

Angers Program 2013

30 Frequently Asked Questions

1. Why do I not have a choice between “home stay” and staying in dorms? What if I don’t like the idea of staying with a family?

Our host families will give you as much or as little independence as you want. Most families host students year-round, and are used to giving students full autonomy. Your only obligation is to take your meals (usually dinner) with your host family and their other students (if applicable). Some students prefer a more structured “family life” and should express their preference on the “family placement form”.

Living with a French family is one of the most rewarding experiences of a study program in France, as it is a unique opportunity to see French culture from the “inside”. The isolation of a campus dorm is not the proper way to explore French culture on short-term programs.

2. Will I know about my family prior to departure?

Yes you will, generally 2-3 weeks prior to departure. Families are selected in advance and with great care by the UCO housing director, but in case there are unexpected changes, such as family emergencies, UCO prefers to wait until the last few weeks to send us the family roster. You will get you family’s address, email and phone number before departure. We encourage you to contact your family as soon as you receive their information.

3. How will I know that this is the “right” family for me?

Selection of families is based on the questionnaire you filled out. Please be very thorough in your answers, to insure proper placement. We try to accommodate all reasonable requests.

4. If I don’t like my family, can I be moved to another?

All families are selected with great care, and we have had very few complaints. However, if you do have a problem, please inform the Director immediately and we will resolve your issue or move you to another family. Remember that families make plans long in advance to welcome you into their homes, and the decision to withdraw a student must be reasonable and fair.

5. How far will my family live from campus?

Some families live very close, some a bit further out and most likely, you will need to travel to school by bus, a very safe and common mode of transportation in French cities. The average bus ride to and from campus is about 10 to 15 minutes. Bus tickets to and from school will be provided to you at no extra charge. However, if you live within 15 minutes walk to school, you will NOT receive a bus pass. Make sure that if you have any

disability or if you cannot walk that distance everyday, you must notify me on your family form.

6. How much money should I bring for my personal expenses?

That depends entirely on your budget. This is an all-expense paid program. You should plan to bring the same amount you would spend in Houston for your outings and entertainment.

7. Should I bring cash, travelers' checks, or credit cards?

You should bring some (limited) cash. I suggest about \$300. You can change money in Houston or wait until you are in France. Banks will not change money The French post office in Angers usually does, or in Paris, you will find many "currency exchange" offices. Or you can get cash at any ATM machine in France using a credit card. ATMs are found on every street corner in France. French banks are not allowed by law to charge a commission for the use of their ATMs. However, your US bank will charge you a transaction fee each time you withdraw cash unless specified by your credit card contract. It is best to withdraw larger sums less often.

If you bring a credit card, be sure it is one from a major bank, which allows you to make purchases or withdraw cash worldwide. Please inform you credit card company that you will be traveling.

If you have no credit cards and prefer to bring cash only, I suggest you use traveler's checks, which is a protection against loss or theft. However, be aware that the exchange rate is not as good for traveler's checks as it is for cash. Also, some places of business don't accept traveler's checks. Some (very few) don't accept American Express credit cards.

8. Should I carry my passport with me at all times?

Only when you travel outside of France or plan to change money will you need your passport. Your ISIC and CIDEF ID cards are accepted everywhere. Please leave your passport in a safe place at your family's home.

ALL STUDENTS MUST HAVE AN ISIC CARD. PLEASE GO TO THE OFFICE OF INTERNATIONAL STUDIES WEBSITE FOR MORE INFORMATION:

<http://www.uh.edu/studyabroad/Faculty%20Led%20Programs.htm>

You can also purchase your ISIC card through a travel agent.

9. Is Angers a "safe" place?

Angers, like any other city in France or Europe is only unsafe if you allow it to be. Although there is far less crime in France (where there is a total ban on guns) than in the US, "petty crimes" are not uncommon, especially in Paris, and being a foreigner, you may be more of a target than a French person, simply because you tend to "stick out" more. My only advice: be aware of your surroundings!

Here are some tips:

- do not walk around with your valuables in obvious reach of another person (in your open shoulder bag, back pack, or back pocket).
- When walking in public, hold your purse or bag tightly. When sitting at a café, do NOT leave your purse on the table or on the floor, or on the back of your chair.

- In public transportation, have your money or tickets ready before you get on the bus or train.
- Only bring one credit card at a time when you go out.
- Do not get distracted by a stranger addressing you, this is the most commonly used trick of pickpockets. Don't be afraid to appear rude.
- If you feel unsafe in any given situation, you probably are, and need to seek immediate assistance. ALWAYS carry the Director's cell phone number and you French family's home phone number.
- If you are lost, find a good, well lit spot to stop and use your map (which you should always carry with you). Don't be afraid to ask people for help.
- Be discreet. No need to call attention to yourself by speaking loudly in English.
- On rare occasions, Frenchmen, especially younger ones, will "whistle" at women on the street or even talk to them in a manner which can be viewed as disrespectful in the US. If this happens to you, act "French", a little arrogant, a little blasé, DO NOT MAKE EYE CONTACT, walk with a purpose, and no one will bother you! Report any occurrence of what you might consider "harassment" to the Director.
- Do not venture out by yourself in places you don't know.

10. What is the exchange rate between the Euro and the dollar?

There are many websites which give you the prime exchange rate to the minute. The one I use is <http://www.xe.com/ucc/>. The exchange rate you will get will include commission not reflected on these websites.

11. Do all European countries also use the Euro?

Yes, most of the countries around France do. One exception: Great Britain.

12. Are activities planned for weekends?

- If you look at the "class schedule and itinerary" (online), you will notice that weekends are free. This is to allow students time to travel on their own, if they wish to do so. There are many things to do around Angers also, and many students in the past have chosen to stay in town and enjoy the beautiful surrounding region and the city itself. If you want to travel, you should plan your trips in advance. It is always more fun to travel in small groups. If you need help planning your own excursions, please contact me at giacchetti@uh.edu

- **Optional Paris excursion.** Based on student demand.

Students who would prefer to go as a group on a weekend Paris excursion must reserve their own accommodations in advance. The program director will accompany them and help them with the organization of their activities, places to visit, and will give them an onsite orientation. However, this is not an excursion for which students will receive a grade, and it is not included in our program fee. Students may plan activities as they wish.

13. What is the best way to travel within France?

Trains will take you anywhere you wish to go. You can also rent a car. However, you must be over 21, and even if you travel with 3 other passengers, this is an expensive mode of transportation: gas is more than double what we pay in the US, insurance is very high, and driving in France implies learning new driving rules.

14. Where do I go to get information about train fares?

The national railroad company (SNCF) has a website where you can purchase your tickets, but it is in French: <http://www.voyages-sncf.com/>

If you want an English language website, they will give you information but are vendors and will charge a steep commission: <http://www.tgv-europe.com/en/home/> or <http://www.tgv-europe.com/>

15. What about traveling outside of France?

Although I do not recommend spending so much time and money traveling to other countries when there is so much to see in France, I understand that some students want to see as much as they can of Europe. Sometimes, the cheapest way to travel is by air. There are “low cost” airlines, which will take you to London, Amsterdam, etc. for cheaper than the train. Easy Jet is the discount airline I would recommend, because they depart from Orly Airport, close to Paris. Any airline departing from the Beauvais airport should be avoided. Also check with Air France, if you are under 25. They have great “youth fares” (unavailable in the US).

16. What is the weather like in France in May-June?

France has a very moderate climate; temperatures rarely go below 40 degrees in the winter or above 90 in the summer (although we have experienced “heat waves” in the past several years). HOWEVER, the weather is very unpredictable. In that late spring season, it is usually cool at night (in the 60s), and pleasantly warm during the day (in the high 70s).

17. What should I pack?

Bring a raincoat and a couple of warm sweaters. And comfortable walking shoes are a MUST! French people dress very casually. Jeans or casual pants are best. Shorts are not as common as in the US but are acceptable.

18. How about hair dryers and computers?

In Europe, not only the electric current is different, but the wall plugs are too. You will need an adapter for all electric and electronic appliances. All laptop computers, cameras, video cameras, come already equipped for both US and European standards. All you need is a small inexpensive adapter (to be found in hardware stores, computer stores, Radio Shack, or the airport). Hair dryers, even the dual standard ones, are notoriously ill equipped to withstand the electric current in France. Some get too hot, some not enough. At your own risk!

19. What is the weight limit for bags?

Regulations concerning weight and size limits for baggage vary from one airline to another, but is normally 50 lbs. Please go to your chosen airline’s website and find their specifications.

However, I URGE you to “travel light”. Laundry is washed every week; you do not need more than 3 pairs of pants and 4 or 5 tops.

Remember this when you start packing: **there are only two kinds of travelers in this world: those who pack light, and those who wish they had.**

Overweight charges on bags are ENORMOUS. It's better to take 2 bags of less than 50 lbs. each than one big overweight bag. (extra charge for second bag runs between \$50 and \$100).

Attention: no sharp objects, no liquids or gels are allowed onboard. Pack your scissors, nail cutters, knives, perfumes, bottles, etc. in your check-in bag.

20. What about toiletry and medication?

All toiletry articles can be purchased in France, but are a bit more expensive than in the US.

All over-the-counter medication (aspirin etc.) can only be purchased in pharmacies in France. They are usually cheaper than in the US because of government regulations.

Only prescriptions by a French doctor will be filled in French pharmacies. Please remember to fill your prescriptions before you go. Many prescription drugs available in the US are not sold in France.

21. How do I call the US from France? How can my family contact me in France?

You have several options to make calls from France to the US:

1. Most US mobile phones can be used in France, but you will need to contact your cell phone company before departure, as this is not always a standard service.
2. You can purchase a cheap cell phone in France, using prepaid minutes. To be used in case of emergency and to receive calls (calls to a French cell phone are free to the receiver of the call).
3. You can use any VOIP service, if you have a computer.
5. Some public phones (as in the airport) will allow you to use your credit card to make a phone call.

Your US family can call you at your host family's number. However, we ask that you limit the use of the family phone. And remember that France is 7 hours ahead of Houston.

NOTE: all French cell phone numbers will have a 06 prefix (as opposed to 02 for a landline in Angers). When calling a cell phone number, remember that the caller is the payer. Calling cell phones is quite expensive.

To call a number in the USA from France, dial :

00 (international prefix), then 1 (US prefix), then the number.

To call a number in France from the USA, dial:

011 (international prefix), then 33 (country code for France), then the regional code in France (1 for Paris, 2 for Angers, 6 for a cell number), then the number.

22. What is the most inexpensive way to make international calls?

If you have your own laptop computer, enroll in SKYPE! This service is free if you call from computer to computer (and you can use your web cam!). If you call from your computer to a landline or cell phone, you will be charged a fraction of the cost of regular phone service. You must purchase pre-paid "SKYPE-OUT" minutes for this service. There are many other such services, such as google.

23. Will I have free access to the Internet in France?

Yes you will. The CIDEF will provide free wireless access and if you do not have your own computer, you can use the computer room at the CIDEF, during business hours. Also, there are Internet cafés in Angers, but they charge a fee. Angers is equipped with free internet access in some areas of town.

Your family will also provide you with wireless internet access. Their service may be a bit slower than the university's.

24. Should I bring my lap-top computer?

If you are going to enroll in upper-level French, YES! If you are enrolled in second-year French, this is optional, but recommended.

However, we ask that you limit your time on the internet. After all, your time in France is best spent.....in France, not in cyberspace!

25. How do I get in touch with the rest of the group before departure?

We have a distribution list, which includes all participants. All names and addresses will be disclosed to the group, to allow students to communicate among themselves.

26. How do I get in touch with the rest of the group after departure?

A list of the families' phone numbers will be given to all participants. The director's cell phone number will also be given to you, so that you can be "in touch" at all times.

27. HOW DO I GET MY AIRLINE TICKET? WHICH AIRLINE DO YOU RECOMMEND?

You can contact a travel agent or purchase your ticket directly from the airline. You can purchase your ticket through "discounters" as well. **Air France (Delta)** is the only carrier for direct flights to Paris. However, you can find much cheaper flights if you are willing to make stops.

We also use a student travel agency, "STA" who can give you good deals on fares and allow you to purchase refundable tickets (a MUST if you plan to "maybe" stay longer....). go to <http://www.statravel.com/>

Please note: we will be departing for Angers by bus from CDG airport. **THE BUS WILL DEPART AT 1 PM ON MAY 23 (there is a next day arrival for all transatlantic flights to Europe)**. This means that you MUST have an arrival time in Paris no later than 12:00 noon. For our return to Paris CDG on June 23, our bus will arrive at CDG airport around 9 AM. Please be sure to book your flights **no earlier than 11 AM that day**, or arrange for your own separate transportation on the day before (at your own expense).

28. How much is UH tuition (and fees) for this program?

This information is listed online. Please go to <http://www.uh.edu/sfs/>

And click on “tuition and fees”.

29. What is the “fee waiver”?

Since the summer of 2009, students who participate in the faculty-led study abroad programs receive a fee waiver of \$500 for 6 credit hours. This amount will be credited to you account at the time of payment.

30. Who are the program administrators in Houston and Angers?

At UH:

Program director: Dr. Claudine Giacchetti: Giacchetti@uh.edu

Program director’s assistant: Ben Ferree: ben.ferree@gmail.com

Business Administrator: Ms. Devianee Vasanjee: dcvasanj@Central.UH.EDU

Office coordinator: Ms. Adrienne Campbell: AECampbe@Central.UH.EDU

At UCO/CIDEF (Angers)

CIDEF director: Mr. Marc Melin (CIDEF is our host Language Institute within the Université Catholique de l’Ouest, UCO).

CIDEF academic director: Mr. Yves Loiseau.

UCO director of student housing: Mrs. Sylvie de Kepper.

UCO family coordinator: Mrs. Dominique Le Gal.

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