

University of Angers
Angers, France
M.A. World Heritage Studies
Summer Semester 2021

Before applying for my Erasmus studies in France, I gathered all the information regarding outgoing exchanges from the dedicated BTU's webpage. There were two universities listed that matched with my current course, i.e., World Heritage Studies. The exchange in Antwerp, Belgium, was not possible as the number of outgoing exchanges was full. However, there were still some quotas left for the University of Angers. I did a quick research about Angers and found out it was voted as "Number 1 place to live in France". The city is also known as "Athens of the West," a name borne since the 19th century from the development of its university. Furthermore, I found out that the area was part of the world heritage site of The Loire Valley between Sully-sur-Loire and Chalonnes, and it was only an hour and a half train ride away from Paris. Undoubtedly, I was drawn to the place and university.

Now, I have to make sure that the courses offered at the University of Angers were coherent with the modules offered in BTU. After delving into the university website, I discovered the list of courses taught in English under the subheading L3 Anglophone, which included Tourism Studies, Heritage Studies, Business Studies, and French Language and Culture. I initially thought of skipping the Business Studies module because it didn't wholly match well with my program at BTU. However, ultimately I decided to choose all the offered courses. It would give me more than enough credit so that my semester abroad would be recognized, and I wanted to make the most of the courses offered. After few email exchanges between the course coordinator from both universities, I was set on the subjects.

The exchange semester in France started in January, which does not align with the semester here at BTU. That made the application procedure a bit tricky as the semester in France was called spring semester, which is neither summer nor winter semester like in BTU. The semester started in mid-January and ended in May. Anyways, the international office at both the universities was cooperative and helped my mobility administration. I also took advantage of the online classes offered at BTU. Taking modules from BTU aided me in continuing studying in the last three months of the calendar year, which would have been vacant. Sure, the courses from both the universities overlapped until March, but I chose asynchronous modules, and I managed my studies.

The most difficulty I had in the preparation phase was finding accommodation in Angers. With 42,000 students, Angers is the fifth biggest student town in France regarding the ratio of students to the general population. It seems like finding affordable accommodation for students was never easy. Moreover, the renovation taking place in one of the student dorms and uncertainty due to the pandemic amplified the struggle. To find a reasonable and cheap accommodation was so competitive that either the applied accommodation was already full or I was on the waiting list.

After a struggle of a month and a half and patiently waiting, I was offered a room in Trélazé, a small city present in the outskirts of Angers. I applied through Studapart, which is an online portal for finding student accommodations. The good thing about applying through Studapart was it worked in collaboration with the University of Angers. Further, it was secure, efficient, and it directly connected me with the landlord.

I had sent out messages to multiple owners through Studpart before, but unfortunately, I was met with no reply. But it was in one of those dark and cold Cottbus evenings that I realized that my messages were ignored because it was in English. Then, I adopted a new strategy and started writing messages in French to landlords via Studapart. My new approach worked, and I started getting replies (in French, of course). But the accommodation was not finalized yet.

I was lucky that the student who had previously booked one of the lodgements decided not to come to Angers. I booked my room right away, and the best thing was I was going to live with a French family learning the *l'art d'vivre*, dining French cuisine, picking up the language, and immersing myself in the French way of living. Monsieur Bruno Lemerrier had a massive heart to open his doors to invite me in his house in an uncertain time and unknown land. In a small suburban home in Trélazé, I spent my five months with Monsieur Bruno, his quiet and shy son Thomas and their cat Loukoun.

My living experience in France with a family contrasted with the experience of living individually in a student dorm in Germany. I felt I had found a home and a guardian in a depressing time, and it made a real difference. I will rejoice at the dinner we had together, from the first Sauerkraut to the grilled chicken at the very end. Due to Corona, the flow of guests was very low, but occasionally, he used to invite his daughter Mary and her partner Leo for dinner together. Those dinners were memorable because of all the French cuisines I was introduced to, and I also got to taste wines from the Loire Valley, the region where Angers is located.

My Erasmus exchange to the University of Angers was on a somewhat uncertain time amid a corona pandemic. Only a few months before my exchange, France was reporting approximately fifty thousand daily cases. It had recovered a bit, but the severity of the pandemic persisted. Whether the classes would be held online or offline was still in huge debate. But the email responses I received from my host university pointed that if the situation permits, the classes would be held on campus. But everything was tied to the ongoing context of the pandemic and how it will develop. Nevertheless, I decided to travel to France on the 15th of January 2021 as the classes were supposed to start on the 18th.

Due to the pandemic, the study was not as smooth as planned. The L3 Anglophone was explicitly designed to introduce international pupils to French culture and heritage and the basics of commercial knowledge and the tourism industry. Including me, there were only eight students this year, but according to the teachers, the total tally would round up to be around 30. Four students were from Indonesia, two were from Italy, one student was a Spaniard, and the last remaining individual was me. Out of eight students, one Italian student chose to remain in Sicily and did 'virtual Erasmus.' She had already booked the ticket to France, but Sicily was listed under a Red Zone, and she couldn't travel, losing some money along the way. There were three students from Turkey, but they never could take the course as they had some issues regarding their visas to France. They only took the starting few classes and disappeared.

The whole semester we switched between online and offline modes of studies. Initially, not everyone could come to France, so we had classes *a distance* for the first month and a half. As the pandemic's effect was subdued, the administration decided to run the classes in the university with applied precautionary measures. We maintained the 1.5 m rule, and both teachers and students wore masks inside the classroom.

But after the very first day of restarting classes offline, my Spanish classmate reported that she had tested positive for Covid. The classes were switched back to online. Luckily, after two tests in the space of three days, everyone else present in the classroom did not contract the virus. After the results, we could return to the classroom. To our despair, after a month of going to university France's covid situation was *ne pas bonne*. French Government introduced a stricter measure for controlling the virus, and university studies were compelled to move online again. After a month of online studies, finally, we switched to offline and finished the course.

I was impressed by how teachers adapted to the situation. Apart from being highly cooperative, teachers were patient with the student. I also liked that the teaching faculty was not restricted to French origins and included teachers from several different nations. The subjects introduced me to the vast array of new topics ranging from French history and language to tourism in a global context. The sessions were highly interactive, and I also gain insights into the commercial realm and modern management approaches. The exchange has also boosted my knowledge regarding global geography, negotiations, and marketing. Further, there were whole subjects discussing wines, intercultural communications, and highlights of the Loire Valley – the château.

Due to the imposed curfew after six, I couldn't fully enjoy my stay. Anyhow, I made the best use of the free time I had and visited many parks that Angers had. After the effect of the pandemic settled down in May, I made sure I visited the château of Angers and Saumur. Château d'Angers also displays Apocalypse Tapestry, the most extensive set of medieval tapestries to have survived. I also visited a former slate quarry in Trélazé. I managed to tour the Museum of fine arts, David d' Angers Gallery, Jean Lurcat and Contemporary Tapestry Museum, Natural History Museum, all in Angers. Before leaving France, I also had a short trip around Paris.

To sum up, I can confidently say that the array of experience I received through this Erasmus exchange has given me the academic and experiential bandwidth that will help me grow as an individual and as a team player. This opportunity exposed me to a new environment and a new culture; it also has given me the leverage to expand my academic horizons. Meeting students and teachers from different corners of the world and having viewed the French way of life, I can proudly state that my stay has enhanced my intercultural competency. Indeed, looking back at my exchange in France will make me nostalgic; however, I will be rejoicing that I got the chance to visit Angers and live my fullest for five months.

