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Aix en Provence, France

Even when I was living in one of the most affected areas during the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, I can wholeheartedly say that studying abroad was one of the best decisions I've made in my academic career. Not only did I improve my competency and fluency in the French language, but I was able to connect with other international students and develop meaningful relationships with my professors. The warm winter weather and close proximity to the Mediterranean weren't bad, either.

I'm currently a Microbiology student with a French minor. It has been somewhat difficult incorporating the French curriculum into my degree plan, but my French courses are some of my favorite courses that I've taken at CSU. When I discovered the study abroad opportunity in Aix, I knew it would be worthwhile to pursue and that it would significantly prepare me for my future career as a global epidemiologist.

I decided to start my semester in Aix en Provence a little early so that I could visit one of my closest friends who lives in Lille, France. I arrived just in time for the winter holiday celebrations. Between New Year's Eve and my friend's birthday, I was in celebration mode for around 2 weeks. That meant lots of eating, lots of dancing, lots of drinking champagne, and lots of cheese. After staying with my friend's family and doing some light traveling in the northern region of France and Belgium, I jumped on a 6-hour train to meet my host family: Nuria, her two children, Maxime and Magalie, and their beloved cat, Sushi. It turns out that they were also in celebration mode. As a result, I was eating arguably more cheese than I have ever eaten in my

life. They welcomed me into their home with open arms, helped me acclimate to life in France, and were incredibly patient with my intermediate French skills.

Before my classes began, I took a language placement exam. I was placed in a class with another CSU student, and we grew to be close friends. I spent 18-20 hours in the classroom per week under an intensive French language curriculum, so it was nice to speak English with someone under the same circumstances. Though the courses were challenging, she and I had a wonderful group of friends that we spent our weekends and free time with. Our friend group consisted of three CSU students, one student from England, and two from Scandinavia. We loved exploring the areas of southern France together and were able to make some incredible memories. We were usually eating crepes, traveling, or just having fun together. We were all very disappointed when our time was cut short together but have still remained in touch.

Even though I left France about a month and a half earlier than I had anticipated, I feel incredibly grateful for my time abroad. The COVID-19 pandemic made me realize just how much support I have within my CSU communities, my professors, my personal relationships, and my scholarship sponsors. Because of them, I traveled to multiple countries, improved my French, deepened my cultural knowledge, and made lifelong connections that I will always cherish. Thank you so much for supporting my unforgettable experience through this enrichment award!

