

LEONARDO OUTWARD PROGRAMME

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Work Placement in KPDB SCP D'Avocats

Apart from imagining myself sipping a glass of red with vines stretching into the sunny distance, I was unsure what to expect from my time in Bordeaux. Having enjoyed taking my A Level fully six years before leaving, and promptly doing almost anything except keeping up my French, my main motivation was to try and dust off the long-forgotten tenses and discover a country I had spent very little time in.



As we were to be placed with host families in Bordeaux the plane ride was an anxious time; in baggage reclaim we all looked and felt caught in some very bright headlights. Upon arrival, though, my fears were allayed as a very smart, petite French lady welcomed me and I immediately warmed to her as we struggled to fit my enormous suitcase in her teeny Polo. Over the months, we struck up a strong relationship and some of my best moments in Bordeaux were spent over dinners with her and her family; complete with confit duck, oysters from the nearby Basin d'Arcachon (it is normal to eat twelve apiece as a starter!), and lots of good wine, even if I did have to adjust a little to the French table stamina; at my first dinner party I nearly nodded off into my tarte au citron after five hours of dining. Living with a host family forced me to speak French every day; for the first time in my life days would pass when I

didn't speak any English, and it provided a real window on Bordelaise culture and lots of new friends to boot. The people I met were always willing to chat with me in French, and once I got past the obligatory, good-spirited banter about rain, fruit puddings and sausages for breakfast (an inconceivable thought for a French person), interested in what I was doing.

As a group from ECTARC, we soon got down to exploring all Bordeaux has to offer. It is a sophisticated confection of a city, with a vibrant riverside and lots of green spaces; you are never far from an ornate shutter or a glass of wine. We soon established a 'local' wine bar and spent many weekends exploring the seaside, the vineyards, and I even took my first trip to Spain discovering the romantic seaside town of San Sebastian. There were also new friends to be made as there were people from all over Europe doing the Leonardo programme.

I studied Law in University so I was placed with a Solicitor's firm in Bordeaux. My apprehension grew at this news as images of me being asked to write letters to clients or sweating, buried beneath a pile of leather-bound books in French flashed before my eyes.

However, daunted as I was by the task, my Tutor at KPDB welcomed me with exuberance and enthusiasm and it became clear that everyone had taken it upon themselves to teach me about life as a lawyer in Bordeaux. Lawyers were generous in allowing me to attend court hearings and in explaining cases to me, which was perfect because in spending days running around with a notepad, I was able to gain what felt like a thorough grounding in French law simply by seeing it in action. The biggest surprise of my placement was how willing people were to give to *me* in terms of time, advice and explanations.

As I progressed I was given some work to do independently and some highlights were translating a medical tribunal for an English client, and working on applications to legally change the sex of transsexuals, which was interesting because of the sense of achievement at drafting my first official documents in French, and also because it meant working with clients with fascinating stories to tell. I am going to start my career in an international law firm and with the progress I have made linguistically I will be keen to try and work in France for a time. From the three-week language course at the beginning, to the living allowance, travel expenses and food costs, Leonardo is really a fantastic option for someone looking to learn French and develop their career whilst travelling and taking in a new culture.

From Sundays mornings bartering over antiques at the flea market in St Michel, to a private tour of a five hundred year old chateau in St Emilion complete with wine tasting; not to mention a summer that seemed to go on until December; I found the programme both a rewarding and fascinating way to spend three months.