Lille Ma Ville: Lille My City

By Yuliana Mendoza, Fall 2014

Introduction

“They say you will cry twice when you go to Northern France, once when you arrive and then again when you leave.” People cry upon arrival because the weather is rainy and cold. But, people also cry when they leave because they fall in love with the beauty of northern France and the warmth in the hearts of the people that live there. I studied abroad at the Universite Catholique de Lille during the of Fall 2014 and I was in their business school, IESEG, and their arts and sciences school, FLSH.

When I boarded my flight to Paris in August, I was excited to embark on a new adventure. However, I was not aware of what I had signed up for and everything that would take place in the following four months. I did not realize I would be in a much smaller town in northern France, Lille, instead of a huge city like Paris and the implications that would have. I did not imagine that I would feel like a local by the time I had to leave, nor did I imagine I would gain some sort of fluency in speaking French in such a short amount of time. It did not dawn on me that I would be at one of France’s best business schools with 2,000 French students and 500 international exchange students that came from over 100 different countries. I did not know that my dorm would actually be in one of the most coveted living areas of Lille, Vieux Lille (comparable to living on Santana Row). I did not know that the dorm I had actually chosen was once a monastery, many many years ago, and that my dorm mates would become like family in just one semester after bonding over our silly fears of the basement, which we referred to as the dungeon. I did not imagine that I would have the opportunity to travel to 13 countries and 20 cities in 4 months. Most importantly, I did not know I would come back a different person than I was when I first left U.S soil.

“Exchange is not a year of your life, it is a life in a year.” During my four months abroad, I had countless unique, challenging, mind blowing, life changing, and unforgettable experiences. I had no idea the impact studying abroad would have on my life. As cliche as it sounds, I will cherish my study abroad experience forever because it was truly life changing and the opportunity of a lifetime that helped shape who I am today.
Housing

Two common housing choices in Lille are dorms and apartments. During my stay in Lille, I lived in a dorm called “Franciscans de Lille” about 2 kilometers from school. I paid around $2,000 dollars in rent for the four months that I stayed there. My dorm was relatively inexpensive. There is a wide range of prices for dorms, so it is important to do research and find the one that fits what you are looking for. Dorm information can be found at this link: http://www.asso-aeu.fr/fr/liste-residences. I enjoyed living in a dorm with both French and international students because I had the opportunity to form a family within my dorm. The resident directors had monthly events for us, which were great because they promoted community and bonding. I was in a great location at the heart of Lille and not too far away from campus. Living in a dorm is more convenient than living in an apartment because it is cheaper, furnished, utilities are included, and it provides the opportunity to live with a lot of students.

My neighborhood

Many of my friends subleased apartments from French students and they really enjoyed it. They found people to sublease for by Googling “apartments for rent in Lille.” An important thing to note is that in order to sublease in France, a French guarantor is needed to sign a lease and you must also open a French bank account. One downside to living in an apartment is that it may be more expensive (my friends paid about $1,000 per month during Fall 2014), it may or may not be furnished, you have to deal with a landlord, and utilities are not included. Although living in an apartment presents a few more steps in the process, it is still a great option. Any person I talked to, whether they lived in a dorm or an apartment, liked their housing arrangement. They found the rent price to be reasonable because Lille is a smaller town, therefore it is cheaper than a bigger city like Paris. I honestly do not think you can go wrong with either option.

*I did not talk to any students that did a homestay in Lille, so I do not believe that is a common option for exchange students.
Finances

The dollar to Euro exchange rate is currently a lot better than what it was when I was in Europe four months ago. There is no telling what the exchange rate will be like when you study abroad, so keep the current exchange rate in mind when reading over this document.

Studying abroad in Lille does not have to be expensive if you plan correctly. Keep in mind that Europe is more expensive than the United States in general. However, since Lille is a small town, it is more economical because it has less tourism than larger cities. It is easy to get money abroad: there are a lot of ATMs around. I suggest you get some sort of traveler rewards debit or credit card so that you do not have to pay an exchange rate fee every time you withdraw money. Make an Excel sheet where you can track your expenses. That way you can see what you are spending money on and can cut back if need be.

Restaurants are very expensive, so I suggest only going to restaurants if you are going with friends so that it is more of an experience. If you are not eating out with people, stay in and cook with your dorm or flatmates! Groceries were about $50/week for me, which was better compared to paying $10-$15 for every meal at restaurants. If you are going to splurge on eating out, go to famous bakeries or restaurants in the area so that it is worth it. Lille has a reputation of having gourmet restaurants that have famous chefs, definitely do your research on the types of food you want to try.

Lille is situated perfectly for travelling! If you are planning on travelling, start planning early. Use RyanAir to get cheap flights (I got a flight for $21 once). Stay in hostels with friends (I stayed at a hostel in Prague that cost $8/night). Fly out of the Brussels airport. It is a lot cheaper and a lot closer than the Paris airport. When you go to a new city, take the free walking tours, they usually start at the city center and take you around the must-see sights of the city. Most trips you do will only be two to three days, so make sure to plan ahead so as to use your time wisely. Make a plan of what you want to see, but also do not be afraid to venture aimlessly and explore a city by getting lost in the streets and stumbling across hidden treasures and interacting with locals to find your way back.

Academics

IESEG offers intensive and extensive courses. I took 13 intensive and 2 extensive courses. Each course is about 1 or 1.5 units so, in total, I took about 30 units while abroad that transferred over as 18 SCU units. All of the courses taught at IESEG are offered in English and there are a few offered in French. Most of the courses taught at FLSH are in French and there are a few in English.

IESEG

Intensive course model: Class is Monday - Thursday from 8:30am - 12:30pm, Final is on Friday at 9am. Intensive courses only last one week which is convenient because there is no homework over the weekends, you are done at noon on Friday, and you get to take a lot of different courses covering a wide range of interesting topics.
IESEG & FLSH

*Extensive course model:* Class meets once a week for 2-3 hours and then the final is at the end of the semester during finals week. These courses are more like SCU courses, but they have less homework because they are still only 2 units. If you take an extensive course that is 4-5 units, it will be very similar to SCU classes in terms of course load and level of difficulty.

It is important to do research on which classes you can get credit for while studying abroad that can count towards something at SCU. A lot of classes will fill up quickly, so it is important to have in mind double the amount of classes you need. For example: if you know you need to take 10 classes, have 20 classes that you know you can take. I know this sounds like a lot of work, but it is worth it to be prepared instead of scrambling to find classes the day of registration. Registration takes place during orientation week in August and it is done electronically. Then, changes must be made by submitting paperwork to the administrator.

*Universite Catholique de Lille and IESEG*

The grading system in France is out of 20 points and they believe that 20/20 is for god alone, 19/20 is for the professor, and 18/20 is for a true genius. So a 17/20 is as good as getting above a 95% on an assignment. When the professor took a poll, only about 2 or 3 out of 30 students raised their hand that they had received a 17/20 in their college career. Students are happy with getting between a 14-16/20. Always try to get the highest score possible and make sure to clarify with the professor if you are unclear about an assignment. Better to be safe than sorry! Do not panic about the grading system because there is a curve when it is transferred over to Santa Clara University.

At IESEG, there were 2,000 French students and 500 international students from over 100 countries. My classes usually had a good mix of about half French students and half international students. Some classes had up to 60 students and other classes had about 30 students, it just depended on the popularity of the class. At FLSH, the classes were smaller with about 20 students in each class. The students at FLSH are not required to speak English and
most classes are taught in French. At FLSH, I found that I was usually one of few international students in a classroom of French students. That presented some difficulties when it came to communicating, but it was awesome being in a classroom with French students and interacting with them.

**Student Life**

IESEG has a fantastic International Club that ensures students are taken care of. From the first day you arrive in Lille until your last day, they plan programs for you and make you feel at home. Before you arrive to France, they set up a buddy that will pick you up from the train or bus station and take you to the door of your apartment or dorm. They will translate for you so that you can communicate with your landlord. Then, they will have a map and show you where the grocery store is and how to get to the university from your location. IESEG International Club provides group trips at discounted rates that are very popular and a lot of fun. In addition, they have several events and programs they put on every week. Their club is very well established and they do an amazing job at making life in Lille great. I met the majority of my friends at IESEG by attending events they put on.

email: clubinternationallille@ieseg.fr

Facebook page: IESEG International CLub

The School has several cafeterias, a computer lab, library, and sports teams. During orientation they hand out a lot of information and login / access information. It is easy to get involved and French students are welcoming to the international exchange students.

*First group trip to Mt Saint-Michel aka Hogwarts*

The best advice I can give for making friends is to just put yourself out there. Everyone is trying to make friends and it is easy to find a group of people you enjoy hanging out with. There will be a lot of diversity among your friends, but I encourage you to embrace it. This is one of the few times you will be able to be completely immersed in a different culture. Also, even if your French is not that great, always practice it! Practice makes perfect and you will be surprised at how fast you start to gain fluency.
Engagement

Two components of Santa Clara’s RIISE engagement goals are Intensive language and Study with locals. These are two of the main ways to engage through this study abroad program. IESEG provides many opportunities to practice the French language and learn about the culture. Although most classes were taught in English, there are a few classes that are taught in French. I strongly encourage you to just go for it and take a class in French, especially if you have taken a class or two in French before. At first, it will be extremely difficult to catch on to what is being said, but you will be amazed at how fast you are able to pick up the language and understand what the professor and your peers are saying. The professors are more than willing to help you if you are struggling because they appreciate that you are attempting to learn their language. I am so happy I decided to take classes in French because, although they were difficult, they helped me advance my French speaking skills exponentially.

There are many opportunities to be immersed in French culture in Lille. Since Lille is such a small town, there is not as much of an American influence as there might be in larger cities. Lille is a college town and the main population is students your age. I would venture to say that almost all of the college students know English to some extent. However, there are a lot of older people that you will interact with at shops, cafes, and restaurants that will not know English. That is where you will be forced to practice your French, whether you want to or not. IESEG International Club puts on a lot of events to experience and learn about French culture. Those are fun events to do with your fellow international exchange students.

Studying with locals is one of the best benefits of doing a direct exchange and directly enrolling as an international student at a university. There are so many opportunities to study with locals and interact with them. IESEG had 2,500 students, 2,000 were French students and 500 were exchange students from over 100 different countries. FLSH has more than 20,000 students and the majority are French. Being enrolled in a university opens the door to join a lot of clubs just like you would here at Santa Clara University and that way you can interact with locals and still do activities you enjoy doing.

Religion

France is mainly a Catholic country, but I did not feel that people’s religious views were imposing. There are two main cathedrals in Lille, one is in Vieux Lille and the other is a block away from the University. At IESEG, since there are people from over 500 countries, everyone was open to a diversity of opinions, customs, and cultures. We were all different and fully embraced the wealth of diversity that we were immersed in every day. In the end we bonded over our differences, but more so by our similarities. I could be sitting in a classroom where every student was from a different country and we found that we all had a lot of things in common.
Race/Ethnicity

Lille is a very international town. I was surrounded by people from over 100 countries, so we were immersed in a wealth of diversity every day. One thing that was interesting was that in some classes, when we discussed foreign policies or how different countries are run, it was important to keep in mind the race and ethnicity of students in the classroom. For example, when talking about China and certain scandals that were going on at the time, we had to be sensitive about how we phrased our class discussion because there were about four Chinese students in the class. Overall, it was always interesting hearing so many different perspectives.

Gender & Sexuality

Women have an equal role in society in France and I did not feel like I was treated differently than the men. Like in any city, whether it is in the United States or Europe, women do have to exercise caution at night because it can be dangerous to wander alone. However, I always had a group of friends with me, including males, and that made us feel safer. In regards to sexuality, I feel that students are very accepting of differences and I never saw conflict arise over these differences. Lille is a safe place to express individuality.

Socio-Economic

Class definitely played a role while studying abroad. One way that it was apparent was that some students had the extra money to go out to restaurants and travel a lot whereas other students did not. Some students were struggling with the exchange rate from their country (Mexico - 18 pesos to 1 euro). Other students that were European and from countries with a higher cost of living enjoyed the freedom of spending their money pretty freely. Although class played a role in this sense, it still was not that big of a burden as far as I saw. It is important to be aware of comments you make in terms of money so as to be mindful of others. My view of class and socio-economic standing changed while abroad in the sense that I learned a lot about other countries. I had never considered some situations that people from other countries find themselves in or how it is back home for them.

Leisure

Lille is a really cool place to be and there are a ton of things to do in the area. Here are some of my suggestions!

Places to hangout: City Center, Old Lille, Citadelle. Specific streets: Rue Royale & Rue Solferino
Must see places: La Piscine Museum, Clock Tower Building, Palais Beaux Arts
Fun events: Braderie - first weekend of September, citywide flea market that attracts thousands of people to Lille for the weekend. Christmas Market - month of December
http://www.braderie-de-lille.fr/
http://www.christmasmarkets.com/France/lille-christmas-market.html

**Sport events:** Soccer games for Lille OSC team - tickets are cheap for students and there will be an opportunity to buy them through IESEG International Club

**Shopping**

**Shopping:** Ranges from H&M to Louis Vuitton. All shops are in City Center or Old Lille. Definitely check out the Lille souvenir shop, it is located near the shops in front of the Opera House.

**Best restaurant:** Creperie Beaurepaire!!

**Best bakery:** Any bakery in Old Lille, especially on Rue Esquermoise

This link provides great information about the beauty of Lille. It is in French, but it can be translated to English.
http://lesflaneriesdaurelie.com/lille-mon-amour/

![Popular shopping street in old lille - the pretty tower in the back is the post office](image)

**Overall Impact**

Studying abroad can be a life-changing experience if you let it be. At first, it will be difficult and it will challenge you, there is no avoiding that. However, I encourage you to embrace that discomfort and fear you have at first, and just run with it. Take chances, do things out of your comfort zone, and live in the moment. You will learn about yourself, your home country, and the country you are living in.