

# Here's my Study Abroad Story

## Christina Brandt Syracuse Abroad Strasbourg, France

**Major:** Economics and Government

**Program:** My program was incredibly different in that we started the semester with a two week travel seminar to 5 different cities in Europe that included exams and a research paper once we reached our final destination, Strasbourg! Everyone on my program lived with a host family, most of which were no more than 20 minutes from the center by public transportation. We took classes either at the Syracuse Center in both French and English or through the University of Strasbourg, which also offered classes in French and English. Strasbourg is the location for the Council of Europe, many students had the opportunity to intern for the Council, the European Court of Human Rights, the European Parliament, as well as local schools, businesses and government agencies. The majority of students were interested in studying History, Political Science, International Relations, or Economics, so the majority of our classes were offered in those subjects. All of our classes conducted in French implemented cultural outings and activities to show us more of the city and help us become a part of the French way of life. One of the biggest advantages of being in Strasbourg during the fall semester was that we got to attend the Christmas Markets at the end of the semester, which are some of the largest and oldest in Europe!



**Typical Day:** I woke up at about 8am every morning. By that time my host dad and my host siblings were usually leaving and would say a quick goodbye. My host mom, Veronique, would make a fresh pot of coffee, and offer me some freshly baked bread or pastry usually with Nutella or homemade jelly. I then made the 3 minute walk (I was very lucky) to my program center for morning classes which generally ran from about 9am until noon. Depending on whether I had 1 or 2 hours for lunch I would either head to my favorite patisserie for a sandwich and espresso and then quickly return to the center for afternoon classes, or spend my long lunch break at a cafe with quiche, a cappuccino and my friends. I usually had class until 3pm in the afternoon and then I would head to my favorite crepe stand for an afternoon snack. When I got back to my host family's around 4pm all of my host siblings were home.

Usually the five of us would sit around the dining room table and work on schoolwork, they would help me with my French assignments and I would help them with English. Then we would help my host mom prepare dinner which was always ready by 8pm. My entire host family and I would spend 2 hours over dinner and then usually a board game, a TV show (often the Simpsons or Criminal Minds in French) or playing the piano and singing French songs. After cleaning up dinner my host mom and I would finish the day over a cup of tea and French novels or plays that had to do with my class assignments to improve my French. Some nights we would do the same in English as she was trying to improve her English at the local university.

**Highlights:** Throughout the semester I had my grandparents and my younger cousin come to visit me as well as my mom. Introducing my family to my host family was by far the highlight of my experience. I sat in the middle of the dinner table translating back and forth between French and English, explaining to my real family what we were eating, why we were eating things in a certain order, what wine to drink with what food, and describing the differences in French and American meals to my host family. I would say that another highlight, being abroad during an election, was explaining to my host family in French how the American election system worked and having them understand it. I knew then that I had really started to master the French language!

**Challenges:** The first challenge I encountered was public transit in a foreign language. Being an LA local this all seemed extremely foreign to me, but I did figure it out fairly quickly. Another challenge everyone forgets is how hard it is to be abroad during Thanksgiving, my host mom made a "French Thanksgiving" dinner which was so nice of her but it is so hard not to be homesick when you're abroad on Thanksgiving. Finally, in terms of less trivial things, the most difficult thing for me was to let go of my inhibitions when it came to speaking French and doing new things. At the beginning I was so afraid of making a mistake when I spoke or did something culturally incorrect, but as I let go of that fear I was able to embrace Alsatian and French life more and more and truly embrace my study abroad experience.

**Advice:** 1) GO GO GO!!! Study Abroad!!! 2) The most important thing you can do when you are abroad is keep an open mind, stay positive, and keep things in perspective. You will be exposed to new things every day, some will seem great, some may seem pretty horrible, but it is important not to judge anything right away and to investigate why certain things are the way they are. All of these new things you are exposed to (good and bad) are what make study abroad the amazing experience it can be. Finally, don't be afraid. The changes in language, culture, location, living with new people, can all seem very scary at first. It may not be realistic to overcome that fear in the first day so be patient but as the semester or year goes on you will be so grateful you got over your fear and embraced study abroad for all that is it and all that it can be.

