

## J'aime la France; 128 days, 17 countries *by Alvin WU*

### About Grenoble and the host institution – Grenoble Ecole de Management (GEM)

In semester A of the 2018-2019 school year, I was fortunate to be nominated to go for an overseas exchange study. The host institution was *Grenoble École de Management* (GEM), located in Grenoble, France. It is a French graduate business school that specializes in business and management. It was founded in 1984 by the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Grenoble. GEM is known for its teaching in business strategy, finance, and technology management. The school offers undergraduate and graduate programs, as well as executive education on its two French campuses in Grenoble and Paris, and its twelve international campuses.



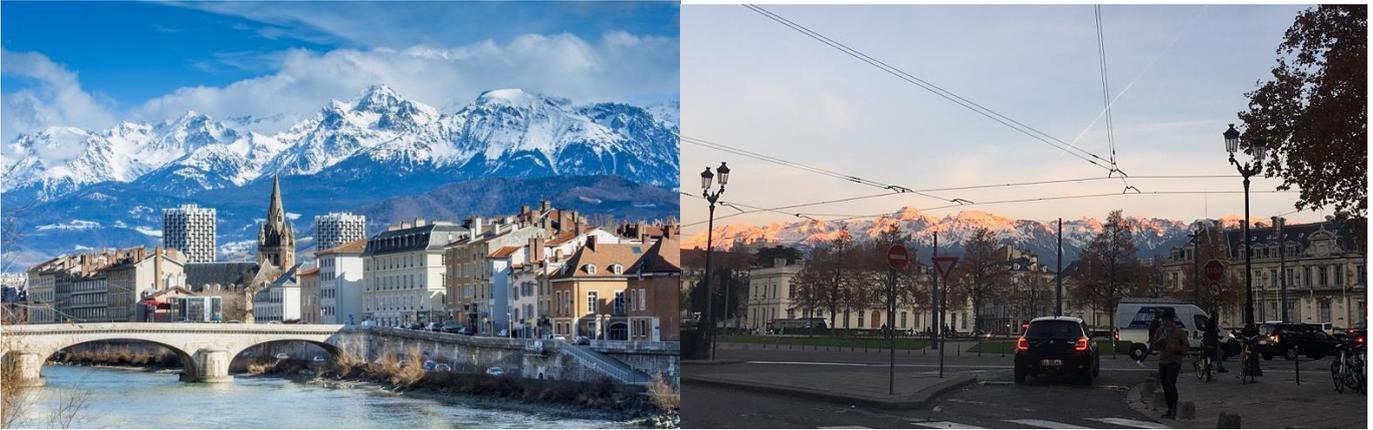
*Grenoble École de Management, Grenoble, France*



*Classmates & buddies in Grenoble*

## About my life

Grenoble is really a perfect place to stay and I easily fell in love with this small city. Moreover, it is located near the Alps, and every day, I was able to enjoy the fresh air and tap water.



*Surrounded by Alps mountains, Grenoble, France*

Grenoble is included in the Rhone-Alpes region, and so I would always called myself a “mountain-area student”, as it is surrounded by the Alps. Originally, I planned to join the ski resort, *Les 2 Alpes*, that held a winter opening on 1<sup>st</sup> of December so I could experience ice-skating and related events on a 3400m mountain. Unfortunately, the date of the activity clashed with my class schedule. If I stayed for one year in Grenoble, I would probably become an ice-skating expert!



*Stockholm, Sweden*

*Plitvice Lakes, Croatia*

Secondly, the geographical location of Grenoble made it so convenient for me to travel around Europe. I travelled to 28 cities and 17 countries during the span of the four-months exchange program. On the map, once can notice that Belgium, United Kingdom and Spain are linked with France, on the west side of Europe, while Grenoble is specifically located near Croatia, Italy, Switzerland, and Germany. Therefore, I made sure to visit all the above-mentioned countries when I had days-off during the weekends!

## Difficulties encountered during the exchange study

### *Language barrier*

As you may know, France is a strong ethnic group that seldom speak English. I remember the time when I was in France, the very first thing I had to do is to purchase all different kinds of insurances, such as resident insurance, school insurance, etc. However, the insurance company staff could only communicate with a limited level of English,

which made it difficult to comprehend each other. Moreover, the copy of the insurances was all written in French. At that moment, I started to panic as I started to think to myself about the fact that how would I be able to seek help if I encountered any safety issues in the future, despite having purchased the insurance?

I also encountered the same situation when I was handling the administration process at the bank. There was only one staff who could speak English. Fortunately, I made some local friends at the University, and they were kind enough to help me, in times of need.

## **Culture and People Insight**

### ***Lifestyle pace***

Initially, it took me some time to adapt to the relaxed lifestyle, coming from a fast-paced bustling city, Hong Kong. Though, in time, I got used to it. I got used to the way of life in France and eventually, I became familiar with it all. I accustomed with the locals, who do not rush, and simply take their own time to complete their tasks – even day to day routine: eating, talking and walking.

### ***Time***

In France, employees can work for around 40 hours per week. The vital aspect about this is that they treat their working hours very seriously. For example, the working hours for a bank is 9am to 6pm. They will immediately stop their services for the day at 6pm sharp, no matter how long you have queued up for. In comparison, in Hong Kong, if you are already in the bank, they will assist you. This was the difference in terms of managing personal off-work time, in these respective countries-

Another interesting aspect in this area was lunchtime. Over there, no one works during lunchtime, even students. At the University, there is a fixed lunchtime in the timetable (i.e. 12:15pm – 1:15pm). There will be no lessons during this one-hour period. It is so different with the situation in Hong Kong, where University students do not have a fixed lunchtime. For instance, here in Hong Kong, I tend to eat my lunch in 10 minutes time, because the next lesson nearly commences. In addition, everyone has a different schedule here, and no fixed time.



*French Onion Soup*



*French Tacos*



*Floating Island*

## **Knowledge and skills acquired**

### ***Language***

Although, language did initially enact as a communication barrier, I did manage to finally settle in my new environment as well as visit a couple of places during this Exchange period. The most interesting knowledge I acquired was not in the classroom, but the way to communicate with different people with different backgrounds and languages. Thanks to the compulsory French course I studied at the University, I learnt basic French words such as “hi” (Bonjour), and “My name is...” (je m'appelle...), to name a few. Besides, I set a goal for myself, to learn “hi” &

“thank you” whenever I visited a new country. For example, when I went to Munich, Germany and I learnt that “Danke” means thank you.

### ***Friends***

The University held a “buddy program”, which allowed new exchange students to get to know each other via different activities, like wine & cheese tasting, bar hopping, and exploring Grenoble together. I met new friends from all over the world through these activities, and even until today, we have kept in touch through Facebook! I believe that someday I can visit them, to reminisce the good days in Grenoble (or maybe, they may visit me in Hong Kong!).

### ***Travelling***

Among all the places I visited, watching a football match in the Manchester United Home Stadium was my most precious experience! As a fan of Manchester United, stepping into the Dream Theatre made my dream come true! In fact, I ticked off some of my life bucket list items during my study abroad: watching Aurora and snow in Finland, climbing the highest mountain in Germany (i.e. Zugspitze), standing in front of Eiffel Tower, etc. All these journeys added beautiful colors to my exchange program and made it an unforgettable memory in my life!



*Santa Claus Village, Rovaniemi, Finland*



*Zugspitze, Top of Germany*



*Old Trafford, Manchester United FC Home Stadium, United Kingdom*

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