

Study Abroad Guide to France

Please use this booklet in conjunction with the

Study Abroad Handbook



University of Denver
Office of International Education

2200 South Josephine Street

Denver, CO 80208 USA

Monday-Friday, 8:00 a.m.–4:30 p.m. Mountain Time

Main Office (303) 871-4912

Fax (303) 871-4910

Contents

<i>University of Denver Programs in France</i>	2
<i>Preparing for Your Program</i>	3
Passport.....	3
Visa.....	3
Travel Arrangements.....	3
Customs.....	4
Prescription Medications.....	4
<i>You Made It!</i>	5
From the Airport to your Program Site.....	5
You Walk in the Door.....	5
Orientation and Welcome Weeks.....	5
<i>Academics in France</i>	6
Registering for Classes.....	6
Credit Loads and Limits.....	6
Grades.....	6
Exams.....	6
Studying in France vs. Studying in the USA.....	7
What Your APR Will Look Like.....	7
<i>Living the Life of a French Student</i>	8
Accommodations.....	8
France and Alcohol.....	8
Transportation.....	8
Electrical Appliances.....	9
Cell Phones.....	9
Calling to and from France.....	9
<i>Homesickness and Mental Health</i>	10
<i>Packing Tips from France Study Abroad Alums</i>	11

University of Denver Programs in France

Congratulations! You have been accepted to participate in a University of Denver program at one of the following study abroad programs in France:

- IAU in Aix-en-Provence
- MICEFA, Paris
- ISA—Catholic University of Paris
- Syracuse University in Strasbourg
- ISEP

This handbook will provide you with a general overview of issues involved with traveling, living, and studying in France. Please use this in conjunction with our general Study Abroad Handbook.

We hope this handbook will assist you and your family in preparing for your time abroad. It is important that you carefully review the contents, as well as any information sent by your French program or university before you depart, and that you take it with you to France.

Studying abroad is an exciting opportunity. Nothing during your college years is likely to change you more. You will learn about another country and another culture and you will also learn to look at your own country from a different perspective. Most importantly, you will learn more about yourself. We encourage you to fully invest yourself into this experience. How much you gain from this opportunity will depend on your preparedness, flexibility, and responsibility. Review the general pre-departure information we provided you with; complete the administrative and academic matters that need to be taken care of before you leave; research the country and city you will be visiting; and review some of the suggested readings in our Study Abroad Handbook about what it means to go abroad.

Remember, you are there to complete an academic program successfully, just as if you were at DU. Good time management and goal setting are keys to handling a challenging academic program and becoming familiar with life outside the classroom. Most of all, we want you to have a great experience and make the most of this opportunity. When you return, be ready to share your stories with other students—your personal experience will be the best source of inspiration for others.

Safe Travels,
The Office of International Education (OIE)

Preparing for Your Program

Passport

You must have a valid passport to travel to France and to obtain a student visa. If you do not already have a passport, apply for one IMMEDIATELY at your local post office. New passport processing can take between 6 and 15 weeks. If your passport will expire while you are abroad, renew your passport now. Your passport must be valid for the duration of your time abroad and up to 6 months after your program ends.

- ✓ **Double check that you have made THREE copies of your passport and other important documents before you leave! If you lose your passport, a copy can help replace it. Give a copy (including a copy of your visa) to:**

- * **Your parents.**

- * **Yourself, and keep it with you in a separate place from your original passport. You can even scan and save a copy in a secure place online if you prefer.**

Visa

You must have a student visa to study in France. You should apply for the long stay visa for studies.

There are two steps to apply for the French student visa:

1. Register online with CampusFrance at www.usa.campusfrance.org
2. Gather all required documents and apply to the French Consulate serving your state of residence or study (www.ambafrance-us.org)

The documents you need for your visa application depend upon the Consulate where you apply, so you need to read the instructions on their website very carefully. Incomplete applications will not be considered. Each Consulate processes too many applications to be sympathetic or make exceptions for one individual.

- ✓ **Make sure that you apply for your visa with plenty of time before you leave for France!**

If you are studying abroad as a Cherrington Global Scholar, you will be reimbursed for both fees (CampusFrance registration and the visa). **Keep the receipt from your money order.** You must pay for your student visa with a credit card, but you will be reimbursed by DU for the expense **only if you submit the receipt to your OIE advisor.** (Under no condition can the University reimburse you for an expense without a receipt.) If you are not eligible for Cherrington, you should be prepared to handle these expenses on your own.

Some Consulates require that you apply for your visa in person. You are responsible for any and all expenses related to traveling to the Consulate, regardless of whether or not you are Cherrington. Cherrington only covers the cost of the visa itself, not travel expenses.

Travel Arrangements

If you will be studying abroad as a Cherrington Global Scholar, please refer to the Cherrington Travel Booking Instructions (you received them in an email from DU Study Abroad sent on, and the document is also posted on the OIE website). If you are studying abroad without the Cherrington benefit or on an unaffiliated program, you will need to arrange your flight independently, but you are welcome to use the same travel agency that we use.

Some programs require you to arrive on a specific day and/or time of day. Find out what your program recommends! It's always advisable to arrive in the morning or early afternoon rather than late afternoon, evening, or night. If possible, avoid arriving on Sunday (unless your program recommends it) because most businesses are closed and public transport does not run as frequently.

Customs

At the airport, once you have found your luggage, you have to go through customs. Make sure you have letters from both schools (DU and the French institution) and your passport. France is not noticeably stricter than most customs, but in general there are a few things you cannot bring and they include:

- fresh foodstuffs
- plants or plant products
- animal or wildlife or their products
- drugs
- firearms or other weapons

Prescription Medications

If you are taking medication, you should find out whether the medicine and the quantities you have are permitted into the country (a good resource is www.internationalsos.com). You should also find out what documentation you need to provide to the customs agents. We advise you to get a letter from your doctor that describes the medication you are taking (including its generic name) and that certifies that the medication has been supplied to you for a particular medical condition. You will not be allowed to bring more of the medication into the country than what is necessary for the duration of your stay.

Also, make sure that you talk to your doctor and get a prescription for the duration of your time abroad. Pharmacies are not allowed to supply you with more than a general dosage, which normally will not last for your entire stay, unless they have permission from your doctor. Take care of this a month or so before you plan to leave.

- ✓ **Make sure you bring your medication with you in your carry-on. You never know if your checked luggage will make it to France with you! Also, keep the letter from your doctor in your carry-on and keep all medications in their original containers.**

You Made It!

From the Airport to your Program Site

Your host institution will send you instructions as to how to get from the airport to your housing. They might arrange for you to be picked up, or you might be required to find your own mode of transportation to your new home. Either way, you should know where you're going and how you're getting there before you leave. Keep in mind that for some programs, you have to check in at a certain time to receive your keys and be shown around – so don't miss that and plan ahead!

- ✓ **Remember to take advantage of France's public transportation system. Although you may be tempted to take a taxi, a taxi ride could prove to be very expensive. Research the options that may be available to you before you get to France.**

You Walk in the Door...

And it's time to start unpacking! Depending on your living situation, you may or may not be provided with living "essentials" such as bedding, dishes, pots and pans, etc. If this is your situation, you might want to take sheets and some eating necessities—a plate, bowl, silverware—however, you can also buy these things abroad, which might be easier. You can also take sheets but buy other things abroad so as to not weigh down your suitcase, but remember that buying a bunch of little things can add up really fast. Also, if you are living in a home stay – don't worry about the above information! The host family will provide you with those necessities.

- ✓ **From experience: Take advantage of the French people that you are living with, be they neighbors, roommates, or your host family. All of these people provide an excellent opportunity for you to be immersed in the French culture.**

"Read in French, watch French TV and movies--don't just settle for the comfortable. Step outside of your comfort zone..."

- **Mary Pearl, IAU Avignon, Fall 2007**

Orientation and Welcome Weeks

If your host institution offers an Orientation or Welcome week – ATTEND! These programs vary from university to university, but are incredibly helpful. Information about orientation will be located in the acceptance materials you receive from the host institution. Orientations are specifically designed to help you with the initial adjustment to living in France, especially your host city, and what to expect from your university. They are generally full of events and activities which are a fantastic way to meet new people, make friends, and get to know your new home! Check to see if there are only a limited number of spots and sign up ASAP!

Academics in France

Registering for Classes

Depending on your program, you will either register for your classes before you go abroad or during orientation. Either way you should prepare yourself for registration by selecting several classes that will satisfy DU degree requirements *and* getting them all pre-approved by your academic advisors at DU. You should have back-up schedules ready when you register in case you don't get your first choice of classes.

- ✓ **You need to get approval signatures from a DU academic advisor to guarantee that you will get DU credit for the classes you are taking abroad. If possible, take care of this before you leave. Attempting to get it taken care of while abroad can be a hassle and occupy time that you could be using to explore France!**

Credit Loads and Limits

Read the Credit section under the "Study Abroad Policies" section of your general orientation handbook. French universities award credits called "ECTS" that are each worth 0.75 DU credit hours. That means that a course taken for 5 ECTS credits would transfer back as 3.75 credits at DU. If your credits are calculated on a U.S. semester system (through IAU, for example), each credit you earn abroad is worth 1.5 DU credits.

Keep in mind that some departments at DU limit the amount of credit that you can transfer back for your major from abroad. Speak with your major academic advisor about any credit restrictions that exist.

You must retain full-time student status as defined by your host university or program. If you fall below full-time status, you no longer qualify for a student visa and are in the country illegally.

Grades

The DU equivalent grades or marks that you earn in your classes taken abroad will be displayed on your transcript, but will not be factored into your DU GPA; therefore, your GPA will be the same upon return as it is before departure. However, if you do not earn a passing grade for a class, you will not earn credit for the class and the grade will still be displayed on your transcript. In order to pass a course and earn credit, you must earn the equivalent of a "C" or better.

Keep in mind that if you apply to graduate school in the future, they may decide to recalculate your GPA to include your study abroad grades. This decision is at the discretion of the school.

The French education system does not suffer from the same grade inflation that U.S. institutions sometimes do. Most French professors are accustomed to awarding "C" level grades to the average hard-working student, reserving "A" grades for the extraordinary students.

Exams

You may need to arrange to take your exams early if you are taking classes directly from a French university. Typically, the French university calendar begins in October and ends in January or February. You will need to ask permission from your professors to take an early exam so you can be home by the end of December.

You must finish all of your coursework before leaving France. The final assessment will be worth the vast majority of your grade. Be sure that you give the assessment, whether it is a test or a paper, your absolute best effort. Save all of your coursework and material and bring it home with you.

Studying in France vs. Studying in the USA

Remember that your grade will most often be determined by a final exam or a paper. As a result, you should put your best work into this final assessment. (This seems to set a dangerous precedent of telling students that they can slack off until the very end, since we don't study for final exams until late in the quarter/semester here...)Set deadlines or goals for yourself and meet them.

Overall, the academic system in France focuses on independence and critical thinking or critical judgment. There is far less structure than here at DU, which means that you will need to take the initiative to do well. Make sure you are on top of your registration process, that you attend and engage in classes, and ask questions of your professors when you need to (sometimes in France the professors are less accessible so it takes an extra effort on your part).

What Your APR Will Look Like

When you return to DU, the general 16-credit study abroad placeholder course will remain on your APR until our office has received your host university's transcript. It can take a while for the transcript to be sent, but once we've received it, we will need an additional 10-14 days to apply those credits to your APR (assuming you have had all of your courses approved by a DU academic advisor). Therefore, your actual credits and classes that you took abroad will not be visible on myWeb until a few months after you return.

Once the transcripts have been received, the Registrar's Office will use your course approvals to place your study abroad classes in the proper requirements for graduation. If one of your courses was never approved by a DU academic advisor, the course will be placed in a general elective category by default.

- ✓ **If you are planning to graduate at the end of winter or spring quarter, it is important to let us know so that we can arrange for rushed delivery (if possible).**

Living the Life of a French Student

- ✓ **Be prepared for the exchange rate (about €1: \$1.33). Everything is expensive in France and you need to budget accordingly. You don't want to run out of money halfway through your trip!**

Accommodations

If your program does not arrange for housing, you will be responsible to find and pay for your own apartment. The cost of living in an apartment in France will very likely be more than the cost of living in an apartment in Denver, so adjust your expectations and budget accordingly. Typically, French students live in small, furnished apartments; it's uncommon to have a roommate. Your living space may be much smaller than what you are accustomed to, but you will quickly learn how to enjoy the public space available in cafes, parks, and restaurants.

Be especially careful before signing a lease. Ask a native speaker to read through the contract before you sign. Be prepared to pay a substantial deposit (normally refundable at the end of your stay, barring any damages), and expect to pay for your own utilities. In some cases, you may need to make arrangements to have electricity, gas, and/or phone services connected.

If you live with a host, you have a unique opportunity to experience authentic, daily French living. As a guest in someone else's home, you want to be courteous and respectful. Communicate your plans. For example, if you're going to miss a meal or will be travelling over the weekend, let them know. Cultural misunderstandings are to be expected, but do all that you can to reduce them by asking questions, observing the way your host lives and organizes their lives, and joining in whenever possible. The more you engage with your host, the more you will benefit from the experience.

France and Alcohol

Most of the European students you will meet have had legal access to alcohol for much longer than you, and therefore hold a different attitude towards drinking. They will often have a more responsible and mature attitude; alcohol is commonly available on a daily basis and the French are more likely to drink during the day socially or with dinner, in which case they drink in moderation. Avoid the common stereotype of American students as binge drinkers who don't know how to behave in public. More important than embarrassing yourself, you also put your own safety in jeopardy. Study abroad students who have been victimized are usually under the influence when it happens, so be careful! Act responsibly and respectfully.

Transportation

Public transportation in France and throughout Europe is much better than what we are used to here in Denver. You will probably come to rely on public transportation, and will spend more time and money commuting than you are used to. There will be an adjustment period to the new lifestyle, but most students come back from France with a newfound appreciation for public transport (not to mention an aversion to driving).

You should also be prepared to walk—a lot! Bring comfortable shoes and learn to enjoy the daily exercise and exposure to the sights and sounds of your new city.

As for travelling within France, the train is your best option. SNCF is the train company and their website is www.sncf.fr. It is originally in French, but there are flags up at the top right that will change the language. You can either book your trains online, at the train station, or at a SNCF boutique around town. It is recommended that you get a 12-25 card (*une carte douze-vingt-cinq*). This card will get you discounts on all of your train travel and it pays for itself mostly within the first round trip. French trains are wonderful. The TGV (*train à grande vitesse*) is a high speed train that runs all over France, and there are other regional trains that travel shorter distances.

Electrical Appliances

France and Europe have different electrical outlets than we do with different voltages, so you will need to take with you an adaptor and/or transformer/converter. Adaptors change the size and style of the plug and transformers change the voltage. Also, it is recommended that anything that produces heat – hair dryers, straighteners, curling irons – should be left at home, and bought in France, or do without it. Even with transformers and adaptors, they tend to fry upon first or second use. The good news is that most computers and camera chargers are now equipped to convert the voltage and you might just need a way to plug it in. Conversion plugs can be easily purchased in the States before you travel to France.

Computers: Back up everything before you go abroad!! Losing everything in a computer crash is devastating, and you want to make sure you're prepared for the worst. Also, when in France, everything is not wireless as it is for the most part here on campus. Take an Ethernet cable, or you can buy one there if you need to.

- ✓ **From experience: "If you don't back up all of your computer files anyway, do it before you leave. Traveling is hard on your computer, and it may be hard to get it fixed if it crashes or if files are lost. My computer broke down about a month into my time here. Luckily everything worked out, but be prepared for the worst. Plus, there is no tech center on campus!"**

- Kathleen Weiner, IAU Avignon, Fall 2007

Cell Phones

When in France, you will find it very handy to have "*un portable*" – a cell phone. There are multiple companies you can buy a phone with, the main ones being: Orange, SFR, and Bouygues. Buy a "pay as you go" plan if you're staying for a semester, and look into starting a contract if you'll be there for the year. It's your choice though. You will not need or use your French phone anywhere near as much as you do here. You can buy credit as often as you need to, and it can come in amounts ranging from 5 Euros to 30 Euros, but remember that it can add up quickly!

Calling to and from France

The calling code for France is +33 and phone numbers are 10 digits long. Most cell phone numbers will start 06.xx.xx.xx.xx. When calling anyone in France with a French phone, you will enter the number exactly as you see it. When you are calling from France back to the States, you will enter 001 + (area code) number. However, when you need to call from a French phone outside the country, you will enter 00 + calling code + number. If the number has a 0 in front, the 0 is left off.

France to France = 04.xx.xx.xx.xx

France to States = 001 xxx.xxx.xxxx

France to Austria = 0043 xxx.xxx.xxxx

And! If your parents or anyone ever wants to call you, they enter 011+33+your number (remember if it starts with a 0, leave it off!)

Homesickness and Mental Health

Moving abroad and living in a country that probably doesn't speak your native language is hard, but it's an adventure! It will be difficult adjusting and immersing yourself in this new culture, but embrace it as much as you can. Use each and every experience to speak French and learn more about where you are. If you don't, you will come home wishing that you had. Yes, it's scary and difficult, but each time you try, you will improve that much more! It will be exhausting, and sometimes your brain will hurt, but keep in mind that speaking as much French as you can every day will make you that much more fluent than everyone else that chooses to speak English. And it will get easier. You'll even find yourself using phrases and verb tenses that you never understood in class without even thinking about it. You may even start dreaming in French. It's amazing! So don't give up.

Also, the weather in France will probably be very different from what you are used to here in Denver, especially if you are in northern France. Be prepared for more rain and cloudy days. Keep in mind that weather can affect your mood, but knowing what to expect will help you deal with that change.

If you are seeing a counsellor in the U.S., you may want to look into the possibility of seeing one in France as well. Culture shock and homesickness tend to exacerbate depression, anxiety, and other emotional and physiological concerns. Even if you're not used to meeting with a counsellor, you may want to consider doing so while you are abroad. Be willing to verbalize the changes and adjustments you are going through to make your study abroad experience as positive and stress-free as possible.

As for dealing with homesickness, remember that everyone experiences it at one point or another and to varying degrees. There are multiple ways to deal with it, too. You can either try to view everything that is different as a new experience, or you can find something that reminds you of home and connect with that, or sometimes calling home helps. Once you've found a way of dealing with it, it is easier to get over it and enjoy abroad! Just despite how bad it might seem, and how much you might want to come home, always remember that homesickness does go away, so just give it time.

✓ **From experience: Skype is a great way to stay in touch with people from home. It's less expensive than regular phone calls. And remember you can always use email or Facebook!**

- Charles Fleming, IAU Aix-en-Provence, Fall 2007

Packing Tips from France Study Abroad Alums

Things to take:

- Warm clothes and sweaters for layering
- Lots of black and neutral clothes (I disagree with this...the French are super stylish and very fashion forward...dressing in seasonally appropriate clothing and colors is a much better way to try to assimilate...just avoid the 'I HEART NEW YORK' t-shirts.)
- An umbrella
- More sweaters and warm clothes, as it can get windy and cold.
- Black boots. Great for rain, going out, and looking French!
- You DO NOT need to weigh down your pack with toiletries, unless you have specific products or brands that you prefer (i.e. contact solution, feminine products, etc.) You can get everything you need in France (although it's not a bad idea to bring travel-size items).
- Nicer clothes for going out at night.
- Don't bother bringing school supplies. You can get it all in France as well.
- Your own pillowcase and towel if you plan on traveling and staying in hostels.
- Less is usually better.
- A couple framed photos or wall hangings from home...another great way to avoid homesickness

Things you might want to leave at home:

- Flip-flops. Wearing them in the summer is totally acceptable, but wearing them every day starts to scream American.
- Sweatpants. If you do bring them, be aware that the French will immediately know you're American if you step outside wearing them.

Other packing suggestions:

- There are tons of different methods for packing (ex: folding clothes/rolling clothes, vacuum packs are also awesome!)
- Think about bringing some extra clothes in your carry on in case your checked luggage gets lost.
- Bring a backpack for weekend travel – many European airlines will charge you extra for a roller carry-on
- Bringing clothes that can easily mix and match will help give you different outfit options without packing too many clothes