

I completed my exchange semester at the Universite Francois Rabelais in Tours, France. I left Vancouver on September 5, 2010 and returned on January 10, 2011. The following is a collection of my experiences, observations and troubles during my time away.

Geographically, Tours is located about 200 kilometres south-west of Paris and is connected to the TGV railway (the super-fast trains). So Paris can be reached with the TGV in about an hour and connections can be made to other parts of France. Tours is located in the Loire Valley where the proximity of the surrounding rivers makes for a temperate climate. It hardly snowed during November and December and temperatures rarely ventured below zero. I would say that the climate is very similar to that of Vancouver, overall very temperate.

The Loire Valley in which Tours is located is also the home of the famous Chateaux de la Loire, a collection of gorgeous Renaissance-era castles. As the royal families were not particularly well accepted in Paris, they often built elaborate residences in the Loire Valley around Tours. All of these castles are relatively close to Tours. A certain number are only accessible by car or an organized bus tour. Others are accessible by train as there is often a neighbouring village with a train stop. I chose to visit the Chateau de Chenonceau. I went to obtain information from the Office of Tourism which is also easy to find. They told me which castle is the most convenient to visit and it turned out to be Chenonceau. The train cost 12 Euros for a return trip and it ended up being only twenty minutes outside of Tours. The castle was breathtaking and the adjacent village was very quaint.

The office for exchange students organized a number of activities for us. There is an initial information session during the end of September where you are presented with the different opportunities. These opportunities include trips to the various castles of the Loire Valley. There is also a weekend trip to Paris and one to Mont Saint Michel, which is an extremely unique location. Another activity they put on was a kitchen atelier where students were given the opportunity to cook a traditional French holiday meal. I did not participate in all of the available activities as I chose to visit some of the locations on my own.

Although I had some contact with the exchange student advisor at Universite Francois Rabelais before I left Canada this usually concerned paperwork and minor discrepancies in information. I did not have a clear idea how I would be welcomed or if there was even an organized welcome for incoming students. I found out in August in which student residence I would be staying in and had my plane ticket booked. I knew I would be arriving in Tours after closing of the student housing office so I booked one

for courses and the resources from which I had to choose courses. For example you had