

A Guide for an Exchange at Grenoble Ecole De Management in France

Preparation and Application Process

At the beginning of 2024, I enrolled in a course titled *Confucianism and Leadership*, which ultimately led me to an exchange opportunity at Grenoble Ecole De Management (GEM) in France. The application process was facilitated by the IMBA office, which required a minimum course score of 85 to qualify for the exchange program.

Before departing for France, several important documents and preparations were necessary:

- A birth certificate with a French translation
- A valid French visa
- Mental and academic preparation for studying abroad

Once the IMBA office confirmed my acceptance to GEM, the GEM administration sent an official acceptance letter in both French and English. This document was essential for my French visa application. One key point to remember is that travel insurance is not required for France, as students can register for French health insurance, which is much more affordable than private insurance in Taiwan.

Visa Application Process

To apply for a French visa, I had to submit my application to the *Bureau de Représentative de France à Taiwan*. The visa process involved the following steps:

1. Document Verification: The office reviewed my application and supporting documents.
2. Interview Invitation: After verification, I was scheduled for an interview.
3. Visa Fee Payment: The application required a fee of NTD 8,000.
4. Interview Process: Common questions included:
 - *Why did you choose to study in France?*
 - *Do you speak French?*

Although the interview questions were relatively straightforward, I highly recommend researching other applicants' experiences to better prepare.

Booking Your Flight

One of the major expenses when studying abroad is airfare. Here are a few tips to save on flight costs:

- Check for student discounts with airlines such as Emirates and Turkish Airlines, which sometimes offer special fares for students under a certain age.
- Consider alternative routes: Direct flights to France can be expensive, so look into flying to a nearby European country (such as Belgium, Germany, or the Netherlands) and then taking a train or budget airline to France. This can significantly reduce costs.

Accommodation in France

Finding accommodation in France can be a complex process. Here are the main options available for students:

1. **CROUS Residences:** These are government-subsidized student accommodations managed by CROUS, a national organization that provides housing to students. However, there is typically an age limit, and spaces are limited, requiring early registration and placement on a waiting list.
2. **Studapart Platform:** This is a dedicated rental platform that offers a variety of housing options for students, travelers, and employees. It provides furnished and unfurnished apartments, studios, and shared flats, making it a reliable option for those who cannot secure CROUS housing.
3. **Private Rentals:** Many students opt to rent from private landlords, which may be arranged through agencies or direct listings on platforms like *Housing Anywhere*. If you are considering this option, be sure to check for trusted landlords and secure a written rental agreement (*bail de location*).
4. **Shared Housing & Student Networks:** If you have friends who have studied or lived in the region, it is advisable to ask them about safe neighborhoods and available housing opportunities. Additionally, many universities have Facebook groups or student forums where you can find potential roommates.

Important Considerations When Renting

- **Security Deposit & Contract:** Once you find an accommodation, you will typically need to pay a security deposit (usually equivalent to one or two months' rent). It is essential to carefully read and understand the rental contract before signing.
- **Key Collection:** Before your arrival, make arrangements with your landlord or rental agency to collect the keys.
- **Housing Costs:** The cost of rent varies by city. In Grenoble, the average rental cost for students ranges from €500 to €600 per month, which generally provides a comfortable living standard.
- **Tenant Insurance:** In France, renters are often required to obtain housing insurance (*assurance habitation*), which covers damages and liability. Many banks and insurance companies offer affordable student plans.
- **Guarantor Requirement:** Many landlords require a guarantor (*garant*), usually a French resident, to ensure rent payments. If you do not have one, some services like *GarantMe* or *Visale* can act as a guarantor for international students.

Studying at Grenoble Ecole de Management (GEM)

GEM has two campuses: one in Grenoble and another in Paris. I attended the Grenoble campus, which is conveniently located near the train station and a Starbucks, making it easy to grab a coffee before heading to class.

The school offers a structured curriculum that includes courses such as:

- **Business Negotiation**

- **Marketing**
- **Strategy and Technology**
- **etc...**

These courses are primarily designed for students with 1-2 years of work experience, making them ideal for those at the early stages of their careers. The coursework is not overly stressful, and the exams are manageable. However, active participation is essential, as some classes require presentations and analytical discussions.

All courses are taught in English, but having a good understanding of French is beneficial for day-to-day interactions and networking with locals.

Thesis & Final Exam:

- Students have the option to complete their thesis either at GEM or at their home institution.
- Before graduation, students must take the TOEIC exam, with a minimum score of 800 required to pass.

Life in Grenoble

Grenoble, known as the *Capital of the Alps*, offers stunning mountain views from nearly every street. This picturesque landscape provides a refreshing and inspiring environment, unlike anything found in Taiwan or many other places. However, due to its location in a valley, Grenoble experiences occasional air quality issues, which may not be ideal for students with respiratory conditions.

The city enjoys a distinct four-season climate:

- Summer: Hot and dry, with temperatures reaching 30°C or higher.
- Winter: Cold and windy, though snowfall is rare in the city itself.
- Spring and Autumn: Pleasant and mild, making these the best seasons to explore the region.

Grenoble is well-known for its outdoor activities. In winter, skiing and snowboarding are popular, with nearby resorts offering affordable day-trip options. The cost of skiing is relatively cheap compared to other regions, and students can often find discounts for transportation and equipment rental. During warmer months, hiking and rock climbing are favorite pastimes, with numerous trails and climbing spots surrounding the city.

In terms of lifestyle, Grenoble is a student-friendly city with a lively yet relaxed atmosphere. There are many cafes, restaurants, and bars catering to the large student population. The public transportation system is efficient, with trams and buses connecting different parts of the city. Biking is also a popular mode of transportation, as Grenoble is one of the most cycle-friendly cities in France. Even though the city is friendly to students, French is required for most daily interactions in stores, restaurants, and administrative offices.

I personally did not experience culture shock, likely because I had stayed in other countries before. However, what stood out to me was the incredible French pastries and desserts,

especially croissants, which became a highlight of my experience. Additionally, France's central location in Europe makes it a great base for travel. With a student visa, I was able to take advantage of budget airlines and trains to visit neighboring countries such as Spain, Portugal, Italy, Greece, etc, which made my exchange experience even more enriching.