

Erasmus Experience Report

Aparna Joshi
University of Perpignan Via Domitia
February-June 2016

The Erasmus program is a unique program that allows international students to experience different cultures, meet new people, learn under different environment and boost their self-confidence. This program helps students travel to foreign countries and gives them a chance to learn under foreign environments. This helps the student to challenge their own barriers and grow academically and socially.

I did my Erasmus semester in Font Romeu. Font Romeu is a very small town situated at the southern border of France. Having brought up in a bustling city like Mumbai, for me Font Romeu was a drastic change. With a handful of population, this place was ideal for students as it ensured no disturbance. Located in the middle of the Pyrenees mountains, Font Romeu boasted of a picturesque view that cannot be described in words. One has to see it to believe it. For a person like me, adapting to this place was difficult initially but as time went by, I actually started liking this place so much that now, I happen to miss Font Romeu. But, while adapting myself, I discovered the changes within me. To name a few, I was learning to adjust to new climate, food, culture and environment.

But, the cherry on the cake was the university/research laboratory that I studied in! I studied in the PROMES-CNRS laboratory, Odeillo under the University of Perpignan via Domitia. The laboratory has the biggest solar furnace in the world. The maximum temperatures this furnace can reach is up to 3500 degree Celcius. Being a solar energy student, studying in such a laboratory is like a dream come true. The laboratory has many smaller furnaces where we could make experiments. Our professors were very helpful and kind. They were intelligent researchers disseminating their knowledge to us and I was indeed lucky to land this opportunity to learn under them.

Apart from that, life in Font Romeu/Odeillo offers skiing opportunities for those craving for adventure. Possibilities for rock-climbing, hikes and small treks are numerous. Also, those that like to pamper themselves, can enjoy thermal spas and thermal baths as the region is blessed with many natural hot water springs. Or just a coffee in the mountains certainly affects your days positively.

The laboratory has a restaurant that offers delicious freshly cooked lunch everyday and students can avail that offer at a discounted price. Also, various outlets to try cassoulets, crepes, bakeries to satiate the palette are available in Font Romeu inspite of its small size.

Accommodation is difficult since bot Perpignan, and Odeillo are ski locations so prior booking is recommended. It may be expensive but sometimes there is no other solution. Knowing French is definitely an advantage as people in this area speak only French and Spanish but everyone at the laboratory speaks English so it is quite international student friendly.

To sum it up, it was a very enriching and fulfilling experience that will always be close to my heart as a semester in Font Romeu has played a big role in shaping the person that I am today! To all those reading this experience report, my suggestion is to go ahead with it and enjoy it to the fullest.