

MONTPELLIER: IL FAUT PROFITER

**Apprendre le français dans le
Sud de la France**

**Learning French in the South of
France**

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Photo taken by me of les eaux roses (pink water) in le Salin d'Aigues Mortes

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L'INTRODUCTION



Picture of me standing in Parc du Peyrou

Hi! My name's Christina and I'm a 3rd year medical student. During my 2nd year I signed up for Intermediate 1 French lessons with the CULP (Cambridge University Language Programme). On completion of the exam I finished off the academic year at B1 level according to the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR). I booked onto a language school in Montpellier and spent my September learning French in the beautiful South of France.

Medicine is an inherently personal profession; good communication skills are at its heart. Providing global healthcare is something I'm very keen on doing in the future. I know that being able to speak French will broaden my opportunities as a healthcare professional, allowing me to work abroad in different French-speaking countries, from Canada to Haiti, and Senegal to Togo; and work for international organisations, namely the World Health Organisation. I know that in today's multicultural society, being a bilingual medical practitioner will be an asset. This year, as my Part II, I'm going to study Psychology and Neural Behaviour, which will allow me to understand the cognitive processing of language. This has furthered my drive to learn French to a fluent level.



A photo I took of l'Arc de Triomphe

Location: Montpellier, France

Duration: 4 weeks (1st-28th September)

Language School: Institut Linguistique Adenet (ILA), Montpellier

Level: B2 CEFR

- *1 hour online multiple-choice placement test before arrival*

Classes: 30 lessons (22.5 hours) / week (each lesson lasts 45mins)

- *300 €/week + 80 € enrolment fee*
- *9-10 students*
- *20-30-year-old age range, with some older students*

Accommodation: Résidence L'Observatoire

- *Student accommodation provided by ILA*
- *5-minute walk from the centre of Montpellier*
- *203 €/week*



A photo I took of my friends walking along one of the palm tree-lined streets of Montpellier.

I thoroughly recommend Montpellier as a place to learn French. The first thing I noticed when I arrived in Montpellier is that the population of the city is young. Montpellier is a student city, home to Université de Montpellier. Place de la Comédie is the heart of the city, full of life at all hours of the day. I was lucky enough to live only a 5-minute walk away from the city centre. Just pick a café in Place de la Comédie for le petit déjeuner or une glace (as I often did) and you can have a front row seat of what life in Montpellier is like. The square is full of world-class street-performers and live music.

Unlike some French cities like Paris, where there are a lot of tourists so staff might be willing to respond to you in English, in Montpellier everyone will insist on talking to you only in French. I found this forced me, out of a place of necessity, to improve my French.

Venturing out of Place de la Comédie there are many restaurants and cafés where my friends and I often spent our lunchtimes. I quickly discovered my favourite spot to read in Montpellier in Le Jardin des Plantes. Nothing compares to the tranquillity I felt sitting opposite towering bamboo shoots whilst reading my bilingual version of the book "The Minority Report". La Promenade du Peyrou, behind l'Arc de

Triomphe, provides scenic views of the city ,and every Sunday morning is home to my favourite flea market.

A 50 minute tram-ride and walk gets you to the beach; Le Petit Travers and Palavas are the closest. I enjoyed many lazy afternoons and evenings lazing in the hot September sun on the golden beaches. Another idyllic location a short tram-ride away from the centre is Lac du Crès: a picturesque lake perfect for swimming. Thanks to a wealthy citizen, Montpellier also has a zoo that is completely free.

At night time the city springs to life. Since Montpellier is a student city there are many clubs with free or cheap entry, my favourite being Cargo. Try as I might to resist the popular Brit-inspired bars, I do admit that I once ended up in a bar called The Shakespeare.

One thing to be wary of in Montpellier is that though the centre is always busy, the streets further out do get empty quite quickly. Though I didn't have any problems during my stay there, me and my friends often had to walk home other friends who lived further out from the centre as there are a lot of odd people that hang round Gare Saint-Roch at night time. Also, if you are a woman, cat-calling is very big and persistent problem in Montpellier. However, my teachers there told me that this is a problem in cities throughout France in general. ILA was very good at providing advice for how to stay safe at night in the introductory class. My advice is to not walk around on your own at night outside of the centre.

Transport is easy and pretty reliable (except on a Sunday when the whole city seems to shut down). You can explore the whole of Montpellier by tram which costs 1.60€ for a single ticket or 10€ for 10 journeys. If I was staying for over a month or if I lived further away from the centre, I would have gotten a TAM card which allows unlimited tram travel for 28€/month. Buses are only 1€ or 1.60€, and there's a regular shuttle bus (la navette) from the airport. I recommend downloading the app OUI.sncf for quickly booking tickets for train journeys.



I took this photo of Arènes de Nîmes after spending the day there for Les Férias.

Standard course: Monday-Friday 9-12.15am (break 10.30-10.45am)

Intensive course: Tuesday-Thursday 13.15-15.50pm (break 14.30-14.35pm)

I was placed in the B2 CEFR class. Initially I was worried that the level would be too high since I was at level B1 when I finished the CULP. Thankfully my worries were quickly wiped away. I found my class to be the perfect level for me. Challenging enough to keep me engaged, as I learnt new grammar points as vocabulary. However, it wasn't too challenging that I felt uncomfortable speaking in French. The morning classes were consistently engaging and extremely useful. They included a mix of grammar lessons, oral and reading comprehension. Every Tuesday we had a "Production Écrite" where we write a short essay or letter on a subject, similar to what is done for the B2 DELF (Diplôme d'Études en Langue Française) exam. This is marked and the next day we analyse the mistakes made by the class as a whole, which was very helpful. Every Thursday we had a "Production Orale" where you prepare an oral presentation on a subject and have to speak for 10 minutes and then answer questions from the class. Though the prospect of doing this seemed daunting at first, I was proud that I

successfully completed one. I think a large part of my enjoyment for my morning classes was due to my brilliant teacher.

The afternoon intensive classes were more so focused on improving your pronunciation and learning about French film and music. I initially found this class quite frustrating as I felt like I wasn't being able to speak as much as I wanted to since every time after you spoke the teacher spent a very long time analyzing the pronunciation and grammatical mistakes that were made. This slowed down the pace of the class a lot and made it boring and repetitive at times. However, throughout the weeks the lessons improved, and I gradually learned to see the benefits of to this sort of teaching. One interesting activity we did was that with a partner we constructed a questionnaire on French film and then went out into Place de la Comédie to pose these questions to the public.

The extra-curricular activities offered by the school were somewhat lacking and often over-subscribed, but there's always plenty of activities to do in Montpellier so you'll never be bored.

Overall, I would definitely recommend ILA as it's very well-organised and the classes are well-structured, so you always know what to expect.

MON HÉBERGEMENT



*A photo of me taken from at the top of
Cathédrale Saint-Nazaire de Béziers*

I have a mixed opinion of my student accommodation provided by ILA. I loved the central location. However, the actual room was very small and wasn't clean when I arrived- definitely unexpected since the accommodation wasn't cheap. Other students I spoke to staying at this accommodation had similar problems. I also was given a ground floor room by a car park so wasn't able to open my window during the night as my room was too easily accessible from the outside. I did request for my room to be changed to a different floor but this request was never fulfilled.

As each room has its own private kitchen and bathroom there isn't an opportunity to mingle with the French students, which was disappointing for me as this meant fewer chances to practice my everyday French language. However, living in student accommodation meant that I had the freedom to go out in the evenings with my friends and create amazing memories, unrestricted by host family timings. I did consider living with a host family before applying. I'm happy that I did choose student accommodation in the end as hearing from friends who did stay with host families, the experience can vary

wildly. Many of my friends found that the host families were only there for dinner but there were no “family” activities or real connections formed, which is what they expected when signing up.

LA VISITE À L'HÔPITAL



I took this photo at un tournoi de joutes nautiques (a water jousting tournament) in Sète

Montpellier is home to the oldest functioning medical school in the West, la Faculté de Médecine de Montpellier, founded over 800 years ago. Montpellier has a new medical school which opened in 2017, so upon arriving in Montpellier, I was excited to have the opportunity be able to see medical education past and present, side by side.

Whilst in Montpellier I gained work experience with a Professor that I was put in contact with through Cambridge University, at Hôpital Arnaud De Villeneuve on the Paediatric Haematology-Oncology Ward. I attended the morning ward round, which quickly submerged me in rapid French. I was able to learn about a range of cancers that the children on the ward have such as Burkitt's Lymphoma, Lymphoma anaplasia, Erwing's sarcoma, neuroblastoma, Leukaemia and Juvenile myelomonocytic leukaemia. I also observed the general examinations that the doctors performed on the patients.

Though shadowing on the paediatric haematology-oncology ward was overall a very positive learning experience, it was also emotionally challenging. I met a child with neuroblastoma, who had come in only

for a platelet transfusion but hadn't been drinking or eating much. As a consequence, she had lost 2 kg. When the doctors and I visited her for the morning general examination, the 6-year-old broke down crying as she was just so exhausted from the whole ordeal.

Adjusting to the pace of French in everyday life was very challenging especially when I first attended the morning meeting at the Paediatric Haematology-Oncology ward. All the doctors, students and nurses in the meeting were talking very rapidly about each patient that needed to be seen that day using specialist medical French that I have not learned , and I found it very hard to pick up any meaning from what they were saying. However, I did learn a lot of medical vocabulary both in the hospital and in French class.

MON TEMPS LIBRE A PASSÉ EXPLORER



Photo from the river bank of Pont d'Avignon.

There are different afternoon and weekend trips organised each week by ILA. I went on two in my time there, to Saint-Guilhem-le-Désert and Aigues-Mortes. My friends and I quickly realized that it was cheaper to organise trips to other cities ourselves. This also gave us more time to spend at places that interested us. Together we visited Avignon, Sète, Béziers and Nîmes. These excursions are truly what made my time in Montpellier unforgettable.

In Aigues Mortes I got to see the incredible pink waters of le Sel du Camargue, with the flamingos resting nearby. In Saint-Guilhem-le-Désert I explored the tranquil village and hiked through the vineyards. Sète, which I fell in love with over and over again, was where I saw the peculiar sport of water jousting and gazed across the immense sea from Mont St-Clair. Béziers offered delectable cuisine and panoramic shots of the houses, an expanse of orange roofs. And Les Ferias in Nîmes, I saw bull-fighting, horses playing musical chairs and

Abrivado (bull-running), which has to be the most dangerous sport I have ever witnessed in my life.

In Montpellier I also watched my first ever football game, where the rivalry between Montpellier and Nîmes was played out. I learnt there and then that football fans reach a whole new level of fandom in Montpellier, after the game was stopped since fans kept on throwing flares onto the pitch.

All these different experiences offered me new and exciting environments to practice my French and learn vocabulary that I would not have learned elsewhere.



*A photo of me
in Saint-
Guilhem-le-
Désert.*

I went into this trip knowing that I won't be able to become fluent in French in a month. Instead, I set myself the goal that I wanted to be able to hold a conversation in French and be understood and convey what I mean successfully. I'm happy that I have achieved this goal. My French has improved immensely in the month that I stayed in Montpellier. I am now much more confident speaking French and my range of vocabulary has expanded greatly.

Living in a new country for a month has led me to become more independent. Attending the ward round in a French hospital has shown to me that working in a francophone country in the future is a real and achievable goal for me. I have made a massive jump in my French learning and I will continue to use this opportunity that I was given as a platform to reach a level that is sufficient for me to be able to work abroad as a doctor in the future.

From this report I hope you see why it is titled "Montpellier: Il faut profiter". It truly is important to seize every opportunity, and thanks to the AJ Pressland Fund I have been able to do that.



Fin.