

# Foire aux Questions - FAQ

---

*EDUCO extends its heartfelt gratitude to the students who contributed to the compilation of this list of questions and answers.*

*Please note that all the information provided is based on individual firsthand experiences, so there may be slight variations from one student to another. Just as with any journey, don't anticipate everything to be universally applicable to your situation. Instead, remain open-minded and be ready to improvise!*

## PRACTICAL INFORMATION

### Which housing option should I choose?

**Every student, in either option, homestay or Cité Universitaire, has a single room.**

My housing experience was one of the best parts of being in Paris. I was lucky enough to be placed in the center of the city, which I enjoyed because it meant I was only half an hour away from everything. No matter what part of the city your apartment is in though, you'll find things to keep you busy. You'll fall in love with your neighborhood bakery or a specific café because in the months you live there, it really does become home. I loved living with a host family because they gave me a real opportunity to learn about the average Parisian's life. Student-life in France, just as in the U.S., is different from family-life, and I think if I hadn't lived with a family, I would have never seen that. I had my own room but always felt welcome to use the kitchen or the common room and also had access to their washer/dryer. If you like to make long-lasting connections then I think a host-family is a great way to do that; I've only been back in the States for a few days but have already exchanged emails with my host-mom.

Host families vary from single older people to families with young children. Be honest about your interests and needs in the housing application. Sometimes students living with host families with children can have more of a familial relationship compared to parents whose children no longer live with them. The latter might give you more privacy and independence (or sometimes, they might have more time for you!). If you live with a host family, you have access to cooking basics and kitchenware and laundry amenities. You may have an opportunity to travel with your host family, like going to their country house for a weekend. Many will include you in family events or will invite you to do cultural things around Paris with them. A host family usually affords you the opportunity to interact with French people and understand how a French household runs, but this does not always equate to a deep relationship. Many homestays have pets\*, which I loved, and all provide three meals per week, which is a huge advantage if you have a limited budget. (\*Mention allergies or dislikes in your housing application!)

I thought there might be too many rules or a curfew living with a homestay. But none of my preconceptions were true. Yes, there were some basic common-sense rules, like cleaning up the kitchen after I used it, or keeping my room clean, or being quiet when I came in late at night. I feel that I had the best experience possible in Paris because of my host family. I had the extra cultural immersion, a comfortable and comforting environment, great dinners and great conversations...I absolutely loved them.

Housing experiences vary, and each option has its pros and cons. I lived in the “foyer,” or Cité Universitaire, and that worked out well for me. I had my own bedroom and bathroom, and shared a communal kitchen. I liked having the independence of living on my own while still being surrounded by other students. Housing is really an individual decision, and there is no way to predict exactly how it will work out. Educo does a great job of finding good places to live, so it’s up to you whether to go for the independence of a foyer or the supportive atmosphere of a host family.

The Cité Universitaire is the French version of an American college campus with dormitories, cafeterias, and student activities. You will not live with Americans, so you will get to meet students from all over the world. English is probably the most frequently understood/used language. Students tend to be older than us, as they are usually in a MA or PhD program, and there are several researchers and a few families that also live in the residences. You must make an effort to step outside your room in order to meet people, as everyone keeps their door closed, so you may feel lonely at times.

### Cité Universitaire:

#### Pros:

- Nice-sized single with tiny bathroom.
- Access to Cité events throughout the semester, such as fitness classes or student-organized parties and outings (to museums, parks, and even Versailles/Disney).
- Some study areas open 24/7 (this might not seem like such a pro until you realize that libraries in Paris close mostly before 7pm).
- At an RER B stop, meaning easy transportation to both CDG and Orly.
- Next to Parc Montsouris, which is good for running or picnics.
- Easy to meet people if you are outgoing.
- Privacy—I was able to host numerous friends stopping by Paris without difficulty. There are beds for rent and you must register guests with the reception. (Limited number of nights permitted).
- 70 euro budget for towels and kitchen utensils (bring your receipts to EDUCO). Sheets are provided by the dorm.
- Close to the Sorbonne (Paris 1 and 4 L3) and the campus at Tolbiac/Bibliothèque Mitterrand (Paris 1 L1/2 and Paris 7 L1-3)
- You can make the decision to speak French or English. The students there are always willing to speak French (if they can) with you if you make the effort.

#### Cons:

- Starting from scratch with food, if you want to cook for yourself.
- Kitchen and lounge closes at 11pm.
- Lack of host family means that it’s up to you to find the French gourmet food experience.
- The food at the cafeteria is mediocre at best. But on the bright side, cooking for yourself is still adequately cheap and doable. (Some of my friends, however, feel they spent more money living at the Cité Universitaire than our friends living in homestays.)
- It doesn’t feel like you’re living in the middle of Paris, since the neighborhood is quiet and there are few Parisian streets that intrude into the large student housing complex.
- Cleaning staff regularly comes into your room, so you have to check the schedule posted in the hallways. This can also be seen as a pro!

## **When do I find out about my housing assignment?**

You will find out when you arrive in Paris. It is an exciting component of the first day. You get an envelope full of information, as well as the details of your housing.

When you arrive at the hotel, the hotel reception will give you an envelope with your housing information and some other basics. Personally, I found it stressful not to know in advance, but in the end, everything went very smoothly and I advise future students to just go with the flow and be zen.

You will most likely stay at the hotel for one night. If you have been assigned a homestay, you will contact them and make an appointment for the next day, after the orientation meetings.

At the hotel: you generally spend one night at the hotel, which is great since you can take a breather and meet the other students on the program. The second day, you will move either to the Cité Universitaire or to your homestay.

## **What should I pack? What's the weather like?**

The weather varies: it is pretty mild but can get chilly quickly.

In the start of the fall semester and the end of the spring semester, it gets very warm – it's often around 70 degrees Fahrenheit. It dropped to the 30s from mid-November through February. In early-mid May, it rains very often, and it is not warm enough to be in full summer clothes. Light sweaters or cardigans still get their use.

Pack as lightly as possible, but still make sure you will not be missing your clothes from back home. Make sure to leave enough room in your suitcase to bring home souvenirs.

Bring a coat. Sweaters are important, as Parisian interiors can be quite chilly (65°F). Bring basics that can be worn in many different ways since you will have a limited wardrobe. Bring a rain jacket and umbrella.

Don't pack too many leisure books. There are so many used-book stores that have classics for 1 euro and current books for around 5 euros.

## **Is there a group flight? Will someone meet me at the airport? How do I get to the hotel from the airport?**

There is no group flight, you'll book your flight on your own, but many EDUCO students end up on the same flights. The easiest (but most expensive) way to get from the airport to the hotel is a taxi, which costs about 60 euros from Charles de Gaulle airport. The train (RER B) is much cheaper (around 12 euros) and is very fast, but it requires lugging your suitcases around (few elevators and many steps in most stations). I would suggest trying to find other EDUCO students on your flight to split a taxi with to the hotel.

The hotel is very close to a metro station, so you can find your way there with any metro map that can be found in the stations and then the subway cars themselves. There is a RATP/SNCF interactive map application that you can download onto a smartphone that does not need internet.

## **How expensive is Paris?**

Paris can easily become very expensive. However, many places have student deals, so you can easily find cheap alternatives. Don't hesitate to try several places and compare prices.

Outside of food and travel, there are plenty of museums you can go to for free as a long-term student resident of the EU under 26 years of age. If they are not free, there is usually a nice discount.

You will spend a lot of money if you plan on traveling. Within Paris, it's expensive but not more expensive than a big American city (ie NYC, Boston or Chicago).

## **Should I bring my laptop? Can I find a converter in Paris?**

The universities and EDUCO both have computers you can use, but you will probably want to have your computer with you if you have one, at least for classes and papers.

If you use your laptop regularly at home, then you should certainly bring it with you. You can buy converters in Paris; they tend to be universal plugs for a lot of different countries.

However, you may not want to bring your laptop when traveling within Europe, as students have had laptops stolen.

## **What should I do if I need a doctor?**

EDUCO will give you important information during the orientation period, so you won't be lost and in which you will be able to find names and addresses of several MDs (some even speak English), hospitals and nurses. (see the EDUCOBOOK, which is distributed to all students). But first, talk to the EDUCO staff, they will advise you and refer you to the appropriate health care professional. Also talk to your host family; they can refer you to their family MD.

Doctolib.fr is a very convenient on-line reservation platform. You can specify the kind of doctor you want to see and if you are a first-time patient. NB: not all doctors accept first-time patients, so check that the doctor does so before making the appointment.

If you are on prescription drugs, make sure you have enough medication with you for a couple of months and bring your prescription with you. A local doctor can prescribe the equivalent medicine but may also ask you to run some tests. The French healthcare system is excellent, accessible to all but very different from our system. In case you need to go to the hospital, the ER may seem like a scary experience (people from all walks of life...), but once you get past that, it's great.

« Pharmacies » also have qualified health care professionals who can advise you.

## **How can I meet French students?**

The best way to meet French students is in class. It also helps to take multiple classes in the same department, because then you will have different classes with the same group of students. Go up to students in your class and ask for notes, just like in the U.S. your class friends can become good friends. The campus (fac, short for university) also has student organizations, Paris 7 has sports teams, or you can sign up for things outside of the university system like dance or art classes to meet people. There are offices at each university that organize student activities called “le Bureau des Etudiants”. It takes work to really break down the language and culture barriers, but you’ll be surprised at how many people you meet once you make just one French friend!

French students will usually not approach you out of the blue. It is up to you to ask them for notes and initiate conversation.

## **Are there many Americans in Paris? Will I be speaking English all semester?**

The amount of French you speak is up to you. There is no language police preventing you from speaking English or from making French friends. It is easy to fall into a trap of only hanging out with other Americans, but many French students are excited to make foreign friends. However, they may want to practice their English skills as much as you want to practice your French. The amount of French you speak will be a direct result of your commitment.

There are tons of Americans in Paris. Ex-pats, teachers, other students, tourists, etc. etc. There’s a good chance you’ll be speaking more English than French if you only spend time with other American students.

If you want to speak English all semester, you can. If you want to speak French all semester, you can as well.

## **Is Paris safe?**

Yes, Paris is fairly safe. Still, it is necessary to take certain precautions, just like in any other large city. Be aware of your purses, wallets, cell phones, and other belongings. Pickpockets can be a nuisance. It is not that big of a city, so you shouldn’t get lost, very well-lit at night, and public transport runs all day and night.

## **How can I get around Paris?**

Paris boasts an excellent metro system that is essential for getting around. To optimize your budget, consider purchasing a monthly pass (or an annual one if you plan an extended stay) as it will save you money during your travels across the city. You’ll find yourself relying on the metro for most of your commuting needs. The metro typically concludes its services around 1 am (2 am on weekends), but you can rely on night buses to keep you moving throughout the night.

Initially, the multitude of metro stops might seem overwhelming, but don’t be afraid; after a few weeks, you’ll become a seasoned metro traveler. The most challenging aspect can be orienting yourself after exiting a station. To ease this transition, it’s advisable to utilize Google Maps if you’re not

confident in your navigation skills before leaving home. Also, consider identifying some prominent landmarks that you can easily recognize to help you find your way.

Buying a metro pass is easy; you have to obtain a card (Pass Navigo) and then charge the card with either a monthly pass or a weekly pass. The weekly pass runs from Monday through Sunday. The monthly pass runs from the 1<sup>st</sup> day of the month to the last day of the month. You can obtain the Pass Navigo at all stations if you ask for a Pass Navigo Découverte (5€). You will need to stick your photo on the pass (big fines if you do not!).

## **How independent will I be?**

While the EDUCO staff is readily available to assist you with various aspects, your experience will primarily be characterized by a sense of independence. Should you encounter challenges in your coursework, the initiative to seek help lies with you; EDUCO has an excellent academic support system of tutors and professors.

EDUCO offers a rich array of trips and social activities that you're encouraged to participate in, yet the majority of your social life will depend on your personal choices. You'll truly be living independently in a bustling metropolis.

In this dynamic environment, EDUCO remains a reliable resource whenever you face any issues. However, it's crucial to understand that resolving problems related to finances, visas, academics, employment, and similar matters rests squarely on your shoulders. It can be challenging for parents or guardians to come to your aid in the event of minor crises that may arise during your stay, so prepare to develop your level of independence.

## **How's the food? Can vegetarians survive?**

Paris is known for its food. Paris puts an emphasis on quality food that can be hard to find in the United States. However, it is incredibly easy to eat poorly in Paris while spending a lot of money. Avoid touristy places that offer dozens of “stereotypical” French dishes. If you are going to go out to eat, look for places with hand-written menus that change regularly. There are a lot of vegetarian options in most restaurants / food places so you will always find something to eat.

## **What should I do about my phone?**

You have several options when it comes to staying connected in France. You can, for example, continue using your American phone exclusively for WhatsApp and other Wi-Fi-based apps, and consider purchasing a new phone or a SIM card from one of the various local service providers. There are several convenient locations where you can make these purchases. Keep in mind that prices may vary, with some providers like Free being on the cheaper end. Each provider offers different plans and deals, allowing you to select the one that aligns best with your needs and preferences. NB: having a French phone number facilitates communication with your French friends.

## **Is Internet easily accessible? Where can I find it?**

Wi-Fi is relatively easy to come by in Paris. If you live in a homestay, the internet is a mandatory part of their set-up and there is Wi-Fi access at the Cité Universitaire. There are some places for which the city of Paris provides free internet, but it does not cover the entire city by far. However, most

restaurants will have Wi-Fi and will give you the password if you are a customer. The universities will also have Wi-Fi, so make sure to activate your account online beforehand.

## **Is it easy to workout in Paris?**

Paris is a great city for working out. There are a lot of parks to run in (by the Seine or in the gardens), and biking around is a great way to see the city. There are also traditional gyms and pools available. At Cité Universitaire, there are fitness classes that are either free or require a nominal fee for each session. Universities also have sport clubs you can join at the beginning of the year or semester.

## **Will there be time to travel? Should I buy a Eurail pass? Is it easy to travel around Europe?**

Traveling around Europe is very easy. It is by no means cheap, but living in France is a great opportunity to see other places. You should invest in a “Carte Jeune” from the SNCF if you are planning to take the train. It costs 50 euros and gives you huge savings on train travel. Weekends are a great time to travel, but I would not recommend doing more than one trip every three or four weeks. You may want to see everything Europe has to offer, but you may book a trip without realizing you have a major academic workload. Be smart about it, prioritize where you want to go, and book early to save money.

## **Is it possible to work in France? Have former students had internships?**

It is possible to work in France as long as you have a student visa.

EDUCO has a limited number of internship possibilities, but generally they are unpaid.

There are also many options for student jobs, like babysitting, bartending, being a waiter/waitress, giving private English lessons, even sometimes dog sitting.

## **ACADEMICS**

### **Why can't I register for classes in advance?**

The French academic system is very different from the American system. French students do not enroll ahead of time using the Internet like we do. You will find out the available courses during orientation week, after your arrival in Paris. There are hundreds to pick from in dozens of subjects, so you will find a schedule that works for you. Figuring out classes to take is one of the most daunting parts of the beginning of the semester, but don't be discouraged by its frustrating complexity. Don't worry though; EDUCO has partnerships with each of these institutions, which makes it a little simpler on us. Only students at Sciences Po will register before arriving in Paris. Everyone else has to do it in person/by hand with the Department secretaries and the EDUCO office.

## **Will all my courses in Paris be accepted by my home institution?**

You need to be in contact with your home university in order to see which classes will be accepted. Some universities offer pre-approved classes, but others do not. The most important thing is to stay in contact with your home institution/advisor and to keep all documents from each class. If you need a certain class to graduate, and just have to take it the semester you're abroad, then you need to get a very clear description from your home institution so you can find something that matches. When in doubt, always be in contact with your advisor.

## **Is the course load similar to that in the US?**

The French course load is very different than in the US. There tends to be fewer weekly readings, and instead you are expected to work independently without a lot of guidance. It is important to stay on top of your work, because some classes will have final papers or exams that count for your entire grade. The best thing you can do is to find some French students in your classes to help you through the daunting process. French professors have higher standards/expectations of students. If your professor gives you a certain formula or plan to follow on your essay, do it. If you're unsure, ask the professor or a classmate.

Assignments and expectations differ slightly. EDUCO can help you get acquainted by providing tutors and help sessions.

## **What are the classes like compared to the US?**

The classes are mostly lecture based, and many of them are 2 or 3 hours long.

Some do not put any emphasis on student participation or attendance, but it is still incredibly important to stay on top of your work. Essays in France follow a very specific format that you need to follow. Once again, befriending other French students makes these differences more manageable.

There are usually fewer assignments and exams, so your grade will come from only two or three assignments.

## **How long will it take my grades to transfer?**

This is a process of several steps: first you take the class, then you take your exams, then your professors take ages to grade the exams, then the grades are given to EDUCO, then EDUCO sends them to your home school's study abroad office, then the office reports them, then when you return you sometimes have to do follow-up paperwork to finalize the transfer/credit approval (this really depends on which school you come from).