



Living in the South

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I studied in Aix-en-Provence in the Fall of 2006 and moved to Marseille for Spring 2007, with the American University Center of Provence. These experiences, though with the same organization, were quite different. Aix-en-Provence is a small and beautiful place, laden with fountains, history, wealthy people and foreign exchange students. It was a good place to begin my study of what the American University Center of Provence puts as "French language and culture." Here, I was able to improve my rather low French skills in an extremely non-threatening environment. Aix is charming; it is also extremely expensive making it often difficult to participate in the nightlife for this very reason.

Where Aix-en-Provence was, for me, about learning about this new country and trying to fit into it, Marseille was about really participating and exploring and becoming part of that wonderful city. Though only a 30-minute bus ride from Aix-en-Provence, Marseille is incredibly different. The city sits on the Mediterranean, with ports that are extremely telling of Marseille's development with old forts, fish markets, and cruise liners coming and going from North Africa.

The Marseille program itself focuses on France within an international context, mainly between France and the Middle East and North Africa. The courses I took-including Islam, Arabic, Immigrant Identities, and language courses- were interesting and helpful in understanding France's evolution and current situation. Outside of class, I had an amazing, dynamic, and open French host family. I spent much of my time exploring the surrounding nature or in a tea salon sipping Syrian teas and listening to Algerian music. In short, Marseille has an extraordinary amount to offer. It is an open and welcoming place full of people who love to talk to you-in English, French, or Arabic.

The AUCP programs offer a look into French culture, examining the idiosyncrasies of at least American and French societies. While at times these insights may have clashed with the liberal students perspective, the lessons we had were always interesting- sometimes charged with debate- and often helpful. I found that as a student of these programs, and as a student who stayed the full year, I enjoyed my time more than people in other programs. Aix-en-Provence and Marseille offer very different experiences but I took a great deal from each program and each city. Nonetheless, the fervor for soccer, the Mediterranean cuisine, and the beautiful countryside is inescapable from the South of France, no matter which program you choose and through the endless options for explorations: by bus or bike or boat or foot.

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