

Experience report study abroad and stay

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1 INTRODUCTION

Exposure in a foreign culture while pursuing academic studies is a rewarding experience. I gained tremendous knowledge and hands-on experience during my semester as a Concentrated Solar Power (CSP) specialist at the University of Perpignan in France. This report covers my experience from beginning to its conclusion, focusing important details and offering advice to aspiring students.

2 PREPARATION

From the start of the application process, students had the option to choose their specialization. Until the beginning of the first semester, it was possible to change the specialization for the second semester. I chose "Solar Thermal and Associated Renewable Energy Storage" due to my interest in Concentrated Solar Power.

The planning for the specialization semester started in the middle of the first semester. This includes setting up civil liability insurance, looking for housing through conversations with other students, and applying for the Erasmus+ grant for stay and mobility. Next on the list was making travel arrangements.

3 TRAVEL AND ARRIVAL

There were several ways to get to Font-Romeu, including by road and by plane. Because of my large luggage, I chose to take flight, going from Germany to Toulouse and then to Font-Romeu. I used road transportation to get from Barcelona to Germany on my return trip.

During my visit, I discovered that arriving in Barcelona, taking the train to Puigcerdà, and then taking a cab to Font-Romeu is the most efficient route. This is a really practical route.

4 ACCOMMODATION

For accommodation, I coordinated with fellow students and shared a three-bedroom apartment listed on Airbnb. Early booking is essential to avoid high costs.

5 STUDYING AT THE HOST UNIVERSITY

A welcome day that included an overview of the courses and a tour of the PROMES-CNRS lab research facility marked the start of the semester. A variety of solar thermal energy-related courses, including those on CSP technology, thermal storage, solar fuels, radiative heat transfer, combined heat and mass transfer, solar cooling, innovative materials, power plant technology and more were offered by the host university.

The CNRS lab in Font-Romeu is dedicated to CSP research and features technologies like the solar furnace, the world's largest parabolic dish, and Microsol-R which is down-scaled parabolic trough research plant solely for the purpose of research. The power plants Visits included the Themis power plant and the eLLO Linear Fresnel power plant.

Despite the valuable knowledge gained, the semester's organization could be improved. Subjects often had significant gaps, leading to a lack of continuity, and all exams were conducted at the end of the semester, adding to the stress also showing significant effect on the final results as well.



Figure 1: Visit to Themis and Ello power plants

6 EVERYDAY LIFE AND LEISURE TIME

Daily life was busy with classes starting at 9 or 10 am and ending at 4 or 5 pm. There is no transport facility in Font-Romeu, so commuting by walking was challenging due to the mountainous terrain. However, some students had cars, which helped during bad weather. The town has restaurants, shops, ski-related stores, a Carrefour supermarket, and a famous ski resort.

For leisure, we traveled to Barcelona, Andorra de Villa, and Livia which was an exciting experience.

However, be cautious as there are many robbers around central Paris and Barcelona. During my return journey from Font-Romeu to Germany, I was robbed inside the airport next to the check-in at the Barcelona airport. I lost my backpack containing educational documents, a laptop, an iPad, and money. Fortunately, I kept my passport in my pocket. The police took a long time to take my complaint, and I missed my flight, forcing me to arrange another transport. This incident highlights the importance of being vigilant and not relying solely on security.

Overall, the semester was valuable, with supportive faculty and a wealth of knowledge to gain. Credit transfer is done according to the regulations provided by the core university and usually takes about a month after exams.

7 Dos and Donts

Dos:

Participate in social gatherings and build connections within the CSP sector. Because of the cold conditions, bring raincoats, umbrellas, snow boots, and thermal clothing.

For the sake of saving money, schedule and reserve accommodation in advance.

Travel with less luggage, to save on expensive courier services, there is one courier service at Font-Romeu which is La-Poste which is very expensive.

Make use of the professors' connections with industry researchers and companies.

Be vigilant and alert when carrying important documents and valuables.

Donts:

Don't bring too much luggage because it might be expensive to send them back.

Don't rely solely on security, be cautious of robbers, especially in busy areas like central Paris and Barcelona.

8 CONCLUSION

I had an incredible time at the University of Perpignan. Together with the exceptional cultural exposure, the hands-on learning made it an unforgettable experience for me as a student. It is recommended that future students make the most of these possibilities while exercising caution to ensure a safe and productive stay.



Figure 2: Socialising Event organised by the host university at Ski Resort in Font-Romeu