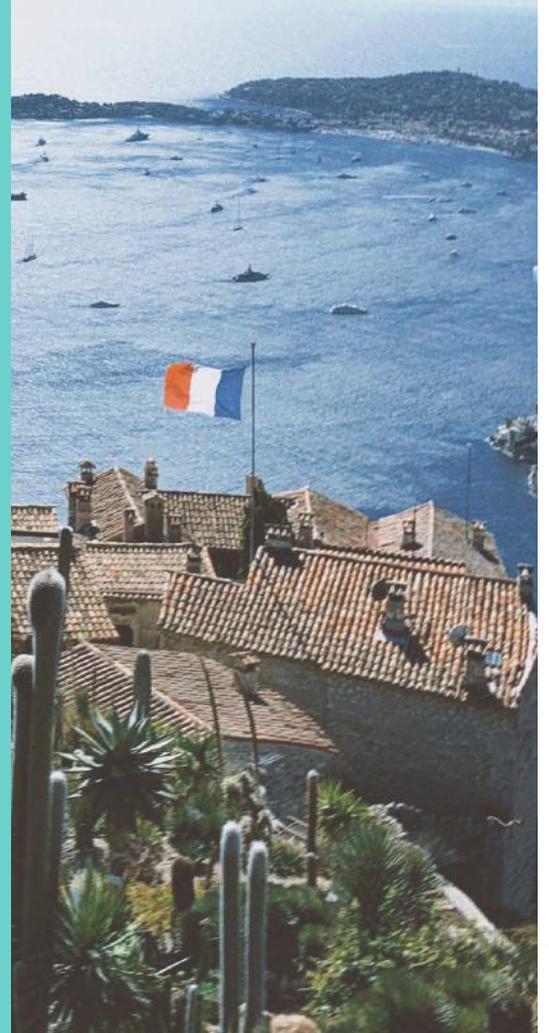


# An Intercultural Journey

IAE Aix-Marseille  
Graduate School of Management

Kathleen Colthurst  
Erasmus Exchange Student 2021



# Table of Contents

01

Introduction

02

Host university

03

Practical information

04

Places to visit

05

Cost estimation

06

Pictures

# Introduction

**Hi, my name's Kathleen and I studied at the IAE Graduate School of Management at the Aix-Marseille University, based in Aix-en-Provence in the South of France, from August-December 2021. I studied primarily business courses (brand management & corporate communication) as well as French language courses and electives in topics such as ethics and social computing.**

**It was undoubtedly some of the best times of my life and here's why.**

Top three highlights of the university/campus

- The campus cat, George
- The outside space to sit and eat your lunch in the sunshine every day
- The laid-back pace of university life versus RSM

Top three highlights of the city

- Aix is stunning in itself, with incredible architecture, very studenty vibes, small enough to feel like home and explore almost every secret street, and a truly fantastic place to live
- The restaurants, there are so many amazing places to eat in the city, you'll eat your way through the whole place and still miss some great spots
- The bars, they're mostly outdoors and in the summer the squares fill up with students drinking, singing and laughing all night

Top three highlights of student life

- The BDE is the student organisation at the university and they organise events every week to bring together the business school students to do tonnes of fun nights out and activities
- The workload is much less than most RSM programmes so it's nice to experience a bit more of the fun side of being a student
- You're going to make so many friends, trust me, both French and international, there are loads of great people at IAE

Top three gained academic benefits

- The French style of teaching is very student-centric and you'll get to experience this different style
- The 3 electives in the fall allow you to shape your focus throughout the term
- The French intensive seminar and continued courses throughout the semester were the best part of the academic experience for me, they're great fun and you'll learn fast - don't miss this course!

Top three gained personal benefits

- Moving to a different country by myself was a great experience and learning French was definitely a great side effect
- I made incredible friends on exchange in Aix, and with a smaller group of international students you'll really get to know (and love) everyone
- I explored the whole country and learned that France is incredibly varied in its towns, cities and landscapes and just as exciting to travel around as Australia (which was my original exchange destination, thanks covid)

# Host university

The IAE Graduate School of Management is based in the Aix campus of the Aix-Marseille University, so you'll be living in Aix-en-Provence (not Marseille). The campus of the business school is located in a small village called Puyricard which you get to via bus/car. You'll be on campus with all the business students and professors, and this allows for a very close knit community of students - you'll find yourself saying hello to everyone you pass on the way to grab your mid-morning coffee and croissant.

## Application

The application process is made much easier by the fantastic international office at the school, they will send you everything you need to do and answer all your questions ASAP. But beware, the French administration system is frustratingly slow, something you'll learn to live with on your semester abroad, so don't panic if you have no class schedule until the second week you arrive in France!

After nomination by RSM you'll need to apply for various things such as your accommodation, different types of French insurance, the courses you want to take etc. But the instructions for all of this will be sent to you by the IAE international office. There are several websites where you need to upload multiple documents (e.g. proof of income for accommodation, passport, etc) which can sometimes be difficult to navigate so get in touch

with the other students going to Aix from RSM and work through it together, I know this helped me a lot!

## Accommodation

The **university will suggest you stay in Crous residency and I would recommend that you do this.** It's very cheap (~€300/ month) and all the other exchange students will be housed in the same halls of residence, so you'll be surrounded by your friends. The halls of residence they placed us all in during our semester was Crous Estelan, a stones throw from the central bus station (very efficient) and a short 15 minute walk into the centre (good for when you're coming home after a couple of bières).



Crous Cité universitaire Estelan



Some things to note about Crous facilities, they're not luxury. They're clean and relatively new but SMALL, but you'll get used to this very quickly and soon it'll feel just like home (and it's totally worth it for the money you save on rent). **If you can, bring a pillow, duvet and sheet (and a roll of toilet paper) with you!** They do not provide anything with the rooms. You can of course also make a quick stop at the local Monoprix supermarket to get your supplies but be warned that you'll need to do this upon arrival.

You'll have a private bedroom and bathroom (albeit small) with shower, sink and toilet, but the kitchens are shared (and a bit basic).

Lastly, when you arrive there are a couple of things to note: first is that the receptionist on duty at the time might not speak English – so be prepared to start practicing your French from the get

go! Second, within the first few days of your arrival you'll have to organise a room check where someone will come and perform an inventory and damage check to ensure you get your deposit back at the end of your stay. You'll also need to organise to see the secretary in the back office to pay your accommodation fees (this is also something you can expect to be performed mostly in French).

## Services/facilities/activities

In terms of services and facilities for exchange students, you'll rely mostly on the international office to help you out. However, there is also an international officer who is part of the BDE (student organisation) who is also there to help support you, as well as showing you a good time.

One of the opportunities offered to exchange students is to arrive early in Aix and do a **2 week intensive French seminar, and I would highly recommend that you do this**. Not only do you get to enjoy two weeks getting to know the other exchange and international students before classes start full time, but you get a great head start on the language as soon as you arrive. The teachers are also fantastic and very laid-back so will help answer your cultural questions and teach you a bit about the city and surrounding area to help you find your feet.

In terms of activities offered to exchange students, the student body organises many socials and events for students to attend, some specifically for international students, but you're welcome to attend all the events and activities on offer.

# Practical information

As mentioned in the application section under the host university chapter, you will need various types of insurance to live and study in France, but these will be described in detail by the international office prior to your departure. In terms of visa, as an EU citizen you're eligible to study and live in France, and non-EU international students seemed to have no issues sorting out visas.

## Transport

When in the city of Aix you'll mostly walk, since everything is pretty close, from the accommodation to the centre and around the centre. When it comes to getting to the IAE campus in Pyuricard, there is a bus (the number 11) which has a bus stop 5 minutes from the accommodation and drops you off right outside the campus. However, the bus takes a very long time compared to driving, and I would strongly suggest that if you are able to bring your car to Aix that you do it. Not only is it really useful for getting to and from campus (and transporting all your carless friends, such as myself) it is also really useful for road tripping to explore the country and all the towns and cities around the Provence area and beyond. If you don't have a car however, try and find someone in the halls of residence or in your classes who you can rideshare with. I would personally not recommend buying a bus pass (~€100) at the tourist office. I bought one thinking that I would need it to commute to university and

definitely did not get my money's worth. You'll probably (like me) end up finding people to ride with to university and your bus pass will grow dusty and mock you from the corner of your room. Especially since you can pay per ride and check in using your credit/debit card on the bus when you want to use it. The only time when the bus pass comes in handy is for the discount you receive when travelling to and from Marseille on the coach.

Aix-en-Provence has a central bus station (Gare Routière) which is where you can catch the bus to Marseille, the airport and the train station, as well as to many other cities in the region. Note that the train station is located out of the city centre (about a 30 minute bus ride away) and it is often more convenient to travel from Marseille-Saint-Charles station since the buses depart to/from the station much more frequently.

Lastly, there is something called ZOU! in the southern region of France which allows students to travel for free on trains and buses in the region, which is great for visiting towns and cities in the south. It's a bit tricky to get the hang of reserving your free seats but go for the trial and error method and figure it out with your friends.

Gare Routière, Aix



# Items to bring

As mentioned in the accommodation section in the host university chapter, your room will be empty on arrival, so the things I was most thankful for bringing in my suitcase when I first arrived (so that I didn't immediately need to go shopping) were:

- A pillow
- A single duvet
- Single bottom sheet, single duvet cover and pillow case
- A towel and shower products
- A roll of toilet paper
- A bar of soap

If you're travelling to and from Aix by car, I would recommend bringing a fan for your room, I ended up buying one when I was there because it gets very hot at night during the months of August–September. Another thing to consider bringing by car is kitchen equipment since it's not provided. I used a saucepan, frying pan and colander most often (there is no oven so you don't need to worry about baking trays). I also had one of everything (plate, bowl, chopping knife, wooden spoon, spatula, glass and mug) and a few pieces of cutlery. If you're not travelling by car, you can buy these supplies at the local supermarket and if you want to keep costs low, consider sharing with a mate in the residence.

In general, I would pack light, since the rooms at Crous are pretty small. However you will have to pack for the seasons since the term starts in August (where the days reach 35 celsius) and finishes in December (where the nights reach zero). So pack a selection of light summer clothes, transitional autumn clothes, and at least one warm coat for November onwards. The dress code at

the university is casual (although you might want to lean towards smart-casual for presentations).

I would also recommend that you bring a pair of sports shoes (either hiking boots or decent trainers) that you can use for walks/hikes. There's a lot of great nature in the south of France, like the local Montagne Sainte-Victoire and Parc national des Calanques, which have some great hiking routes (for beginners and the more experienced) and you will more than likely end up climbing/walking at least one of them, in which case you'll need some sturdy shoes.



Montagne Sainte-Victoire



Parc national des Calanques



# Places to visit



↑ Café Caumont  
→ Cours Mirabeau

## In Aix-en-Provence

### To see

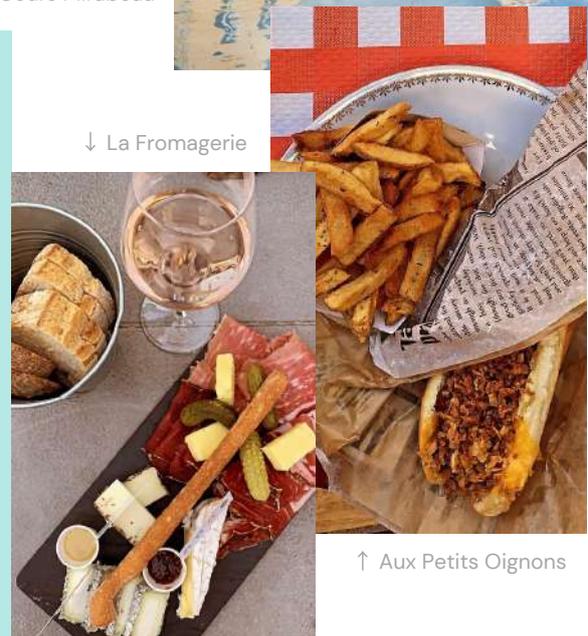
- I could have spent endless evenings walking around the city, you'll see it all without my help, but when you first arrive, take notice of the fountains all over the city (and on the main street, Cours Mirabeau)
- There's a free walking tour which I recommend taking at the beginning with some other exchange students to get to know your new home

### To eat

- There are so many great restaurants in the city, so I'll split a few of them by budget to get you started
- Cheap: Pizza Capri, Aux Petits Oignons, Bagel Story
- Mid: Aux Délices du Liban, La Fromagerie du Passage
- Treat yourself: Le Contrepoint, Koi Sushi Bar
- For the best boulangerie in the city go to Le Moulin des Artistes (everything they sell is delicious, you can't go wrong, but definitely try a cookie or quiche)

### To drink

- Place des Cardeurs is the place to be as a student in Aix, it's a large square with loads of bars, it's where everyone goes out, Woods (for the music nights) and O'Barrel (for the cheaper drinks) were our favourite
- Next to Place des Cardeurs is also Place de la Mairie, which is a great place to sit and drink too
- There are a couple of clubs in Aix (Scat Club and Le Mistral are most popular) but they're not 'great' – for bigger nights out you'll have to go to Marseille (be sure to check out R2 and Baou)
- Bowling du Bras d'Or (a slightly rogue bowling/pool hall with karaoke on a Thursday that actually always made for a great night of games and drinks)
- For a chill drink go to Le Vieux tonneau or Le Forum
- For coffee be sure to visit Café Caumont



↓ La Fromagerie

↑ Aux Petits Oignons



→ ↓ Baou

↓ Place des Cardeurs



# Exploring further afield

## Around Aix

- Visit **Chateau La Coste** for some sculptures, a good walk around the impressive grounds and a glass of La Coste wine and some charcuterie to finish
- **Montagne Sainte-Victoire** was Cézannes muse but is also a short drive from Aix and a brilliant (little bit steep in places) hike to the top
- You should definitely make the effort to see the **Calanques National Park**, bring swimwear, you'll definitely want to jump into the stunning blue water after your hike
- **Marseille** is just half an hour from Aix, it's a bit rough around the edges but worth wondering around for sure - don't miss the sunset from **Notre-Dame de la Garde**

## Day trips

- **Cassis** is an easy day trip on the train, it's not just the start of trails into the Calanques, but a good place to grab an ice cream and walk along the harbour, or sunbathe on **Plage du Bestouan**
- **Avignon** is an hour on the bus and a nice place to wander around for the day (although the famous Pont d'Avignon is a bit underwhelming)
- **Lourmarin** is also a short drive through the pretty **Luberon** region and a nice day trip for a stroll around the town and some window shopping
- **St Tropez** is a good day trip for a sunny day, we went in early December and the town was much quieter than it is during the summer so made a good time to see it

## Long weekends

- A roadtrip along the **Cote d'Azur** was one of the best trips I took during my time in the South of France, we hit Menton, Èze, Paloma Beach, Villefranche-sur-Mer, Saint-Paul-de-Vence and Mougins (you only need around half a day in each)
- A weekend in **Nice**, and a night in **Monaco** is essential, we did this as a whole group of exchange students and had a great time exploring Nice and dressing up and catching the 15 minute train to Monaco for the evening
- **Cannes** and **Antibes** are an easy weekend trip, Antibes is nicer than Cannes (in my opinion) but the train takes 10-15 minutes between the two (and it's free with ZOU!)
- We loved our weekend in **Bordeaux** and would recommend the free walking tours, the wine was significantly cheaper than in Aix (and quite delicious), and you should try to rent a car and visit **Dune du Pilat** in time for sunset (highly recommended)
- **Paris** (need I say more), and with the TGV train from Aix it only takes 3 hours
- Base yourself in **Hyères** for a night or two and as well as exploring the town, take the short ferry for a day trip to the **Porquerolles** islands and rent a bike to cycle to some of the most beautiful beaches in Europe
- Slightly further afield, but we drove to the **Écrins National Park** for a weekend to do some impressive hiking (don't miss **Lac du Lauvitel**) and see the alps under the snow in the winter, stopping by **Grenoble** on the way back for a couple of hours
- Another one we did as a larger group was a few days in **Montpellier** and **Toulouse** - both great cities to explore with very different vibes, Toulouse also has a vibrant student population so try to enjoy a night of bar-hopping there



Marseille ↑

Cassis →



Plage du Bestouan ↓



Avignon ↑

Antibes ↓



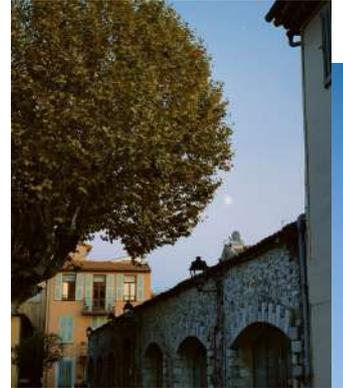
Menton ↑



Villefrance-sur-Mer →



Saint-Paul-de-Vence ↑



Cannes ↓



Dune du Pilat ↓

Bordeaux →



Nice ↑



Écrins National Park ↑



Porquerolles, Plage Notre Dame ↓



Grenoble ↑  
Toulouse ←  
St Tropez →



# Cost estimation

Aix-en-Provence is not the cheapest city to live in (in terms of eating out, drinks etc) and neither is the rest of France, but it's not significantly different to the Netherlands. Below is an overview of total costs for my exchange period (or at least a rough estimate).

ACTIVITY	DETAILS	COST
Insurance	Civil liability and housing insurance	~€40
Accommodation	Crous housing	~€1300 (including €100 reservation fee to reserve room)
Books/study materials/university related activities	There were no additional costs	~€0
Groceries	This changes per week, depending on travel/eating out	~€650 (based on ~€40/week)
Travel	Covers weekly commute and larger trips	~€650 (based on ~€40/week)
Other	Social activities (e.g. paint-balling, eating out, drinks) & general shopping	~€1500 (based on ~€100/week)

I had *the most* Aix-tremely Aix-traordinarily Aix-ellent Aix-perience of my life on Aix-change here, and I have no doubt that you will too.

I made incredible friends, discovered a new way of teaching and a new language, fell absolutely in love with the city, saw amazing sights throughout the whole country and never ever wanted to leave. As someone who was originally set to study in Sydney, then Seattle, and landed in Aix after covid cancelled both previous options, I could not have been happier that it ended up this way. I can only hope that you come away from studying at IAE Aix-Marseille feeling the same.

All photos in this report are my own, excluding those of the Crous residence and Gare Routière.

**Kathleen Colthurst - Exchange Student 2021**