you are looking for more clubs, Bastille (rue de Lappe specifically), Montmartre and the outside streets of the Champs Elysees offer some great clubs with different music styles. Be warned however, it would be a great idea to look up the type of music the DJ will play that night, since one night it can be rap, while the next is techno. Be prepared to pay

around 10-20 euros for the cover fee. Some entrances can be free before midnight, and sometimes, due to the clubs capacity, event, or theme, the bouncer can choose to let you in or not. A classic club for students in Paris is called Duplex, beneath the Arc de Triomphe. If you wish to go out on Thursday, there is a club at the feet of the Montparnasse tower that will give you a discount if you are an exchange student (certain fridays). Simply bring an ID, and enter the club before midnight to not pay a cover fee. Again, it is recommended to ask your buddies of specific places to go, it is always better to go as a group late at night. Even though Paris is considered safe at night, it is always better to be in a group. Once in Paris, uber's can be relatively cheap, but the metro is of course the best option. If you are living near ESTACA, one can take the nightbus called the *Noctilien*, which will take you to the closest train station to ESTACA. These buses pass through the Latin Quarter (Saint Michel) and Montparnasse. If the night is that great, one can always take the first train in the morning. If waiting in line for overpriced drinks to a club one might not be able to get in, a bar hop sounds like something you would like to do. Online there are various companies that groups to various bars which discounted drinks, and usually end up in a club by cutting the line. This allows you to make many friends in your group, and are usually filled with exchange students from all over the world.

French Language and Culture

NOTE: all of this guide's notes on culture or language are simply observations of our own experiences. You *will* notice differences and people that don't conform to these. Don't treat these like blanket truths. We just want to prepare you for what you will probably - but not always - experience.

Remember, you are in another country. In Paris, as well as many other European cities, there will be plenty of people that can speak English, and signs and instructions will be in English as well. However, it's typically best to at least try to speak the language of the country you're in.

With regards to French, as a member of GEARE you should be at least familiar with common nouns and verbs, and be able to put a sentence together. You can get by with a few words of greeting if you want - All you really *need* to do is get groceries and maybe buy train tickets. For what it's worth, you will be missing out on a lot of the culture around you however.

You'll have a French class once a week for the entire semester. This is a good place to get better at the more technical aspects of French, like grammar and sentence structure. The best way to learn is to get out there and speak. You will make

mistakes, but people aren't going to be upset or annoyed. And if you really need to speak English to get some point across or clarify a question, most French people will be willing to accommodate you if you tried to speak French first.

Culturally - well, it really depends on what part of the culture you want to know about. One difference is the French tend to eat lunch and dinner later than in the U.S., more like 2 and 8 pm respectively. Speaking of times, they also use the 24 hr clock most often, so be prepared to adjust accordingly. The French can also be a little less punctual than Americans. Additionally, be prepared to discuss politics, especially American politics, in depth as this is a common topic for Parisians. In America it is typically frowned upon to discuss religion or politics, but this standard is not the same in France.