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Experience Report

My specialization semester is in Odeillo a small village on one of the mountains of Pyrenees called Font Romeu. We are studying at the Solar Furnace of Odeillo which is constructed and operated by the National French Research Laboratory “CNRS”, PROMES, and University of Perpignan “UPVD”. As EUREC students, we are not doing so much of analysis and research at this research facility but we are attending our specialization which is Solar Furnace and we are supposed to finish the semester at the end of May.

I would like to introduce a brief introduction of my experience at the period that I have attended there during my second semester at Odeillo with all the ups and downs that I have faced during my studying period as an Erasmus Student. This introduction will contain the below aspects with some events and pictures.

Preparation:

I finished the first semester exams at the end of January 2014 and I had two weeks of break until the next semester in Font Romeu. There were no preparations during the last weeks in January or during the first two weeks of February 2014. We knew from former EUREC students who did their specialization in Font Romeu that we will be spending a week at Perpignan University and then a week finding accommodation at a hotel reserved by University Perpignan at Perpignan. Once your accommodation was set, students could start their way up to Font Romeu. This year, the system has changed without being noticed and we had to ask our coordinator about the first destination and we were informed that the two weeks of Perpignan have been cancelled and we have to directly go to Font Romeu. Students who were still searching for accommodation could stay at the Guest House of the Research center but only for a limited time. During the first week, I had to stay in Egypt due to family problems and I could not attend the orientation through the Research Center and the first set of laboratory experience. Arriving at the second week of the semester, I had to stay at the Guest House until I search for accommodation which was extremely hard during this period of the year because of the Ski season where families all around Europe flock to Font Romeu to enjoy the Skiing Resort there. Once I arrived at the Research Centers, the students delegate was handling the applications and their requirements which was a very easy process. Unfortunately, there were

no ideas or tips suggested regarding the travel but that was an easy process for me as I managed to have some tips from my colleagues who has arrived a week prior to me.

Accommodation:

During the first two months of this semester, the ski resort is functional and therefore the prices of all accommodations at Font Romeu is very expensive as all houses being rent for families at relatively high prices with short periods. I was allowed only to stay at the Guest House of the Research Center (which was fully equipped with reasonable price) for only two weeks until I find myself an accommodation opportunity and it was forbidden to stay the whole period at this house; although the Research Center's Management accepted to stay the entire period since there are no scheduled visits.

Once I have found accommodation, there were many other tasks I should do which was extremely difficult to execute such as internet and electricity. The electricity had to be changed under your name and the internet also where you needed a bank account. It was impossible to open a bank account in France so we had to make other colleagues who are already living in France to provide their accounts instead. During the search for accommodation, you have no help from anyone but you have to go to the tourism office and find someone who speaks French and call the updated list regularly. I could not find myself an accommodation opportunity but I managed to stay at a friend's place in a small additional room because of the extreme prices of rent.

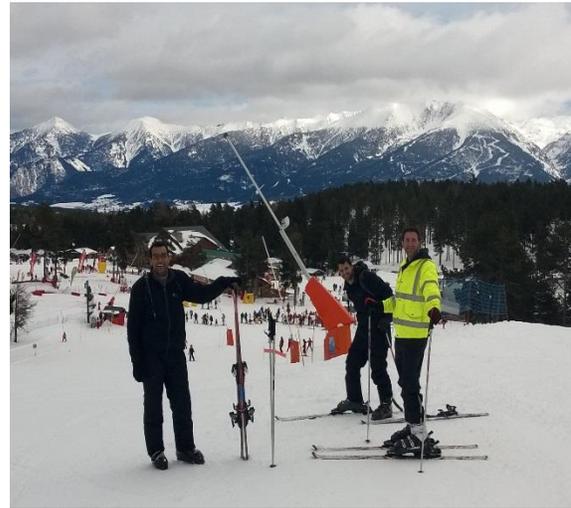
Studying:

The courses that we had there was interesting and they were according to my expectation but there was a lack of organization and they were unclear what they belong to. So, you take courses that you do not know for which division they belong to and you could suddenly realize that they are not in the exam schedule after a long period. In addition to the interesting courses, we had off topic courses which we had exams on and that did not make sense for most of us as they were physics courses not engineering ones. We were able to negotiate about the course design and structure with the professors but nothing was changeable.

Everyday Life and Leisure Time:

Font Romeu is a beautiful and quite place where you could enjoy a vacation in but not stay for a whole semester. At the beginning of our stay, the weather was not so good and it was entirely covered with snow but we managed to enjoy skiing and other activities related to snow. Bars and hanging out places were almost closed most of the time because people there only come for the skiing, that is all. When the weather was fine at the end of April, we managed to do many activities such as playing football, jogging through the mountains, camping, and touring

the villages. I used to go to Perpignan almost weekly on the weekend to break the boredom of the place and enjoy the weather. We were playing table tennis and baby football almost daily at the lab after the lectures. The best thing I experienced at the Research Center is the facility and the daily meals prepared by a very nice chief there with extremely low prices. The most irritating thing is going to the supermarket as the nearest one was about 35 minutes walking uphill.



Conclusion:

Font Romeu is a wonderful place during the spring and summer period with many things to do and this what we have discovered by the end of our stay there but was too late because we had to prepare for the exams and internships so we were so busy.

There are some logistics that should be handled by the host university especially accommodation. We had some discussions with professors about it and I hope that our message would be delivered for the next year. Everyone had plenty of free time which is really countless and you could do a lot of self-studying there such as learning a language or working on a software that you need for your work afterwards.

The main point that I need to stress on is why EUREC students are taking this course up on the hill which I did not have an answer for from all the professors that I have talked to. We are staying at Font Romeu-Odeillo to learn and experiment on the tools and equipment of the Solar Furnace which we did not use except once in the whole 3 months. The most educative and useful experiment in my opinion was performed down at the university of Perpignan. All professors are from Perpignan and they take ages to come up to the research center which makes life harder on all of us. I would like to deliver this message to the host university. It is a very good opportunity to save money also as there are not much to do there.