



#### HEAD ADMISSIONS OFFICE

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## PRE-ARRIVAL ORIENTATION 2003-2004

### Congratulations!

You have been accepted for a semester or an academic year of study at the AUCP and will soon begin one of the most intense and rewarding adventures of your life. Before that time, in the months and weeks to come, *what can you do to prepare yourself* quickly and effectively to make the most of your study abroad experience? The following will attempt to answer that question as practically and directly as possible.

This is not a discussion of the merits of study abroad, nor is it an in-depth guide to what to expect in French life and your French family. The AUCP orientation, your class work, and your weekly sessions in French Cultural Patterns will address these matters on a regular basis, and the AUCP faculty and staff are always available for help. Instead, this guide concerns the nuts and bolts of getting you from where you are to Aix-en-Provence in the best possible shape, with your paperwork taken care of and your bags properly packed.

We'll start with *le côté administratif* : where to send forms, communication questions, passports, prerequisites, and so forth. Then we'll turn to physical matters : what exactly should you bring with you? Finally, we'll suggest some ways to approach the upcoming experience mentally and emotionally. You can have a visa and current passport and take everything you need, but if you're not prepared in your head and your heart, the experience can be pretty rocky, especially at first.

### Correspondence

Return all forms and address other mailed correspondence directly to the AUCP :

**American University Center of Provence**  
**La Maison des Palmiers**  
**19, cours des Arts et Métiers**  
**13100 Aix-en-Provence, France**  
Tel : 011 33 442.38.42.38;  
Fax : 011 33 442.38.95.66  
Engle home phone for emergencies :  
[33] 442.91.39.01  
E-mail : engle@aucp.org

Don't forget that there is a six hour time difference with the East Coast (9 am in New York = 3 pm in Aix-en-Provence).

Students have a mailbox at the AUCP; please have your personal mail sent c/o American University Center of Provence at the above address.

## E-mail

While you may use e-mail for correspondence before your arrival, students will not have regular access to e-mail in Aix, either to send or to receive mail. Please do not give this e-mail address to families and friends. You may wish to arrange an automatic response for your U.S. e-mail, indicating that you will be out of electronic contact during your stay in France. The rationale for this policy is clear. At the AUCP we want our students to live French lives and participate fully in the local scene. We have learned that, with the ease of electronic communication, it is difficult to make the psychological break necessary for full cultural integration. E-mail and Internet contact with home universities is possible for specific academic purposes.

## Getting Ready to Go

**Passport :** Make sure that you have an up-to-date passport. If you have never had a passport, contact the Passport Office nearest you as soon as possible. Adult passports are good for ten years. If you already have a passport, ***verify that it is valid and will be valid for the duration of your stay abroad, plus three months.*** Do this now just to be sure. Your heart will sink on the day scheduled for departure if you suddenly find that it is not.

**French Student Visa :** As a student in France, you will be required by French law to have a student visa. To receive your student visa, you will need to present to officers of the French consulate the enclosed *attestation*, or statement, certifying that you are enrolled in the AUCP program. You will also be asked for a letter guaranteeing that you are covered by American insurance during your stay in France or will be purchasing such coverage, as well as a statement of financial guarantee. Models of these letters are included.

Once you have the application form, visas can be taken care of by mail, but delays sometimes occur. If possible, it is probably best to go in person. Call your nearest French consulate as soon as possible for appropriate forms and procedures. *In filling out your visa application, be sure to specify D for "Type of visa".* Internet site *info-france-usa.org* lists all the French consulates in the US and provides other helpful information.

So, what you'll need for your visa :

- U.S. passport valid for three months beyond your return date from France,
- I.D. photo,
- the *attestation* supplied by AUCP,
- the notarized statement proving your financial resources,
- the proof of health insurance,
- and a self-addressed stamped envelope.

### One Semester Students

You will need a student visa, good for six months. Even if you plan to stay slightly more than six months for travel after the program, do *not* get a long-term visa (*visa long séjour*), for this involves much unnecessary cost and effort.

### Full-Year Students

You will need a long-term visa, available through your nearest French consulate. Once in Aix, the AUCP will arrange with local authorities for a mandatory medical visit (even if you've already had one in the States), there is no additional charge for this. It is important that you fill out the form for your *carte de séjour* application so we can start the paperwork prior to your arrival.

## Home University Paperwork

Have you filled out all necessary forms and taken care of appropriate university paperwork? This includes an authorization by your Dean or other responsible official indicating that AUCP course work is accepted for home university credit transfer (in most cases, this has already been taken care of on your application form). Are there any financial aid matters that still merit attention? What about course enrollment for the following term or academic year at your home school? Should you consider bringing your college catalogue in order to take care of such matters? Remember to make provisions for lottery dormitory selection and other such things.

## NOT TO FORGET

- **Student Arrival Form** (See "When and How to Arrive" below.) Make sure also to call and confirm your "pick up" the week before your arrival.
- **Four I.D. photos** Good quality, recently taken passport quality photo. *Keep in mind that the photo you supply will be your host family's first contact with you, and they will refer to it when they go to pick you up at the airport or train station when you arrive in Aix. Does the photo look like the real you?* The photos will also be used for your student card and other documents.
- **Tuition payments** should continue according to the "Payment Schedule." Canceled checks are considered receipts, but a formal receipt will be prepared upon request.
- **Health form and health insurance:** a health form is included in these materials; please ask a doctor to fill it out carefully. All students are also required to send written proof of valid overseas health insurance.

## Personal Finance

It is important to plan now how you wish to deal with personal financial matters while overseas. Carrying large amounts of cash is strongly discouraged. Most students find that Visa or Master card (four number code) cash dispensers are by far the most convenient means of obtaining funds. Here in Aix, you can withdraw cash amounts in euros directly from your US account. There are numerous automatic teller machines in France and in Europe. Visa (*CarteBleue*) is by far the most popular, but Master Card, Cirrus, American Express are also served.

You may wish to come with traveler's checks. If so, you can have them made in dollars or in euros. The American Express office on the Cours Mirabeau will exchange them readily for you for a euro cash equivalent.

Full year students may wish to open a bank account in Aix-en-Provence. The AUCP will help you with the necessary paperwork. After that, you may transfer U.S. funds to it in three ways : 1) by U.S. cashier's check in dollar (regular amounts--no cents) or euros; 2) travelers' checks in euros or dollars or 3) by "Swift" bank transfer. For emergency funds, a Travelers Express MoneyGram can be wired to you via a US office in dollars; you claim the wired amount 10 minutes later in one of the three offices in Aix-en-Provence.

## Personal Budget

*How much spending money should you bring?* This is obviously a very personal matter. As a guide, consider the following list of approximate prices for Aix in the spring of 2003. The list includes purely social activities and lunches uncovered by housing costs as well as certain activities that might be used to satisfy French Practicum cultural integration requirements.

Approximate prices are given in euros (check the recent dollar rate) :

<i>Croissant</i> 0,80 €	Newspaper 1,20 € - 1,50 €
Coffee in a cafe 1,20 € - 1,80 €	One bus ride 0,60 €
Coke in a <i>café</i> 2,10 €, AUCP machine 0,80 €	Movie ca. 4 € with student discount
Draft beer 2,20 €	Taxi ride 8 €, distance within city limits
Piece of pizza or sandwich 2,30 € - 3,80 €	Museum admission 3 €
Small Perrier 2,60 €	Jazz, night club/admission 12 € - 15 €
Lunch at French univ. cafeteria 3,20 €	Round trip to Paris plane, youth fare ca. 115 €
<i>Baguette</i> 0,60 €	Round trip to Marseille (bus) : 5,50 €
Inexpensive restaurant meal <i>menu, no wine</i> 9 €	License to join sports team or club : 46 €
Swimming pool 2,10 €	Health club (month) 23 €

A note regarding weekday lunches : AUCP students are given access to a refrigerator and kitchen privileges for lunch preparation. Many choose to prepare their own lunches from local products that they buy themselves. Students discover the simple pleasures of homemade salads with Provençal olive oil dressing and the goat and sheep cheeses from the region.

### French Practicum Activities

As part of French Practicum, students are required to join a local organization, club, or team. Sports generally involve some form of one-time licensing and proof of insurance; gym or health club activities are naturally more expensive (see above). Belonging to something like a drama group or hiking club will usually involve a membership fee (around 23 €). A pottery or photography class can cost about 122 € for the semester.

### Special Opportunities

Each semester the AUCP organizes two optional classes :

**Cooking class** with the internationally respected chef Bruno Ungaro; a hands-on, lively, privileged experience; four three-hour classes, meal included, 165 €.

**Wine tasting class** with the director of the local *Institut d'Oenologie*. An opportunity to refine your senses and learn to appreciate and discuss the wines of France. A series of four two-hour classes, 65 €.

### Travel Arrangements

#### Your Arrival

Make plane reservations early. **Plan your arrival in Aix for the Saturday just before orientation.** Arriving on Saturday will allow you a free day to start getting over jet lag and start getting acquainted with Aix and with your host family. Even if you plan to travel before the semester starts, it is better for host families and all concerned if **you do not arrive in Aix any earlier than this date.** In exceptional cases where the host family will agree to house an early arrival for a day or two, the student arriving early will be billed a supplemental charge of \$50 per day.

#### Getting to and from Aix

The easiest, most direct route to Aix is by plane to Paris (or other European city) with connecting flight to the Marseille-Provence airport (25 min. by car or bus to Aix). On a map, Nice may seem close to Aix, but it is a good two hours by bus and more by train; the Marseille airport is much more convenient. Remember to book your flight straight through to Marseille. Unless you plan to stop off several days in Paris on your way to Aix, it is not wise to fly to Paris and then take the TGV fast train to Aix. Why trouble your tired self with the transfers--which are so difficult with your luggage--when you can fly easily to Marseille?

### **Why the AUCP Does Not Organize a "Group Flight"**

You have chosen the AUCP program because you are a motivated, curious, independent person who wants genuine contact with the French and their culture. Abroad, you are going to be challenged in new and enriching ways. One unfortunately common way to react to the constant daily challenge of new experiences in a foreign country is to seek the security and comfort of other Americans or other English speakers. Even if this may be your first long trip out of the U.S., though, *plan to travel alone*. You can do it and much more.

Like any kind of group travel, traveling with a number of other students will provide certain comforts, but it will set an unfortunate personal precedent by, in effect, cutting you off from your first contact with French culture and the magic of your interaction with that culture.

### **Pick-up upon arrival**

Your French host family will be at the airport (Marseille only) or train station (Aix only) to welcome you when you arrive. Don't forget to send in your arrival form as soon as possible, and call the AUCP no earlier than the Tuesday before your arrival in Aix to confirm your pick-up and get your host family's name, address and phone.

### **Departure**

In making your round-trip reservations, remember that for Fall you are free to leave as of Thursday, December 18, 2003 (after finals) and for Spring as of Friday May 21, 2004 (after finals). You may in both cases remain in your French homestay through the following Saturday night. Departure is mandatory on Sunday. See the heading *AUCP Calendar* below.

### **AUCP Calendar**

**Academic Calendar :** The 2003-2004 AUCP calendar is enclosed. Additional holidays may be announced, and the AUCP reserves the right to alter the calendar according to local needs.

### **Housing**

Fall Semester: AUCP finals finish on Thursday of exam week. You may however remain in your AUCP housing through the night of Saturday, December 20, 2003.

Full year students and fall semester students returning after the holidays for French university final exams may return to their housing as of the night of January 5, 2004.

Spring Semester: students arrive on Saturday, January 17, 2004 and are welcomed by their host families on that date. AUCP finals end on Friday, May 21<sup>st</sup> since Thursday May 20<sup>th</sup> is a national holiday. You may however remain in your housing through the night of Saturday, May 22.

### **Final Examinations**

While final examinations are given during the periods announced on the enclosed calendar, the exact order of exams is not announced until mid-semester. Do not make any arrangements to travel until after the announced final exam period. **Early finals may not be given for any reason.**

### **Student ID and Driver's License**

At the AUCP you will have a student picture ID that will be useful for student discounts for movies, travel, etc. You will not need an International Student ID. Nor will you need an International Driver's License; you will probably not need to drive while abroad, but if you do, your American license is sufficient.

## **Clothes to Bring**

Naturally, what you choose to bring will be a question of personal preference. That said, some advice based on years of experience with students in Aix may be useful.

*Pack light!* Unless you are a real clothes horse, you should be able to bring everything you need in one suitcase and a piece of hand luggage.

**Your French Look :** While young French people dress like young people the world over (jeans, etc.), the general standard of dress in France is more formal than in the U.S. In other words, it is perhaps better to err in the direction of formality than in the direction of casualness. Men should come equipped with at least one nice outfit of slacks, tie, and coat, and women with dresses and skirts. When you are invited to French homes for dinner, you will need to dress up; the same goes for the occasional trip to a nice restaurant or the theater that you should try to build into your budget.

Remember, too, that while clothing style is a very personal thing, you may not want to signal your American identity long-distance. In other words, given your desire to integrate into French culture, the Walkman or baseball cap would be more appropriate left in the U.S. than brought to France.

## **Laptop Computer**

Due to problems of theft, the difference in electric current, and the possible unreliability of transformers, we do not recommend that you bring a laptop computer. Ten high quality computers for student word processing use are available M-F from 8h30-19h.

## **Security**

Consider a money bag or belt that can be worn close to the body in order to protect money and documents on the train and in other public places. In terms of crimes against persons, you are much safer in France than in most places in the U.S., but there is a big problem with casual theft. If you learn good habits, you won't have any problem.

## **Weather**

The winter months in Provence will surprise you--it is much colder here than people often think. At night the temperature will descend frequently into the 20's or 'teens (Fahrenheit), or below. And when the *mistral* blows, the words "wind chill factor" will take on new meaning! It typically snows once or twice a winter. As people walk a great deal in France, you'll spend a good bit of time outdoors and will need a very warm coat, as well as warm gloves, mufflers, and an umbrella and/or rain jacket or poncho. Remember too that houses in France are usually not heated to American standards; think about "layers" : sweaters, long-sleeved thermal undershirts, etc.

The fall is generally quite temperate and pleasant, with cold weather arriving in early November. The coldest months are January and February. Spring arrives in March or early April. The hottest time of the year is late June through mid-August (90's). The rainiest time is the spring.

## **What You Can't Find (or Afford) in France**

You'll find that most products available in the U.S. are available in France; in general, they are only slightly more expensive. It's thus hardly worthwhile to come armed with extra tubes of toothpaste, etc. Certain products, though, are difficult to come by or are excessively expensive in France:

- Vitamins and aspirin (or aspirin substitutes) are much more expensive; consider a stock for your whole stay.
- Contact lens solutions : all available in France, but more expensive.
- Your prescription medicines : think ahead for your whole time in Aix.

## Books

**Dictionary** : you will need a big, high-quality English-French, French-English dictionary, preferably Robert and Collins. If you are serious about your French, this is an indispensable tool that should not be confused with a small pocketbook dictionary which can help when you're traveling but is clearly insufficient for serious work. In France such a dictionary will cost about 40 €. It's also a good idea to bring along other language learning tools such as *501 French Verbs* (Barron's) or phrase books that you have found helpful in the past.

**Leisure Reading** : Though your primary goal is greater understanding of the French language and culture, you may well wish to unwind with fiction and non-fiction in English. There's certainly nothing shameful about reading a bit in your mother tongue; in fact, it can be very helpful given the early stresses of life abroad. English language books are expensive and somewhat rare in Aix, so think about throwing in some reading for the term.

## Specialty Items

One of the best ways to get to know the French--to get to know anyone, for that matter--is to share interests with them. French Practicum is in part based upon this principle. Keep it in mind as you pack. Do you have any special interests or hobbies that you can practice while in France? Do you imagine playing a particular sport in Aix? If you need any special equipment, whether it be football cleats, brushes and paints, hiking boots, or a telephoto lens for your camera, remember that it might come in very handy. As part of a painting class at the *Maison des jeunes et de la culture*, or as linebacker for Aix's French champion American football team *Les Argonautes*, or as a member of *les Excursionnistes Aixois*, you will be placing yourself into the kind of natural, non-"touristy" contact with the French population that leads to real friendships. **If you play a portable musical instrument, bring it!**

## Gifts

When you arrive, it would be nice to bring a gift for your French hosts. For this you might ask yourself if there is a particular product that is typical of the region or town where you live or grew up, a picture book from the region might be appreciated, for example. The best time to present your gift is at the end of an evening meal when everyone is still gathered at the table. Present it with affection, which is more important than the gift itself.

## Your Host Family

Though you will naturally be curious early on to know about the family with which you will be living, it is AUCP policy not to reveal names or other information until the Tuesday before your Saturday arrival. When you phone that week to confirm your arrival, you will be given the name, address, phone number of your French host family.

## Your Frame of Mind

Perhaps the most important thing to prepare before you leave is your way of looking at the experience to come. When you arrive and throughout your stay, we'll try to address issues such as culture shock and cultural / linguistic adaptation. For now, it might be best just to keep things simple and address a very few important principles :

**Study Abroad Means Study** : A quick word about a vital issue. Study abroad should be an extension of your American university experience--different, to be sure (that's its charm), but still serious academic work that fits into your personal progression towards your degree. You'll have great pleasure taking off and seeing a bit of Europe over mid-term breaks. **But the AUCP is not a base for European travel.** It is a center for academic work tied securely to your cultural experience, and it is a base for your personal integration into the local French community. Your teachers will insist that you attend class regularly, and we will do all we can to make sure that you have frequent French contacts of high quality. The foundation for the total experience is your course work at the Center and at the French university.

**Remember, Other Cultures Play By Other Rules :** In the abstract, you're no doubt very much aware of this. In practical, day-to-day life, it can be a tough thing to experience. It's not that everything will be different--in fact, you may be pleasantly (or unpleasantly) surprised by how much certain aspects of French life seem so "American." Beneath surfaces, though, at the deep, structural level of culture, France and America differ greatly. You'll see this a million times a day, in the way clerks address you in stores, in the size of French food packaging, in the greetings of French friends, in the way people drive, in the ritual of dinner.

The accumulation of all this can be dizzying and even depressing, especially at first. At those times, remember why you came--expressly to learn about another culture from the inside (and probably a great deal about yourself in the process).

**Try Not to Have Too Many Preconceptions :** While it is fun and natural to think about the experience to come, try to avoid having too fixed and clear an image in your mind of what the town, your French hosts, their homes, etc. will be like. It's important even now to cultivate a flexible, curious, open attitude towards the French, their culture, and your role in that culture. Prepare yourself to observe without judging, and never forget that you're a guest.

**Get Ready to Be Unhappy Some of the Time :** Not a very promising bit of advice, but necessary, for the experience of adapting to a new culture can be very traumatic. You should be aware of this. You should also know that it's a wonderful, thrilling, and life-enhancing experience. At times, though—especially at first--the going will be tough.

You're probably going to arrive in France jet-lagged, lonely, and something close to miserable. You'll want to go home. At times like this, psyche yourself up; tell yourself that this is part of the challenge. There will also be many moments when you say to yourself that you couldn't imagine being happier anywhere else. But there will be others that can be difficult, and it would be dishonest not to insist a bit upon this fact. Remember too that at the AUCP we're here to help you get over the hard times.

### **A Final Word**

This pre-orientation sheet is necessarily brief and to-the-point. If you have any further questions, please do not hesitate to contact us. The staff and faculty of the AUCP are always available to help you.

Remember that this is *your* experience. It will be exactly what *you* make of it. Approached with curiosity, understanding, openness, self-discipline, and affection, it will be an unforgettable adventure.