

Polytech Student about Internship in France

SPbPU Master's degree student Svetlana Petrenko is sure that all the dreams come true. Recently Svetlana has returned back from France, where she had done an internship at Ecole Polytechnique. On arrival she told us about the differences between Russian and French educational systems, French students' life, shared her experience in communication with foreign students and made her own rating of places which everyone should visit in France.



- Svetlana, why did you decide to go to France?

- France is a country I've always wanted to visit. Here at Polytech I study at the Institute of Applied Mathematics and Mechanics (IAMM), Mechanics and Control Department. My International Master's Degree Program is called '[Continuum Mechanics: Fundamentals and Applications](#)'. During my studying professor Eric Charkaluk from Ecole Polytechnique visited Russia twice and gave us lectures. I know that Ecole Polytechnique is one of the best European universities in mechanics, and I was really glad that there are special internships for foreign students. I learnt about laboratories and research topics on the website of the University, submitted my documents and went to France!

- What should you pay the most attention to?

- Be ready to obtain necessary documents, statements of good health, etc. You should have medical assessment surveyed by your medical doctor, vaccination certificate, electrocardiogram, various medical analyses. Then in France you should go to the hospital where English-speaking doctor will examine your health. In an ordinary hospital no one speaks English, because in France second language skills are not compulsory.

- How long was your internship?

- I have studied at Ecole Polytechnique for 2 months. It's rather short space of time, usually an internship lasts 4 - 6 months. But I had to present my Master's thesis, and that is why I returned back. On arrival I've already visited Moscow. There was a prize distribution ceremony, and I was medalled.

- What medal did you have?

- Gold medal of the Russian Academy of Science. I was very happy to get it!



- Congratulations! Svetlana, what is your Master's thesis about?

- It is connected with mechanochemistry. My Master's thesis is about materials

which change its structure because of chemical reactions under different loads. My internship in France was also connected with these processes, though my academic advisors (prof. Alexander B. Freidin at SPbPU and prof. Eric Charkaluk at Ecole Polytechnique) had thought a lot about my tasks. Professor Eric Charkaluk in France deals with fatigue and plasticity topics, so I started to work with plasticity. It is related with Li-ion batteries, and my Master's thesis is also connected with them.

- Did you speak English or French during your internship?

- My internship was in English. The students there were from all over the world. I didn't have problems with communication, everyone was friendly. I met some new friends in the University canteen, and they introduced me to others. At the laboratories everyone was ready to speak, to help or to give an advice. Some little problems were connected with non-working moments. For example, when you communicate with a French student one on one, he or she would speak English, but when you join some company, people there would speak French. And even if you have learnt French before, you can be faced with a difficulty, because there are few places where you can learn spoken French.

- How do you find Ecole Polytechnique? What is about its infrastructure, laboratories?

- There is a digital badge system at Ecole Polytechnique. It's very comfortable, because it allows you to access the University building, laboratories and University canteen, and also you can use it as a payment card. There are lots of sport clubs: rowing, swimming, climbing, fencing, horse riding, various courts, football fields – whatever you want. However, in order to join any of the clubs, you must provide all the medical reports I mentioned earlier.

- How much does the student dormitory cost?

- It costs EUR 430 per month. I lived in a Short Term Housing, and it was much cheaper: EUR 200 per month. This sum was paid to me as a foreign student support. Also I had a scholarship in the amount of EUR 500 per month.

- You told about the differences in Russian and French educational system.

- Yes, there are some differences. For example, French students choose educational courses according to their own choice. At first they have some basic courses, but the following year students choose the courses by themselves. It can be whatever they want: Art, IT or Economics. When they apply to the PhD degree, the reasons of their choice become clear: for example, in future the student is going to have his own laboratory: that is why he studies Science and Economics. Also the majority of French students pay attention to the development of writing skills. In Russia most of the exams are in the form of a test.

- What would you advise to students who are going to study in a foreign

country?

- I would advise them not being afraid of foreign language. I have thought that my English knowledge was not enough to study abroad, and it was the only reason why I haven't gone to some foreign university before. Don't be afraid! For example, English is not native language in France, so nobody expects you to speak in a perfect way.



- What places in France should everyone visit in your opinion?

- I think it is Latin Quarter in Paris. There are Pierre and Marie Curie University, Sorbonne, Luxembourg garden, Pantheon. Pantheon is one of the most significant buildings for French people. The second place you should visit is Montmartre. It is very picturesque, and many great artists lived there. Nowadays famous artists, musicians and actors also live and work in Montmartre. Then come to the square in front of Opera Garnier. By the way, for young people and students under the age of 26, there are discounts for travel, trips to museums and theaters in France.

- Svetlana, thank you very much for the interview! Wish you good luck with your scientific work!

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