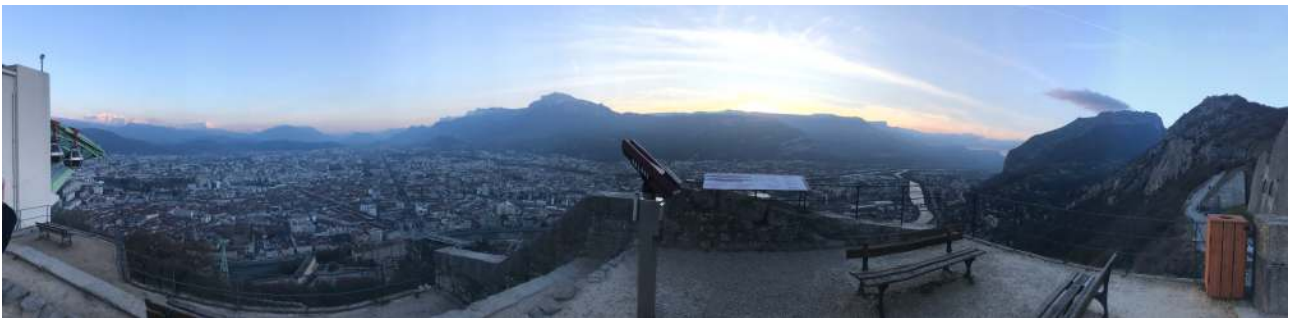


Reflection on the student's period abroad and what they have gained from it, together with a guide for other students visiting the same institution?

BY HUMPHREY CURTIS



Panorama of Grenoble from atop the Bastille

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1. Introduction

Since leaving Sciences Po Grenoble (IEPG) two months ago, not a day has gone by without pondering and recalling my experiences in France. This reflective essay will seek to critically evaluate my year, offer detailed information for future students, provide comparisons with Exeter or other universities and use the accounts of other Study Abroad (SA) students. First and foremost I am keen to offer a reflection on my experiences and how my experience has forced me to grow and change for the better. In particular, my year abroad has provided me with a far deeper sense of self¹ (Adam, 2018) - enabling me to better understand myself and independently cope with stress or difficult situations. Secondly, my essay will honestly disclose my expectations and preparations for my year at the Grenoble Institute of Political Sciences (IEPG), my progress throughout the year and provide advice for future SA students.

2. Reflection on study abroad period and what I have gained from it

Upon reflection I would recommend a year studying abroad to anybody and the experience is simply invaluable. I personally believe you only learn about yourself on the periphery or outside of your comfort zone, which the year abroad certainly ensures (Chaiklin, 2003). However, it is crucial to not head into the year with exceedingly high and unattainable expectations. No matter how thorough one's preparations are; the year abroad will bring plenty of surprises and unforeseen difficulties. These adverse challenges certainly make anyone mentally stronger, more level headed and better at judging or managing tough situations.

Before the year abroad, due to my occasional anxious and pessimistic disposition, there was not a moment where I had very high expectations for the year. Whilst on summer holiday with my family I was a bundle of nerves, especially as I had only visited France once before: on a brief school trip to Mont-Saint-Michel in Normandy at the age of 12. In retrospect, my behaviour was a tad pathetic, I should have had more British gusto and revelled in the prospect of diving headfirst into the unknown.

After all, my secondary school's most famous alumnus is Sir Ernest Shackleton - a British naval hero and titan of Arctic exploration. This hero of mine would have been dismayed at my lack of ambition and trepidation at merely moving across the Channel! Furthermore, when I was assigned Grenoble - in all honesty, I felt certainly very surprised and even a bit disappointed - having put it down as one of my final choices. I believe my feelings of disappointment came from naivety and a complete lack of familiarity with France as a country.

In line with Halvorson's research on the psychological effects of adversity, I would argue that the challenges of the year abroad are certainly not overwhelming but manageable - making any individual more resilient or strong-willed (Halvorson, 2010). It is completely reasonable response to feel nervous about making friends and settling in a new country. Yet the whole purpose of the year is to feel these emotions and overcome them. Empowering any individual to have a far deeper sense of self, enabling me to better understand my own behaviour or better manage stressful moments (Adam, 2018).

If I am completely objective, during the initial few weeks of my year abroad there were moments where I did not feel entirely positive about the experience. I felt incredibly homesick, longed for a return to the English-speaking world, missed my now graduated university friends, the creature comforts and ease of studying in the UK. I felt incredibly frustrated with the bureaucratic aspects of the French student experience and I was certainly not a natural when it came to speaking French! However if I could advise my previous self it would be to relax take a deep breath and just enjoy my beautiful Alpine surroundings.

¹ Or self-concept clarity

Having researched more into studying abroad, emotions of stress during the first few weeks were largely due to culture shock and the anxiety prompted from suddenly “losing all of our familiar signs and symbols of social intercourse” (Adam, 2018). In line with Adam’s research on studying abroad, this shock provided me with the important opportunity to assess myself and determine whether my norms of behaviour were imbedded because of my cultural upbringing or if they truly underpinned my identity. As author Michael Crichton eloquently describes, “Often I feel I go to some distant region of the world to be reminded of who I really am... stripped of your ordinary surroundings, your friends, your daily routines... you are forced into direct experience [which] inevitably makes you aware of who it is that is having the experience” (Crichton, 1988).

A year abroad prompts you to engage with your values and beliefs, which are then either “strengthened or discarded” (Adam, 2018). A good example, was when I self-evaluated my integral belief that I needed a thriving social existence in my day-to-day life. As a natural extrovert - I have always deeply valued having people around me and spending time with friends. For the first semester of the year abroad, my social experience was very normal - during my first week I met and realized the diversity of the international student group². It was very easy to form friendships as we could very easily relate to one another and sympathize with each other about our various struggles.

After the Christmas break, my integral belief that a highly social life was intangible to my existence was deeply challenged. The international student community halved in size and most of the students I befriended relocated to another country or back to their home university after the first semester. Jemima (a fellow UoE student at IEPG) and I were left rather stupefied and dismayed having invested extensive energy into befriending our cohort for merely a semester. As a consequence the second semester taught me to become more independent and not so reliant on friendships for fun experiences.

I spent much of the second semester having to pursue activities on my own as a soloist. Although I would like to say this solo experience was out of choice, it was unfortunately more born of necessity. This loneliness is not unnatural for SA students, as studies have indicated “international students constantly miss the support and assistance from their families and friends when they study abroad” (Vandermaas-Peeler, 2018). With this newfound solitude I spent much of the second semester travelling and skiing. At the time it felt like I had been presented with a very difficult or almost unfair predicament. I bemoaned my situation and had conversations with myself, “why am I here?” “what am I meant to do now?” and “surely this must be a mistake”. Eventually, I realized that these emotions of fear and loneliness were a challenge presented to me by the year abroad and for me to overcome.

With this positive rather than disheartened attitude, I challenged myself to pursue experiences myself and without the support of others: to actively enjoy independence and solitude³. In my experience, I particularly found solitude enabled me to “find my own voice” and complete my own personal challenges (Carter, 2012). For instance, despite starting the year as a novice skier I managed to successfully navigate icy black and red ski runs on my own by the end of the ski season - an achievement I am very proud of to this day. Aside from self-reflection and personal growth, other important benefits I have found from studying abroad include, “increased cultural awareness, intercultural sensitivity, and intercultural communication skills; second language gains; a reduction in ethnocentrism in favour of developing ethnorelativity; and interest in further contact with diverse cultures and peoples” (Vandermaas-Peeler, 2018).

Focusing on academia, much like Exeter political research and analysis conducted at IEPG is strongly

² International students attending IEPG came from all over the world to as far as Australia, the Americas or the Far East to as close as Germany and Spain, (Gee, Who are all these international students in France and where do they study?, 2018).

³ Sherrie Bourg Carter’s scientific and psychological research has found many key benefits to solitude

qualitative and theoretical. During my year abroad I met German and Korean students⁴ who struggled adapting from a largely quantitative and numerical analysis of politics they have undertaken at their home universities to the far more qualitative and theoretical approach to politics at IEPG. Forcing me to learn to clearly communicate and sensitively help my fellow SA students who struggled adapting to IEPG's different political discourse and methods of teaching.

Unlike the UoE, IEPG is a very small university solely dedicated to the study of political science⁵. Hence, this enabled me to solely focus on politics and provided me with the chance to study and grasp a number of French-centric political developments and theories, which I had never studied before. Therefore modules are specialized or tailored to lecturers' political research or field of interest. For instance, at the UoE I took modules such as 'Globalization in World Politics', which focused on understanding and evaluating a broad spectrum of IR theories whilst at IEPG I studied specialist modules such as 'France and multiculturalism'⁶ which has focused on the enormous demographic changes and consequent divisive racial issues in modern France (West, 2018).

Initially I immediately preferred IEPG's niche modules compared to the UoE's standardized political modules and I emphasize this line of argument in my first SA essay submitted in March. However, upon deeper reflection I believe my initial positive reaction was due to finding the change refreshing and novel. Bunzeck and Düzel have conducted much scientific research on how novelty increases levels of dopamine in the brain from the stimulus of new educational experiences (Bunzeck & Düzel, 2006). Eventually the novel gloss of the French academic modules started to deteriorate and I instead found the French method of teaching slightly archaic and stifling.

In France the methodology of teaching in lectures is mainly underpinned by written learning - essentially forming detailed notes of the lecturers PowerPoint's. This made attendance fundamental and for some classes it was tracked. I felt this methodology was one-dimensional favouring those who learn through reading and writing rather than visual, auditory or kinaesthetic learners. Furthermore I did not feel this methodology put enough pressure on the students to learn or study independently - although in retrospect I accept due to the vast array of language barriers among the international group it would have been difficult to expect foreign students to study and read French literature independently from the library.

With regards to French speaking classes, I have spoken to fellow UoE students: Carys at the Université de Savoie Mont Blanc⁷ (USMB) and Jemima at IEPG about their experiences. Carys studied solely in French for the year, meanwhile Jemima took some French politics classes at IEPG - both agree that the experience was not nearly as challenging as it sounds. Lecturers adapted their classes knowing that they had students from all over the world with very different French abilities. Both emphasize the importance of developing course friends to share notes and discuss lectures.

In addition, it is integral to not be afraid to ask the French students for their notes. This is because, French students at IEPG and USMB spent their second year of university abroad and can empathize having dealt with many similar difficulties. Thus they are very forthcoming and happy to see new students wanting to interact with them. IEPG even formed an International Track Tutoring module in which the international students received peer to peer mentoring from older students at IEPG, which greatly helped improve my

⁴ From the University of Bonn and Seoul National University.

⁵ In the first week at IEPG it quickly became apparent that a number of my previously selected modules for both semesters on my Before Mobility paperwork were no longer offered due to changes in lecturers.

⁶ With Caroline West an Irish political, sociological and language specialist.

⁷ A major difference between the USMB and IEPG was in the differing educational culture of both universities. IEPG has grand école status, which led to a far more intensive approach to learning compared to Carys' university in Chambéry. Throughout the year she had far less weekly homework assignments and no essays. Whilst at IEPG lecturers regularly insisted on conducting their lectures in classrooms with much smaller and more intimate class sizes.

confidence at speaking French, learn French slang and receive help with any difficult French homework assignments.

One of the aspects that can be particularly surprising is that: the UoE and even my cousins University of Cape Town (UCT) have far better and more sophisticated online technological resources than IEPG. Both UCT's online ICTS platform and UoE's Exeter Learning Environment (ELE) are far more usable, engaging and resourceful in comparison with IEPG's glitch ridden and tedious online learning hub Chamilo that many of IEPG's lectures do not even bother to use⁸. Carys' USMB did not even provide an online platform for students to use and access study materials.

Technological difficulties and administrative bureaucracy is one of the hardest aspects of the year abroad and something I was completely unprepared for. To put it politely, French universities and institutions are an administrative nightmare - forcing me to radically alter my behaviour. Instead of having the excellent support of Exeter's online learning hub, I spent more time delving into IEPG's library for information. Increasingly, lecturer's office hours became important: so as to have key questions answered and receive further reading materials. Rather than having everything easily accessible in English, it became useful to have friends who could easily translate texts from French into English.

Although these challenges were frustrating compared to Exeter, it helped me develop new methods of learning and a more hands-on approach: in which building relationships and sharing information with your lecturers and peers became more integral to accessing the most useful materials for learning and gaining an in depth understanding of your studies.

By the end of the second semester, I encountered a new dilemma: the highly politicised and left wing nature of the student body. Unlike the UK, which experienced Thatcher's reforms and marginalisation of trade unions, much of France's bureaucratic administration is still short on reform - with immensely powerful trade unions and the country still suffers from relentless strike action. At the end of my time at IEPG the university was closed for two weeks due to student sit-ins, barricades and strikes regarding Macron's reforms⁹.

Unfortunately, two of my summer exams were pushed back by a fortnight and resulted in a rather stressful period of time. In retrospect, having learnt a new calmness in the face of adverse or difficult situations from my experiences throughout the year abroad, I responded to the situation much better: by continuing to revise and not letting the situation undermine my poise. Eventually I had to take my oral exam in a busy local cafe with my lecturer - which was certainly a somewhat bizarre experience and in retrospect quite unprofessional. Although, I empathise with the students and their reasons for protest, to this day I feel that IEPG let the situation get out of hand by not devising a sufficient response and effective area for the students to sit their exams causing severe administrative delay. Certainly the university should be better prepared for strikes especially as they occur with such regularity in France!

⁸ Instead lecturers made their own independent websites and chat rooms for sharing materials or communicating - mainly through Google scholar.

⁹ This was relatively little strike action compared to other universities in Grenoble whose buildings were closed for longer than a month.

3. Guide for other students visiting the same institution?

3.1 Preparation & Expectations

In preparation for my year abroad I spent plenty of time researching about IEPG, securing my CROUS accommodation in Grenoble, a Monzo Card¹⁰ and applying for Erasmus related funding. European Erasmus study is a phenomenal opportunity as the tuition fees are only £1,385 compared to my current fees of £15,950 per academic year at Exeter. Moreover the Erasmus Grant of £280 per month¹¹ is equally generous (University of Exeter, 2018). For myself, three fellow UoE students studying in France and my two friends¹² both having taken their SA at universities in Valencia - the Erasmus Grant fully covered our monthly accommodation costs.

My CROUS Condillac accommodation totalled at €266 per month - below the monthly Erasmus funding. Therefore, although the United States and Australia are certainly very desirable destinations for a year abroad - it is hard to overlook the generosity of the Erasmus grant in Europe and the opportunity for extra money to spend. The centrality of Grenoble in mainland Europe is another huge bonus: the SNCF train services, Flixbus¹³ or Ouibus coach services¹⁴, Blablacar car pooling¹⁵ and fewer contact hours at IEPG made regular weekend travel around France or to foreign EU countries much more manageable compared to Exeter.

I had only visited France once before arriving at Grenoble. I felt a sense of trepidation at heading to a new country and in particular with my limited GCSE-standard French ability. A French friend of mine, studying modern languages at the University of Cambridge, heightened my nerves by warning me to expect some animosity for being British from the French people. However apart from the local Grenoble people speaking little to no English, I have only experienced a handful of distasteful and xenophobic moments for being foreign and, in particular, English.

Fortuitously my girlfriend undertook her French UoE SA year at USMB in Chambéry which is located about fifty minutes from Grenoble by train or coach, consequently I went into the year knowing that we could support one another. It was also a fantastic opportunity for me to really become familiar with the beautiful city of Chambéry and USMB. Positives aside, I was shocked to read about the acid attack on two US students at Marseille train station¹⁶ in September 2017 (BBC, 2017), which made me feel nervous about France's public security. Both students were on SA years in France and Marseille is located only 3 hours via train from Grenoble.

During my pre-arrival research, I realised that IEPG's admission process was highly selective¹⁷. I deduced from this research that IEPG would have a diverse array of tri or bi-lingual students with good social science ability and I went into the year daunted at the prospect of workloads heavier than Exeter and higher academic standards than Political Science at the Streatham Campus judging by the grand école status of IEPG. Furthermore, I expected for the students at IEPG to be diverse with plenty of second-generation immigrants who could competently speak their mother tongue as well as French.

¹⁰ <https://monzo.com>

¹¹ Or £2,520 per year

¹² Studying at the University of Bristol and Nottingham.

¹³ <https://www.flixbus.co.uk>

¹⁴ <https://www.ouibus.com>

¹⁵ <https://itunes.apple.com/gb/app/blablacar-trusted-carpooling/id341329033?mt=8>

¹⁶ I decided against visiting Marseille to watch a football match due to fears over my safety. Personal safety is something I have fortunately never had to consider at the UoE.

¹⁷ To gain admission into one of France's ten grand écoles requires strenuous preparation for their specific exams, in-depth language skills and social science ability.

3.2 Homogeneous Year Group

Grenoble itself is a very multicultural and vibrant city bristling with different ethnicities and cultures. This multiculturalism was reflected in my Condillac accommodation block and the Grenoble campus, which is shared by several universities. My initial expectation that IEPG had a very diverse student body could not be more wrong, IEPG had an almost entirely white, middle class and very homogeneous student body¹⁸ - possibly because entry into grand écoles is not accessible enough to minority groups.

3.3 Socialising & Friendships

The international students and society¹⁹ at IEPG is excellent for forming the basis of a large and diverse friends group. Socialising with the French students is certainly a far greater challenge due to the language barrier, the fact you're only studying in France for one year and therefore "temporary" rather than "permanent residents" (Alghamdi & Otte, 2016). Moreover, French students face many more contact hours and are exceedingly busy²⁰.

Research has pointed out that for, "the majority of international students, language difficulties seem to be the most challenging issue" (Alghamdi & Otte, 2016). Unfortunately this proved to be the case as the French language barrier persisted throughout my year and the lack of interaction between French and international students were one of the main regrets of the international student group at the end of the year. My French undoubtedly improved enormously throughout the year due to constant practice and the excellent weekly French language classes IEPG provided.

For Jemima, the fellow UoE student at IEPG, she certainly had much more immediate success befriending French students as she studied French at A-Level and reached advanced C1 ability. Consequently she was able to share classes with French students for both semesters. However I remained in purely English speaking classes as a B1 French speaker for both semesters, limiting my potential to integrate with the native French students.

For my other UoE friend, Ben, who studied Political Science for the year at the University of Strasbourg, he largely had a similar experience to myself and spent most of his year largely socialising with the international student group at Strasbourg. However I personally believe that if you are willing to persevere, try and maintain conversations and even take a few classes with French speakers, you can very quickly build relationships and friendships with French students.²¹

3.4 Accueil+ Week

For students attending IEPG, in my opinion, it is very important to sign up for the Accueil+ programme IEPG offers for €235 from the 4-9 of September before the start of the academic year. Both myself and Jemima did the week long excursion, which involved intense three hour French lessons everyday²², meet most of the fellow international students, learn more about Grenoble and spend two days hiking in the breathtakingly beautiful Chamonix and Mont Blanc. The experiences are a fantastic nerve settler, help provide familiarity with greater Grenoble, the IEPG campus and meet many of the fellow international students from all over the world.

¹⁸ France even faces a greater national issue with the application of laïcité and the repression of minority cultures.

¹⁹ <http://www.sciencespo-grenoble.fr/ang/>

²⁰ Not only do they have nine modules per term but compulsory weekly sport practice.

²¹ In my accommodation block I very quickly befriended the French students on my corridor and regularly practiced conversing with them in French.

²² Which was sorely needed!

3.5 Finances & General queries

For all SA students, particularly IEPG students²³, I would recommend a Monzo card, as it provides adaptability across multiple currencies enabling all users to pay in any publicly listed currency on MasterCard exchange rates. Furthermore another useful finance tip is to use Transfer Wise²⁴, which is easily the cheapest method of internationally transferring money and undoubtedly a money saver once you have a French bank account. I would also recommend using EE as a phone carrier because they offer traveller mobile plans (data, minutes and text) European wide enabling you to use your phone plan throughout Europe without extra costs or difficulties.

Organise your Erasmus paperwork quickly so as to receive the grant as soon as possible²⁵. I would recommend setting up a bank account at the Societe Generale located on campus by the *bibliotheque* - the staff speak good English although it is best to book a meeting time early due to high demand. Once you have successfully opened your French bank account be sure to do the Caf paperwork²⁶ - the grant goes towards your accommodation and is worth the wait and frustration. The application online is in French and can be difficult to understand - it is certainly useful to befriend a French speaker in your accommodation to help give you a hand²⁷.

In regards to medical queries the campus has a local surgery for students - the doctors speak good English. If you're a regular skier be sure to have both good travel insurance²⁸ and that your blue European Health Insurance Card (EHIC) hasn't expired.

3.6 Accommodation & Campus

At IEPG and USMB, an entirely separate private organisation called CROUS runs all the student accommodation. CROUS are a monopoly whose application procedure for accommodation is very tricky. To the extent that the Australian students from the University of Brisbane I have met at IEPG were advised to not stay in CROUS accommodation by their home university. These Australian students arrived in France very early and rented more expensive but nicer local flats in Grenoble, however that certainly came with its own set of difficulties²⁹.

A building in my CROUS-run accommodation, Résidence Condillac, even had a disastrous fire the year before I arrived (Solidarites Etudiantes, 2017). History even repeated itself: when I visited Carys about a week before final exams and her CROUS-run Foyer des Alpes residence in Chambéry experienced a small fire on the ground floor³⁰ resulting in the entire building being evacuated at 3am³¹.

In Grenoble, it is possible to live either on campus, *Domaine Universitaire*, in CROUS student residence, private accommodation or an apartment in the city. The student residences are well priced (at most €300 per month) and contain single rooms with shared facilities. The bedrooms have en-suite bathrooms with a small fridge. The kitchen is shared with 10-30 occupants on your corridor and consists of a microwave, 8

²³ It was often important to be able to pay in Swiss Francs as well as Euros.

²⁴ Transfer Wise comes automatically to Monzo users and is part of the app.

²⁵ Bring a sizeable amount of funds so as to ensure you do not run out of money before you received the grant in November.

²⁶ <http://www.caf.fr>

²⁷ Furthermore Google Chrome offers a useful automatic language translator for its web pages.

²⁸ I have used Direct Travel Insurance, which gave me reasonably priced quotations and a good service throughout the year: <https://www.direct-travel.co.uk>

²⁹ Least of all navigating often-dodgy French speaking estate agents.

³⁰ As a consequence of arson.

³¹ Needless to say that it was a crazy experience and we were both completely fine!

hot plates and two sinks with no oven and freezer. The Wi-Fi is sometimes a bit patchy so it is important to have a mobile contract with a sizeable amount of data. When choosing student accommodation, be sure to apply close to campus or a tramline (preferably C or B) as well as shops.

The campus is close to big stores such as the Casino Géant and Carrefour, which are a similar price to the UK though not very accommodating for vegetarians, vegans and allergens etc. Meat can sometimes be slightly more expensive depending on season. There are many useful apps such as Duolingo³² to improve your French however it is also important to immerse yourself in French culture with French Netflix shows, music, newspapers and magazines.

For Jemima and I, we both lived for the year in CROUS student accommodation. Rather amusingly, some French accommodations like Jemima's will not include a loo seat! Although not exemplary the accommodation is certainly more than bearable. For instance, my Condillac accommodation included a restaurant called Tutti-Quanti, which provided good food when needed.

Be sure to properly research and use maps to identify accommodation you are going to apply for. Some of Grenoble's university accommodation blocks such as Rabot are located very far from campus requiring long tram rides and have sub-standard to poor living conditions. Fortunately for me, my university (IEPG) was situated only 5 minute walking distance from my Résidence Condillac accommodation and all of my classes occur within one large modern concrete building. Having spoken with other Exeter SA students across Europe, this is a tremendous luxury as it is rare to have such an immediately accessible university campus from one's accommodation.

The quality of teaching environment at the UoE is certainly superior – UoE's library, restaurants, lecture and tutorial halls are significantly more modern and pleasant than the Universities of Grenoble Alpes shared campus, library and IEPG's limited public spaces due to the main building undergoing significant renovations. These necessary renovations have not only been disruptive but resulted in IEPG being embroiled in an expenses scandal (Place Gre-Net, 2017).

3.7 Travel

I recommend flying into the tiny Alpes-Isère Airport, with Ryanair, which is very cost effective method of travel. It is ideally located from Grenoble and there is a cheap €10 coach which will whisk you to Grenoble train station. From where you can easily get a Tram or Cab to your accommodation.

A tram card is easy to acquire all is needed is a headshot photo and a passport. My advice is to buy the card for €20 from the Tabac du Campus about a 2 minute walk from IEPG. The tram service is heavily subsidised and only costs a minimal €15 per month. The tram is easily one of the best features of Grenoble³³. Tram stops are ubiquitous throughout the city and the trams will whisk you from one side of the city to the other from 5am to 2am everyday. As Aleigha Page from a blog entitled Grenoble Life aptly noted, "Grenoble is the perfect size city for study abroad. It is large enough to offer variety, but yet it is small enough so that it is not overwhelming" (Page, 2015). Subsequently Grenoble won the best student cities category by the student-run L'Etudiant Magazine in 2017 (Gee, 2016).

All coaches depart from the train station. The coach services are cheap and can even get you as far as Portugal! Flixbus has an excellent app for your mobile phone. SNCF train services equally have a good app for your phone to manage tickets and I would recommend purchasing a Carte Jeune rail card³⁴ for €50 off

³² <https://www.duolingo.com>

³³ The tramlines were incredibly easy to master and a tram with German-efficiency will duly arrive at your stop every 4 minutes.

³⁴ <https://www.sncf.com/fr/offres-voyageurs/cartes-tarifs-grandes-lignes/carte-jeune>

the SNCF website for the year - bringing you heavily subsidised rail travel on all tickets for the year. The rail service was fantastic throughout the year until the rolling strikes in the summer! Blablacar is good for travelling short distances via car-pooling - it is also a fantastic way to practice French.

3.8 Societies

Sign up and pay in cash for societies and sports. There are a wide variety of societies from cheerleading to Model UN. In my experience, the Ecole de Glisse³⁵ society was fantastic enabling you to ski at all the wonderful resorts located near Grenoble for cheap rates, as well as receive cheap lessons and equipment for all abilities. The closest ski resorts are: Chamrousse, Les Deux Alpes and Alpes de Huez. Ecole de Glisse have an informative website³⁶ and excellent Facebook page. Another fantastic event is the CRIT³⁷ in which all ten Science Po's compete with one another across multiple sports - including dramatic build up and closing ceremonies.

Other popular sports options include the Plein Air Multi-Activite module³⁸ in which you practice a different sport each week from learning how to rock climb to snowboarding. The International Students Society was also phenomenal with a very active Facebook group offering cheap weekly trips to Lyon, Annecy, Marseille, Turin and Vizille - it is certainly a great way to travel and make friends from all over the world.

3.9 French Bureaucratic Administration

French administrative bureaucracies have been likened to a French pastry called a mille-feuille, which has many layers of cream and puff pastry, which aptly encapsulates the French attitude of always being light-hearted about stressful situations. During my time at Grenoble days seemingly turned into weeks of complex enrolment paperwork and trawling endless university buildings searching for someone with answers³⁹. My three points of advice to future IEPG students would be: get a good map of the campus, not let themselves get easily frustrated and most importantly never ever hesitate to speak in French.

4. Conclusion

To conclude, not only is Grenoble the perfect city for a young student and blessed with its central location in Europe as well as French subsidised transport – its hard to beat. The Alps are mesmerisingly beautiful: with hot summers and snowy winters. I thoroughly enjoyed my year at IEPG, it was far from perfect or comfortable but I feel greatly imbued with confidence and direction regarding my future and returning to Exeter. I really hope other students take up the SA experience at IEPG and make the most of the opportunity: by making new friends from all over the world, mastering the French language, travelling and then travelling some more, developing a laid back French attitude with an appetite for long lunches, having your opinions changed by new experiences, immersing yourself in the quintessential French culture as well as the educational culture of a grand école and don't forget to enjoy yourself - the year certainly flashes by quickly.

³⁵ The Campus au Sommet event is one of the spectacles of the year in which hundreds ski down the slopes in Chamrousse carrying flames: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xA7uWYILEJw>

³⁶ <http://ecole-de-glisse.com/2/>

³⁷ <http://www.sciencespo-grenoble.fr/vie-etudiante/la-vie-sportive/le-crit/>

³⁸ <http://www.sciencespo-grenoble.fr/vie-etudiante/la-vie-sportive/decouvrir-et-sinscrire-au-sport/>

³⁹ Who would inevitably not speak a word of English!

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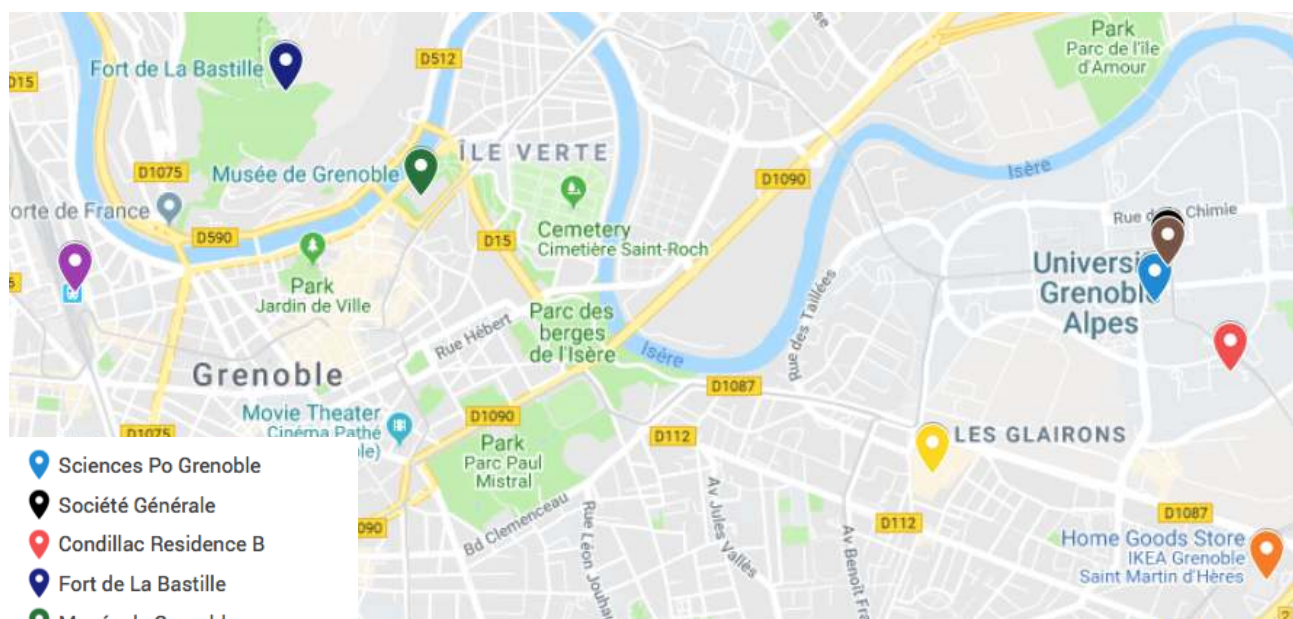
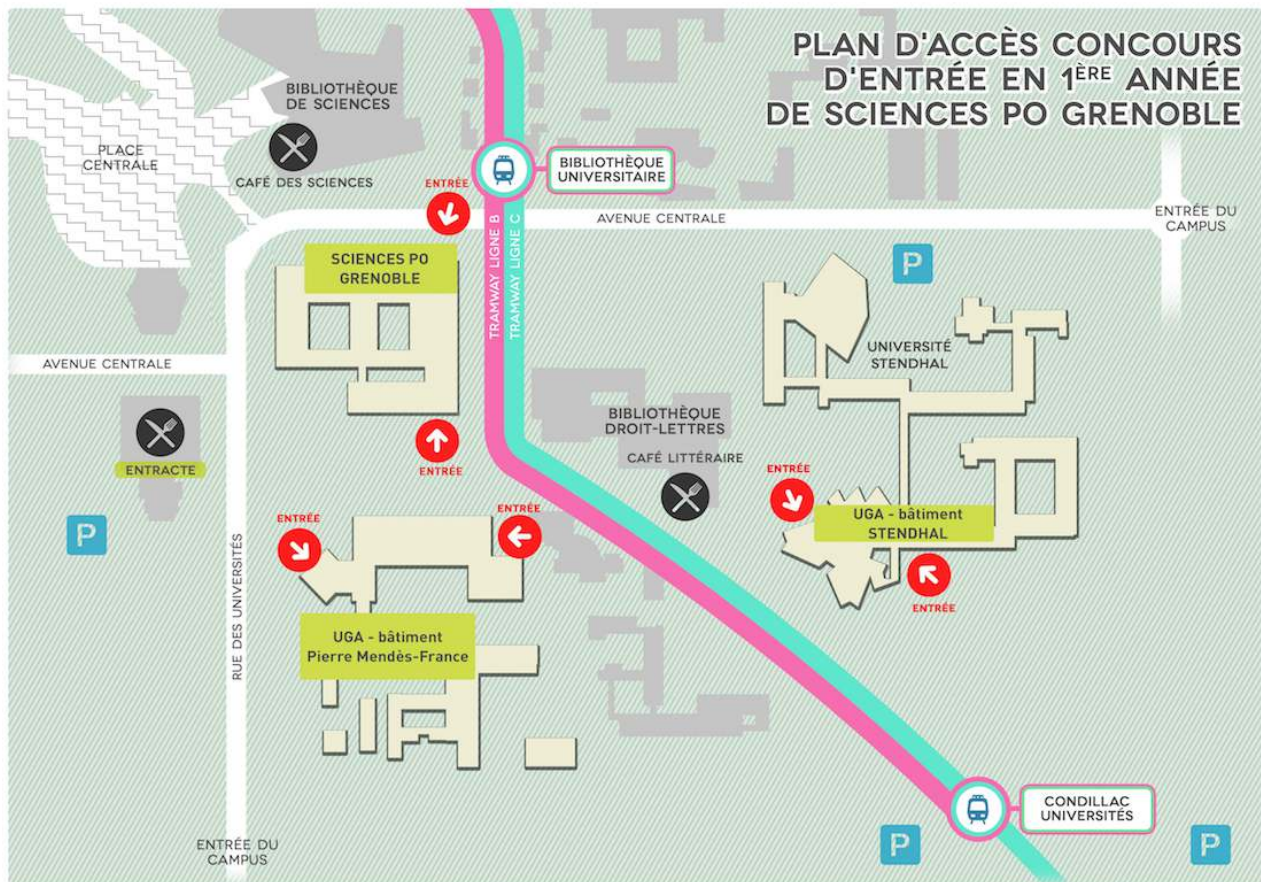
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6.1 Appendix A - Maps

Map of Sciences Po and some points of interest



6.2 Appendix B - Photos

Accueil+ Week - Aiguille du Midi, Chamonix, Lacs Blanc and Bleu



Travel - Paris, Geneva, Lausanne, Annecy, Nice, Lyon, Marseille, Italy and more!

