



HOW TO

study abroad in

France

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Introduction

Maybe you're dreaming of weekends on the Mediterranean coast, skiing in the Alps, or visiting vineyards and touring châteaux?

Perhaps you're motivated by the thought of starting your day with a visit to the local boulangerie, or taking your books to a Parisian café once frequented by Europe's greatest artists and philosophers? Maybe you're dreaming of weekends on the Mediterranean coast, skiing in the Alps, or visiting vineyards and touring châteaux? Is it the famous fashion scene you're fascinated by, or perhaps *La Défense*, Europe's largest purpose-built business district? Or maybe you're up for the challenge of exploring your way through the country's 7,000 museums and 40,000 historic landmarks?

Whatever your reasons for wanting to spend time in France (and there are many more), you're certainly not alone. The world's most-visited international tourist destination, France welcomed some 82.6 million visitors in 2016 (compared to 75.6 million international visitors each to the US and Spain).

In addition, almost 310,000 international students are to be found in France each year – making the most of the country's high-quality yet low-cost education, immersion in a language which is both *belle* and internationally *utile*, proximity to leading French businesses and international corporations, and of course the enduring appeal of mastering the French *art de vivre*.

If you're keen to join their numbers, read on for information about the French higher education system and how to apply, plus advice about funding, visas, employment prospects and more.



Higher education in France

France has an impressive 35 representatives in the **QS World University Rankings® 2019**, of which 11 are within the global top 300. The nation's two leading universities, **Paris Sciences et Lettres Research University (PSL)** and **Ecole Polytechnique**, both make the world's top 100, ranked 50th and 65th respectively and cementing their reputations as two of Europe's and the world's leading institutions.

In addition to around 250 *grandes écoles* (see below), France's 83 public universities provide courses in a comprehensive range of subjects, catering for around 80 percent of tertiary-level students. France also offers a selection of highly respected art and architecture schools, as well as colleges specializing in fields including fashion, film, hospitality, journalism, performing arts and social work.

Many of France's higher education providers are organized into clusters, known as PRES (short for *pôles de recherche et d'enseignement supérieur*), which bring together universities, research institutes and specialized schools. Members of each PRES share resources and collaborate on research and course provision, with degrees sometimes conferred by the overall PRES, rather than a single institution.

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In line with the Bologna Process, French universities offer three levels of degree: the *licence* (completed in three years), the master (requiring an additional two years) and the doctorate (usually an additional three years). Master's degrees are classified as either 'research' (designed for those intending to progress to a doctorate) or 'professional' (for those intending to enter the workplace).

Recent years have seen a move towards greater inclusion of internships within courses, in response to demand for more practical skills and professional experience. According to government agency Campus France, around 30 percent of all students now complete an internship as part of their studies, and this is closer to 60 percent among those studying specialized master's programs.



France's *grandes écoles*

One of the most distinctive elements of French higher education is the system of "*grandes écoles*". These elite institutions, which may be either public or private, are typically characterized by a relatively small intake of students, highly competitive admissions, and specialization in a single subject area (most often business or engineering). They also have a reputation for educating a high proportion of the country's leading politicians, civil servants, business leaders and researchers.



While most undergraduate programs are taught in French, the country offers a large selection of English-taught courses at postgraduate level. Campus France offers a searchable online database of English-taught programs. However, you'll still need a basic knowledge of French to help you integrate with French lifestyle and culture while studying in the country. Your university will probably have language courses available which you can take alongside your main studies.



Admission requirements, applications & visas

The application process and visa requirements to study in France will depend on whether you come from a country in the EU, or from further elsewhere in the world

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Applicants from the EU:

- You will not need a visa
- If you want to start in the first year of a program and you hold a French baccalaureate, you must use the online application system used by French students, which is known as Parcours Sup. If you want to enter the system a little further on, you may apply directly to the institution at which you want to study.
- If you have a high-school qualification other than the French baccalaureate, you should get in touch with the institutions you want to apply to. They may request that you apply directly to them, rather than through the centralized Parcours Sup system.



- *Grandes écoles* and *grands établissements* have their own application procedures, so it's advisable to get in touch directly to find out what is required. You can apply to preparatory classes and to some establishments through APB if you want to enter in the first year.
- If your course is in French, as is likely, you will need to prove you are sufficiently fluent. You can do this by taking an exam such as the TCF DAP (*Test de Connaissance du Français, Demande d'Admission Préalable*), DALF (*diplôme approfondi de langue française*) or CEFR (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages). Similarly, you'll need to prove you can speak English if that is the language of tuition. It's advisable to check with the university to see which language test scores are accepted or preferred.

Applicants from outside the EU:

- The application procedure will vary depending on whether or not you're from one of the 41 countries in which Campus France runs the 'Studying in France' platform. If you are from one of these countries (listed on the Campus France website), then you are obliged to use the CEF online application system. This guides you through the entire application process, including obtaining a visa, how to apply and which documents you require. You can create your personal profile in the CEF system through the Campus France website. If you want to study a PhD, you're not affected by the 'Studying in France' procedure and should contact your prospective institution directly for information on how to apply.

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Once accepted by a French institution, you'll need to apply for a visa, which also includes a residence permit, called the VLS-TS. This is valid for a year at a time

- If you're not from one of these countries, you will need to submit a preliminary application (known as the 'DAP procedure') at your local French embassy before applying to one or more French universities. You should do this ideally in November in the year preceding the academic year in which you want to study in France. The exact process will depend on your previous qualifications and where you are located. Contact the French institution(s) you're interested in for guidance on the correct procedure to follow.
- Once accepted by a French institution, you'll need to apply for a visa, which also includes a residence permit, called the VLS-TS. This is valid for a year at a time. In order to obtain this visa you'll need to present a completed application form, passport photos, your passport, proof of your previous qualifications, a police certificate attesting to your lack of a serious criminal record, and proof you can speak French to an appropriate level if your course is taught in French. Applicants are also asked to show they have sufficient financial resources – around €615 (US\$750) per month, the equivalent of a base-rate monthly governmental scholarship. Finally, you will also need to prove that you've been accepted to study at a French university.
- Three months after your arrival in France, you'll need to have your student long-stay visa validated by the French Office of Immigration and Integration (OFII) who will give you a sticker to put in your passport.



All students can apply for art programs via the CampusArt platform (www.campusart.org), which includes around 100 institutes offering programs in courses such as fine art, design, music and architecture at all study levels. However, it doesn't replace the 'Study in France' procedure if you're from one of the 41 countries where this applies. After you've been accepted, you'll need to confirm your enrollment with your chosen French institution before classes start. You'll then receive a certificate of school attendance and a student card to confirm your legal status as a student.

Three months after your arrival in France, you'll need to have your student long-stay visa validated



Tuition fees & living costs

The benefits enjoyed by those who study in France include relatively low tuition fees at public universities for both domestic and international students, which have not increased for three years.

In 2017-18, annual tuition fees for most courses at public universities are:

- Bachelor's degree: €184 (~US\$225)
- Master's degree: €256 (~US\$315)
- Doctorate degree: €391 (~US\$480)

There are exceptions; for example engineering schools charge €610 (~US\$745) per year.

It should be noted that universities in France tend to levy additional administrative charges, which are known to bring the price up considerably. That said, the final figure is still likely to be far lower than you would pay in a comparable destination.

You will pay more to study in France's highly selective *grandes écoles* and *grands établissements* (great schools and establishments), which set their own fees.

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Some of these operate only at postgraduate level, and some – like Ecole Normale Supérieure, Paris – require students to have completed either two years of preparatory school (which is nearly as selective as the grande école itself) or to transfer across after two or more years of an undergraduate course. In general, private universities in France charge between €3,000-10,000 (~US\$2,660-8,880) per year.



Living costs

As you may expect, living costs are higher in Paris than elsewhere in France. Campus France recommends a monthly budget of €1,000 (~US\$890) for students in Paris, and €800 (~US\$710) for those outside the capital. Even so, the relatively low tuition fees go a long way towards offsetting higher living expenses even in the capital – this overall affordability is one of the factors underlying Paris' consistent position in the top five of the **QS Best Student Cities** index.

You'll probably spend at least €300 (~US\$370) a month on food, with a meal in a *restaurant universitaire* (university restaurant) likely to cost around €3.25. A liter of milk is typically around €1.20, a baguette €1 and a coffee €2.

Accommodation will cost around €200-300 (~US\$245-370) a month, with student accommodation being the cheapest option.

Students from within the EEA and Switzerland are free to pursue work alongside their studies without any restrictions. Those from other countries can work up to 964 hours per year (equivalent to 60 percent of a full working year), as part of the permissions granted with the VLS-TS visa and residency permit. Internships completed as part of a study program are not counted within this.

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Funding opportunities

Doctoral students can also apply for a *contrat doctoral*, which means they legally become an employee of the university, receiving a regular salary in return for research and teaching work

A good source for finding scholarships is Campus Bourses (<http://campusbourses.campusfrance.org/fria/bourse/#/catalog>), run by Campus France, a search tool which allows you to narrow down the results by nationality, subject and study level to find scholarships to suit you.

Talented international students may be able to obtain funding via the Eiffel Excellence Scholarship Program. This provides an allowance of €1,181 (~US\$1,050) per month for 12-36 months at master's level, and €1400 (~US\$1,240) per month for up to 10 months at PhD level. Other funding options available to international students include grants via the EU's Erasmus program, awards from individual universities and funding provided via regional councils, usually in partnership with public research agencies such as the *Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique* (CNRS).

Doctoral students can also apply for a *contrat doctoral*, which means they legally become an employee of the university, receiving a regular salary in return for research and teaching work. These contracts are for three years, with a nationally set minimum salary of at least €1,685 (~US\$2,060) per month.



Student cities

Paris

You will, no doubt, already have your own set of ideas about **Paris**, which remains one of the world's most popular places to visit. The Paris region welcomed more than 45.9 million tourists in 2016 – including more than 16 million international travelers to the city – reflecting the appeal of iconic sights such as the Arc de Triomphe and Eiffel Tower; world-famous galleries such as the Louvre; and the general ambiance, culture and cuisine Paris is famed for.

Of course, to truly get to know Paris you need to spend time living there, intermingling with the people who make the city what it is. If student life in Paris appeals to you, there's no shortage of great universities to choose from, including 17 public institutions (with varying specializations) and several prestigious *grandes écoles*. As a result, the city has a large and diverse student community, which goes a long way to guaranteeing the continued vibrancy of its long-established intellectual and creative culture.

Lyon

A picturesque medieval city (though its history goes back even further than this), **Lyon** is situated close to France's borders with Switzerland and Italy. It is known for being one of the culinary capitals of France, and is close to the French Alps, making it a good location for those who like to hit the *piste*.

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Lyon's well-preserved architecture has earned it UNESCO World Heritage Site status, but there's more to France's joint second city (there's some debate over whether Marseille or Lyon can claim this title) than spectacular architecture. Its many higher education institutions give it a large student population, and, consequently, the vibrant nightlife commonly found in all student hubs. If it's more civilized cultural pursuits you're after, Lyon doesn't disappoint on that front either, while those who have one eye on their future career may be interested to hear it's one of France's main financial centers.

Toulouse

A historic city situated not too far from France's south-western borders with Andorra and Spain, **Toulouse** is known in the modern age as one of the capitals of the European aerospace industry. Its universities are also historic, with the original institution that's now divided into three parts – **Université Toulouse 1 Capitole**, **Université Toulouse II Le Mirail** and **Université Toulouse III Paul Sabatier** – having been founded in the 13th century.

Toulouse has a large student population, and is known for being a hotbed of alternative culture, alongside more traditional cultural outlets in the form of opera, theater and immaculately preserved architecture. And if you want to get out of the city, then the South of France is your oyster, with the proximity of the Pyrenees allowing skiers to get their fix.

Montpellier

Another major student community is found in Montpellier. Around a quarter of the city's population consists of attendees of its universities, two of which are featured in the QS World University Rankings 2019,



including the [Université Paul-Valéry Montpellier III](#), which lays claim to being the seventh oldest in the world.

Montpellier's location near France's Mediterranean coast makes it a good option for sun-worshippers, though it also means you'll have to brace yourself for a mass influx of tourists in the summer months. The benefit, of course, is that in the off-season you can enjoy almost exclusive access to the beaches, and plenty of opportunities to explore some of the more well-hidden pleasures that the South of France has to offer.

Lille

In former times, the northern city of [Lille](#) was one of the main industrial centers of France, which meant an inevitable period of decline as the world entered the post-industrial age. However, in recent years the picturesque city has undergone something of a renaissance and is now considered by many to be one of France's lesser-known treasures, with a vibrant cultural scene and a strong commercial backbone. Lille is also a relatively affordable city for students, with rent around 50 percent lower than in Paris, according to Numbeo.

One of the main advantages of being based in Lille is the ease of traveling to explore other parts of France, and much of northern Europe. You can, in fact, catch an express train directly from Lille to the world's two most popular tourist cities, Paris and London, or to Brussels, which can serve as a gateway to the Netherlands or Germany. If you've got the travel bug, Lille could be for you.

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Working in France after graduation

Having weathered the global financial crisis of 2008 relatively well, France eluded the recession of 2012-13 seen in many Eurozone countries. Though overall growth has been slow to pick up, and unemployment levels remain stubbornly high, the country nonetheless offers plenty of opportunities for ambitious graduates seeking work.

Services account for almost 80 percent of national GDP, with major industries including tourism, electronics, textiles, chemicals, machinery, automobiles, metallurgy, aircraft and food processing. High-demand roles include IT professionals such as programmers and analysts, high-level engineers, and healthcare workers.

In order to stay on and work in France after graduating, non-EU students will need to apply for a change of residency status; this can be done via the local prefecture once an offer of employment has been received and accepted. Your offer of employment must have a salary of at least one and a half times the minimum wage (currently €2,220 (~US\$2,715)).

Alternatively, international students can seek permission to extend their student residence permits for up to a year. During this time they can

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continue to work under the same conditions as when they were students (meaning a maximum of 964 hours per year/20 hours per week) without applying for a change of status, unless their earnings exceed 150 percent of the minimum wage (€9.76 per hour as of 2017); if this is the case they must apply for full-time employment status. Indian students with a master's degree or higher can stay up to two years with an extended residence permit. If you're from the EU, EEA or Switzerland, you can stay in France to look for employment for as long as you like after graduation. You can find graduate job opportunities on websites such as Pôle Emploi (Employment Centre, www.pole-emploi.fr) and APEC (the *Association Pour l'Emploi des Cadres*, www.apec.fr).



Want to find out more about studying abroad in France? Get advice from the TopUniversities team and international students in our [online forums](#).