

Experience Report

Solar Thermal Specialisation, Font-Romeu

Preparation

Majority of the planning and organisation of the ERASMUS was handled between my core university (The University of Oldenburg) and the University of Perpignan (of which we were enrolled, however worked at the CNRS-PROMES research centre). The application was very smooth, with nearly all the required details being supplied pre-filled by the University of Perpignan

Travel and Arrival

The closest major airport to Font-Romeu is actually in Barcelona, although there are other airports nearby in Girona, Perpignan, and even Toulouse is possible. Personally I arrived in Barcelona and was lucky enough to get in at the same time as another classmate of mine who came with his dad, and we were able to rent a car and drive from Barcelona (about 2 hours). It is a pleasant drive through the mountains past some spectacular mountain ranges and abandoned buildings (even an old power station!). It is also possible to get the train from Barcelona to Puigcerda or La Tor de Carol – Enveitg. From La Tor de Carol – Enveitg there is a semi regular 1 Euro bus which you can take to the town centre in Font-Romeu. The 1 Euro bus travels between certain towns in the Pyrenees and to Perpignan and is useful for being able to visit some attractions, although many others still need a car to access. We were lucky enough to have three (well 2.5 after one of them broke down) cars between the 10 students who were living together in Font-Romeu, and while not necessary, it is highly suggested that there are enough cars for the students as many of the interesting places to visit require vehicle access – not to mention the 30-40 minute walk to the supermarket.

Accommodation

All 10 EUREC students who were completing their specialisation in Font-Romeu were able to rent three neighbouring apartments in the same block. This, for me at least, was a fantastic experience, as it really forged a sense of comradery and we were very easily able to become good friends with one another. The apartment was located almost half way between the town centre and the laboratory, which was also ideal. It was a very pleasant walk each morning through the old town of Odeillo, through some woodlands and past some very friendly mountain horses!



The apartment also had a great view of the valley:



Student Life

I thoroughly enjoyed my time living and studying in Font-Romeu, and would rate it as one of the top experiences of my life. There are a plethora of activities to do in the region including skiing, hiking, hot springs and many castles! The time we were there was perfect as we got to experience both the end of the snowy winter season and the start of the summer season. While the town itself was fairly quiet once the snow season receded, it was still a pleasant experience. It was the first time I had lived in such a small village, and yet it made me think as to why I had never tried it before! Truly very peaceful and relaxing, however if partying is your thing then the two bars in the village on offer might not be able to cut it (Although they certainly gave it a good shot!).

Coming from a somewhat unfamiliar background (Aeronautical Engineering) to thermal systems, I found the pace of the course and the depth of content quite perfect. There was a slight learning curve at the beginning, but the topics were well thought out and covered all aspects of concentrated solar thermal technology. The facilities at the lab were excellent, being a well-established solar thermal research facility and boasting the largest solar furnace in the world, as well as several smaller ones for small scale experiments:



Overall a fantastic experience and one which I would highly recommend to anyone considering a career in concentrated solar thermal technology.