

One Year in France— My Exchange Student Life at Burgundy School of Business

My name is Liu Hui Ting. I am a Taiwanese student currently studying at Feng Chia University.

I went to France Last year in the beginning of August. My purpose for studying abroad was to broaden my horizons and gain a better understanding of French culture. This was a great opportunity for me to learn and speak French. Unlike English, the opportunities to speak and study French in Taiwan are seldom and the number of French people living in Taiwan is few.

In Taiwan, the only foreign languages that Taiwanese students can take in High School are English and Japanese. English is most common, almost all High Schools throughout the country teach English. Japanese is more seldom, and many High Schools do not offer Japanese classes

When I first arrived in France, I realized how different my Taiwanese culture was compared to this majestic French culture. The manners in living between Europe and Asia were stark in comparison, nothing seemed alike. In Taiwan, many stores open only in the evening, to cater to working businessmen and late night college students. In France, most nightlife only comprises of nightclubs and pubs, as well as parties or friend gatherings at people's houses. In Taiwan, parties at friend's houses/apartments is uncommon. The primary reason is because Taiwanese apartments are very small and cannot accommodate for many people. In France however, I noticed that parties were very common and occurred on both weekends and weekdays.

France also has delicious food, yet it is costly. The French food that I miss most is the delicious French sandwiches. The sandwiches in France are different from my Taiwanese sandwiches. French sandwiches use thick bread; we Taiwanese use very

soft bread. French sandwiches also seem very fresh, Taiwanese sandwiches are very oily. Lastly, French and Taiwanese sandwiches use completely different ingredients.

International and French friends also helped form and shape my opinion of France. When I first arrived in France I was shocked by the amount of kissing I saw. Everyone seemed to be kissing each other, even though they barely knew one another. I later learned that it was how people greeted one another and I eventually became accustomed to it. My French friends were very outgoing and very prideful of their country. My International friends were similar for the most part.

My International friends and I would often study and enjoy our time together. I went to some of France's tourist destinations with my International friends, and for the most part we spoke to one another in French, although some of my American friends preferred to only speak in English to the other International students. I too liked using English when I was with my International friends, because my level of communication with my French vocabulary is appallingly low. However, whenever there was an opportunity to use French, or when some of the International students preferred speaking French than I would try my best to use my French vocabulary.

There were also hardships and troubles when I was with my friends in France. There was also all sorts of external cultural conflicts. For instance, the parties that are so commonly seen in France are very rare in Taiwan. Also the "activities" done in these parties would almost never ever happen in Taiwan. Sometimes I would have argument with my International friends over trivial and unimportant matters.

It also goes without saying that I experienced some culture shock when I first arrived in Taiwan. I was very excited and energetic when I first arrived in France. The buildings were different, people dressed differently, people had bright blonde and brown hair, and people's eye colors came in all different colors, from bright blue to dark green, to a rough brown color.

After a day or two my excitement for France began to wear off. I started to feel alone, very alone. I wanted anything, anyone beside me. I desperately wanted to call my mother and father, but I knew that if I did I would just start crying on the telephone. I didn't want to worry my parents, and I didn't want them to think that I was not enjoying France, especially after they spent so much money sending me to Europe.

For the first week I was alone and hated it. After I made a couple of friends and began to adapt to the culture I began to enjoy French culture more and more. I must admit though, that the process of culture shock is one of the scariest events I have ever faced in my life. I can barely remember how it feels like now, since I'm surrounded by people that I trust and love, but I just remember feeling so hopeless. I wanted to vent to other people how France was not the most romantic or beautiful country by far. As I made more and more friends I began to really enjoy my life in France, and what once was a culture shock faded away.

Lastly, studying French and other subjects at the University was quite an interesting experience. The manner in which information and teaching is presented in French universities is completely different to how Taiwanese Universities operate. In France, people raise their hand and ask questions. In Taiwan this is very rare because students do not want to look like they don't understand what the teacher is discussing. In Taiwan, whether you understand the teacher or not, you just pretend like you understand the concept that is being presented. In France, my International friends all bragged and joked about how poorly they did on tests. In Taiwan, if you score poorly on a test, you hide your test and pray that no one asks you what grade you received.

My journey to France was an amazing one. I made many friends, learned about a new culture, and studied a beautiful language. There were times in which I felt fed up with French culture or my International friends, but for the most part we got along great and really enjoyed each other's company. The culture shock I experienced at

the beginning of my trip initially dimmed my impressions of France, but over time I began to truly understand the beauty of living in France.

At times it hard to understand what truly inspires us as well as what motivates us. It is difficult for people to adjust to new customs and new ideas. There are always irrational fears that live deep in our heart, and they are fears that we must all embrace when we journey and explore abroad. I was scared, very scared to leave my own home country. Yet this trip has really impacted my ideas and conceptions about the world I live in and the ideas I hold. Thank you for letting me have this opportunity to study in France. Going to France has been by far one of the best experiences of my life.