

# PARIS: MA VIE EN ROSE

Report for the A.J. Pressland  
Fund

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Photo: the Jardin du Luxembourg

I have included this section in order to help other language students who are considering studying French over the long vacation.

Duration: 3 weeks 4<sup>th</sup>-25<sup>th</sup> September 2017

Institution: France Langue Notre Dame School, Paris

Course: Intensive course with 26 lessons a week consisting of 20 general lessons and 3 specialised modules, 885€/3 weeks.

Specialised modules ('ateliers') taken: Grammar, journalism, creative writing, oral, current events.

Other courses offered: Business, Tourism & Hotel Industry, Medical, Legal, Gastronomy, Fashion and Design, Internship and Diplomatic French courses offered at the Paris school.

Class sizes: General class 6 students, ateliers 3-8.

Level of course: B1.9 (school offered courses from A1-C2 according to CEFR)

Accommodation: Self-organised through family friends, shared an apartment in the Latin quartier with three French students, 500€/3 weeks. The language school also offered accommodation with host families and in residences.

Excursions/workshops: Daily activities run by school including tours around monuments, film and cuisine clubs, boat trips, patisserie and fashion workshops and further away weekend excursions.

# WHY FRENCH, WHY PARIS?

The French language has always had a great allure to me; at first it was just the mysterious tongue that my parents would speak rapidly in to each other when wanting to discuss a birthday present or a potential ice cream trip. But as I grew older and my brother moved permanently to the French Alps, leading to many family visits, the French language became more and more present in my life. Unfortunately during my later education my French studies were overshadowed by my desire to study the sciences, and with the limited number of options given, I ended up studying solely science at sixth form, promising myself that I would pick French up again. Studying at Cambridge I was able to achieve this by taking advantage of the excellent CULP courses and as my academic interests developed, French became increasingly important to me; now dedicated to pursuing a career in global health, where French-speaking Geneva is a hub of organisations such as MSF and WHO, the ability to speak French is invaluable to my career plans. Additionally, I hope to soon have the opportunity to conduct research in francophone Sub-Saharan Africa as part of a master's program, where my language skills would highly enrich the experience of speaking to patients burdened with the parasitic diseases that I would be researching.

The answer to why Paris is a lot simpler, the rich history and culture mixed with romanticism made the capital an easy choice. It also has familial interest to me as my parents met while studying at Science Po, also leaving me with a network of locals to show me the ways of Parisian life.

Thus, with my excitement and eagerness to immerse myself in French life, I boarded a Eurostar in September 2017 to begin my time in Paris.



Photo: Notre-Dame cathedral, a 5 minute walk from the school.

Arriving at my language school, France Langue, was a lot less intimidating than it had been for my previous language course as I was already used to the expectation that after stepping through the doors to the school all students had to speak solely in French. During the first morning at the school all new students had a one-on-one oral test with a professor to establish their level; I was very surprised when the professor suggested I joined a class in level B1.9 as with CULP I had only just finished A2. After deciding that I wanted to challenge myself and give the higher level a go, I joined my 6 new classmates in an airy and bright classroom with an incredible view of the iconic Notre-Dame. After finding the first few days incredibly daunting I was really excited to see how quickly I progressed in this challenging immersive environment, soon finding that I was joining in the lively class debates on current events such as the Catalanian referendum and the state of French politics. This was particularly engaging for me as I had been more used to discussing topics like what pets I had and where I wanted to go on holiday in my previous French classes. I quickly found myself able to share my opinions on subjects that mattered to me; during week 3 of my lessons I delivered a 15-minute exposé to my class on my current research on antibiotic resistance.

Overall, I found the lessons highly enjoyable and interactive. My days consisted of 4 hours of general French lessons in the mornings and then a 2-hour 'atelier' after lunch as part of the intensive course. These workshops were particularly enjoyable and highly varied so that you could pick whichever ones suited you best; for example, some afternoons I took grammar classes to strengthen this essential skill, but others I took creative writing class or 'actualité' which centred on us reading, writing and discussing French newspaper articles. The teachers at France Langue were always full of energy, engaged and interested which made the long

days of lessons pass extremely quickly. My main teacher Naima was always helping us to make the most of our time in Paris, by picking up copies of the free metro magazine for us every morning, giving us amazing suggestions for authentic Parisian couscous restaurants and always keeping us in the know about upcoming events in the city, the kind of information that would be difficult to access elsewhere.

On top of all of this, one of my favourite aspects of the school was how keen all the other students were to speak in French outside the classroom; I found that in our breaks where we would all go grab a café au lait and sit in the park, instead of reverting to English we would chat enthusiastically in rapid, if not slightly fragmented and grammatically flawed, French. This was a complete novelty to me and has remained one of my favourite things about my time in Paris. These conversations were made particularly interesting by the diversity of the students in my class, from an Italian Médecins Sans Frontières worker to a successful Brazilian author to a Cuban ex diplomat!

During lessons wasn't the only way to practise French while at France Langue; the school ran daily excursions and tours around awe-inspiring monuments such as the Sacré Coeur, weekly French film clubs and a patisserie workshop where we learnt how to make classic croissants (they take 20 hours to make!). One particular highlight was when we went on a trip to Versailles, after seeing many pictures of the palace seeing it in real life was a whole new experience and it felt like I gained a new intimate understanding of the breath-taking excess and extravagance that embodied 18<sup>th</sup> century French royalty. Another incredibly memorable outing was when we went to the Palais Garnier where the school was able to get us cheap tickets to see Mozart's classic opera *Così fan tutte*.



Photo: Balcony of Palais Garnier

Overall I would highly recommend France Langue to other language students. The quality of teaching and variation of exercises was excellent and the small class sizes meant that the lessons could be adapted to individual levels and that speaking could play a large role in lessons. Additionally, every week you could request a half-hour tutor session one-on-one with a teacher for free; these were incredibly helpful, for example, during the first week when I was behind my classmates in grammar I used a tutorial session to learn the subjunctive mood and get up to speed. The school is a lovely atmosphere to learn in and the mix and diversity of students makes it feel very special.



Photo: the view from my Parisian apartment

Living in the historic Latin Quarter within the heart of Paris in a flat shared with French university students made it easy to most of all my free time outside the classroom. As well as enjoying many afternoons admiring the works of the Impressionists in the Musée d'Orsay, or reading Harry Potter in French in the Jardin du Luxembourg, much of my time was spent simply wandering the vibrant and romantic streets of Paris, taking everything in. The flat was also a very convenient ten-minute walk away from the school.

Strangely, it was in the evenings where I found my French to have made some of its biggest leaps; spending every evening with a group of French 20 year olds I found I had to quickly get over my fear of speaking in conversation with natives and by the end of my three weeks I no longer had hesitation and anxiety over spontaneous conversation. The banks of the Seine are a hub for young people in Paris, I loved the evenings spent picnicking here with friends with wine and cheese. There were also multiple amazing festivals on the banks where Parisians from all walks of life would come and sample wines from all over France and dance to live jazz bands. It really made my trip that I had my own personal three French tour guides who could show me hidden Parisian gems as well as helping me to really feel like Paris was my home. My friends would often take me along to their Science Po activities and I especially enjoyed spending a weekend helping to tutor disadvantaged French primary school kids in the suburbs, although I was only much help with maths as it turns out I am still not above an 8 year old's level of language.



Photo: Medici Fountain

After my description of my time in Paris I hope that you can see how I arrived at the title 'Ma Vie En Rose'. With early mornings listening to choral music in Notre Dame, long afternoon walks with croissants and coffee and evenings dancing on the banks of the Seine, it is impossible to describe my time in Paris in any other way. Paris has been absolutely invaluable to my language progression, especially in terms of increasing my confidence to levels that now allow me have spontaneous conversations and discuss serious and relevant topics. Overall my time was more than just about studying in the classroom and gaining such an insight into the energy and *joie de vivre* of Parisian life was more than I could have hoped for. I would like to give my sincerest thanks to the A.J. Pressland Fund for enabling me to have such a positive and enriching experience.

After my time in Paris I have been inspired to continue my French studies and have enrolled in an upper intermediate class with the University of Cambridge Language Centre, with the hope to improve my French to a level that I will soon allow me to live and work in France.