

ESSEC 3 week exchange

By Dmitry Permyakov

Upon landing in Paris, I had to take the bus into the center of Paris, which took approximately 1.5 hours. I then had to figure out the train system, which was quite confusing, particularly given the transit strike that was occurring throughout the duration of the exchange. Following the train ride, I then had to take two more buses to get to Cergy and onto the ESSEC campus.

Day 1

The first day of orientation started at 8:30 am with a light snack, and the entire day was composed of ice breaker activities to allow us to get to know the other students. There were many students from Canada and USA. We were handed orientation booklets along with a quick tour of the campus and quick explanation of useful suggestions to make our lives easier. We then spent the rest of the day doing unique getting to know each other exercises such as walking around the room blindfolded and building a pyramid out of plastic cups (also blind folded). We painted self-portraits and had 3 minute speed dating sessions telling our classmates about our portrait. We also had to pick a song and replace the words of the song with descriptions of what we wanted to get out of the program.

Day 2

We had the opportunity to learn from a professor with a PH D from UC Berkeley. We started the day in the classroom learning about the euro and the euro zone, including how it came to be and the formation of EU. We also covered some of the problems associated with having a standard local currency with different disparity levels between the countries.

Day 3

On the 3rd day the same professor covered European migration problems as well as required a presentation on the knowledge we learned. We were given a country and had to do a 10 min presentation at the end of the class. After class, a group of students and I decided to go see a classical music concert four season by Vivaldi, which was not part of the program and was done on our own time.

Day 4: European Geopolitics

Day 4 included a 2 hour intro lecture on how difficult negotiations are in Europe for an expert in EU negotiations. As an example, we were given an EU country to focus on and then we had to learn about it, understand the complex problems, and then present defending argument in favour of your country's interests against 29 other countries. 3 students acted as chairs to facilitate the process. The rest of the day was spent outside in a field in a circle having multiple rounds of negotiations. As a group we were hardly coming to consensus - further proof of how difficult it is to come to consensus when multiple parties are involved.

Day 5: Cultural visits

On the first Friday we had no formal classes. Instead, we were given time off to explore the city. The day started off with a river cruise of the city where we could see many of Paris' attractions from the water, including the Eiffel Tower. Then we went to have lunch at a restaurant in the centre of the city and concluded the program with a tour of the famous opera. This entire itinerary was guided by ESSEC's organization's management team. For the remainder of the day the class broke off into groups for personal exploring of the city.

Days 6 and 7: Weekend

We could spend weekends however we wanted. Most people still partnered up and toured the city together.

Day 8

The same professor that took us through introductory day gave a presentation on intercultural management and explained the differences of management styles in many different EU countries.

Day 9 and 10: Social Responsibility

Days 9 and 10 were spent covering sustainability and topics regarding managing one's self. Many of the points brought up here were similar to Schulich's introductory MGMT 5150 course with Ingo Holzinger. The teachings stressed how crucial it is to self-reflect and reassess a company's and one's own actions and taking the environment into consideration when making business and other everyday decisions.

Day 11: European Negotiations

We focused on different behaviours of some EU and other nations. Many examples were provided as well as in-class exercises. One example included contrasting behaviours of Japanese businessmen and North American businessmen and how tough it is to negotiate when there are different customs and traditions. However, in the end, common sense and business logic generally seems to prevail. For another exercise, we were given many different roles, each conflicting with one another, and our task was to make sure the project was completed and all parties were given a fair share of the revenues. This was quite a tough exercise compared to some of the other activities.

Day 12: Digital marketing in Europe

On the second Friday we had a lecture instead of a cultural visit. The primary focus of which was how digital marketing affects businesses all over the world and how companies need to adapt and evolve along with their digital media strategies.

Days 13 and 14: Weekend

This weekend I went into the city to enjoy the sights of Paris. I personally had a chance to explore the Eiffel tower and the Louvre which were both very impressive.

Days 15 and 16: Cultural Foundations of Luxury Brands

The remaining 4 days focused primarily on the luxury industry with many of the top luxury products in the world being from France. On days 15 and 16 a local Professor, who obtained his Ph. D. at ESSEC, was giving us a lecture on what luxury is all about and sharing his personal experience in the luxury world. He pointed out tips and tricks on how luxury companies always fight to stay relevant.

Days 17 and 18: Cultural Foundations of Luxury Brands (continued)

The last two days of lecture were covered by a very knowledgeable and experienced professor who was the Former CEO of Giorgio Armani France. He shared many insights with us from a practical stand point, which was very wonderful. He also covered how the luxury industry needs to carefully manipulate their customers psychologically to impress them in order to obtain a sale, and the importance of making everyone feel special.

Day 19: Last Day

A cultural trip to Giverny where we had a chance to enjoy the beautiful gardens and pond where famous painter Claude Monet has spent a fair share of his life painting. The pond was very beautiful and we had a chance to tour Monet's personal residence where many of his works were on display. After that we drove to a very nice classical French restaurant where we had a farewell lunch with the group and received our certificates Global Manager in Europe before we had to part ways with what became a very close knit group.

The next day was the holiday, Bastille Day in Paris, which I unfortunately couldn't attend since I had to fly back to Toronto to prepare for my new job with RBC.

Summary

This was an absolutely incredible experience where I had the chance to really enrich my knowledge and form some lasting personal connections. It was the best way to end the MBA for me personally and I want to thank the Schulich Career services team in particular for pointing out this program to me and allowing me to gain such a valuable life experience. I would highly recommend this program to anyone considering a short term exchange. My only regret for me might be doing only a part time exchange, rather than doing a full semester exchange. But the 3 weeks were incredible and we had a wonderful rotation of great professors at ESSEC, giving us a quick overview of all the relevant subjects. The student cohort was also very diverse and knowledgeable. Paris was also great to explore on the weekends, and a wonderful place to relax and enjoy the sights, further making the 3 week exchange so much more valuable and memorable.