

ERASMUS report HEAR Strasbourg, summer semester 2018

Applying for the Haute Ecole d'Art du Rhin is relatively easy; you only need to submit the usual formalities (CV, passport photo) and a portfolio.

There is only minimal assistance with finding accommodation there; shared apartments are rather difficult to find without direct contact with other students; those that can be found on websites are relatively expensive. For most of my time in Strasbourg, I stayed in the Paul Appell student residence, which is very affordable (€171 a month for a room without sanitary facilities). However, I would recommend everyone to put some effort into finding a room in a shared apartment, as, with a bit of luck, the rents in the city are generally not high and the student residence quickly makes you question your human dignity – showers like in the public indoor pool, which have to be pressed again after a few seconds with a button and usually contain some considerable tangles of dark hair; a depressing kitchen consisting of two induction stoves and a microwave, without any equipment and all kinds of strange smells make you feel happy every time when you leave the building. Lack of sleep due to uncomfortable mattresses and the inability to invite new friends over should also be considered.

If all of this is not a problem for you, the rooms are not a bad solution, due to their aforementioned affordability and proximity to the school. A good tip, which I received in good time but didn't follow up on, is to apply for the so-called CAF (information can be found in the HEAR's International Student Handbook), a housing allowance that can be paid for both the residence and shared rooms can receive.

Right from the start we were told that the easiest way to get around Strasbourg is by bike – public transport is available, regular and not too expensive, unless you want to go to Ikea, the airport or if you have a lot of luggage with you, the bike is always the cheapest solution. Personally, I can count the times I've sat on a tram on one hand.

The easiest way is to buy a bike directly via Leboncoin.fr. There are lots of used bikes that don't cost much. Since many bicycles are stolen in the city, you should also invest in a good lock and give preference to an older, inconspicuous model.

The city itself is small, but remarkably lively and full of cultural offerings, which is certainly due in large part to the relatively large number of tourists. Getting around is sometimes tiring, especially in the city centre, as there are smaller tour groups and practically constant construction work blocks your way. Over time, however, you develop your strategies and reach your desired goal with increasing speed within the labyrinthine infrastructure. If you're not in a hurry, you probably won't get tired of walking, as the city is really worth seeing. In addition to the impressive cathedral, the pretty half-timbered houses and numerous canals always attract attention.

The University of the Arts also resides in a beautiful building, located a little outside the centre but easily accessible from anywhere. The campus of the University of Strasbourg, which also has a large library, is just a few minutes' walk away. There is also a student restaurant not far away; the International Office staff usually visit this with the ERASMUS students during the first few days. The quality of the food is quite good, vegetarians have a slightly harder time, vegans may have problems. Overall, maintaining a diet free of animal products is probably a little more challenging in France.

Food is on average a little more expensive, which is why the twenty-minute bike ride to Kehl, the nearest German city, is definitely worth it every now and then.

I was really pleasantly surprised by the quality of HEAR itself, which is nationally respected, especially for its Illustration Faculty. In terms of quality, almost all sections do great work; the students are active, motivated and obviously well selected from a large number of applicants. There are parties almost every evening, which usually start in "La Mine", a campus-owned, student-run bar that closes at either 10:00 p.m. or 2:00 a.m. and from which smaller groups move on to what feel like almost constant house parties. Connections can be made relatively quickly, especially with knowledge of the French language.

Especially events organised by the Phonon (SoundArt) have remained in my memory very well and should not be missed.

Overall, HEAR is divided into several sections, for which detailed information can be found online. According to several sources, the Illustration Department in question is quite strenuous and challenging, which can have a negative impact on one's personal life and, according to some exchange students, was quite a shock, as they felt they had been thrown in at the deep end. I myself was in a class called "Farmteam", the origin of the name is beyond my knowledge, but broadly speaking it is a group of students working in visual narration. There were no courses, just two days a week on which the group met in plenary and talked about older students' theses, possible collaborations, excursions or other things. In this respect, the faculties certainly differ greatly in terms of requirements and independence and working atmosphere.

But overall the school appeared to be targeting the job market in most sections, while in no way obstructing the personal development of its students, quite the opposite. For me, the insight into the work of my fellow students and the contact with them was one of the most important advantages of the institution, although almost all of the professors are also excellent. I can particularly recommend the portfolio course from XXX, which gives very targeted feedback with in-depth knowledge of the world outside of art school, as well as the painting class from XXX, which is, definitely, an exceptional experience. For the latter, it is advisable to be confident in your understanding of the French language.

Since I started in the summer semester, there were some minor disadvantages that are still worth mentioning. On the one hand, you don't get the full introduction because the students are already all integrated into everyday university life, but in my case this was compensated for by the help of the ERASMUS students who had already been present became. In addition, the summer semester is very short and punctuated by short and long holidays, during which access to the faculties is somewhat limited and no courses take place. If possible, staying from the winter to the summer semester is certainly recommended.

If you plan to stay in July and August after the summer semester, you should be prepared for the fact that most students will leave the city outside of the course periods.

It's not a bad idea to follow suit and look around the country (and surrounding countries). You can get to Paris very cheaply and quickly by train, and Strasbourg also has very good long-distance bus connections and its own airport, not too far outside the city. An important address is Kelbillet.fr, where you can quickly and easily find out the cheapest connections. There is also Mülhausen Basel Freiburg International Airport, which is about two hours from the city and is a great launching pad for getting Europe at low cost.

Its proximity to Germany and Switzerland and its generally good connections for travel within and outside the country is perhaps one of Strasbourg's secret advantages.

Overall, I benefited in every way from the university, the city and the country and can only warmly recommend HEAR. It should be said that I am hardly in a position to provide better information than can already be found in the International Student Handbook and on the school's website, which is why my current report is a little more in the area of personal impressions.