

## University Paul Cézanne – Academic Year 2005/2006

Aix-en-Provence is best described as a 'Petit Paris' with medieval narrow streets, impressive fountains, Mediterranean street markets, a myriad of cafes and restaurants with summer terraces and the perfect climate to enjoy them all. What struck me about my Erasmus year in Aix was that the difference between the lifestyle and the social life on the French Riviera and what I was used to in Dublin.

There is a fantastic night life for those who are up for clubbing until 5 o'clock in the morning and for a more chilled out atmosphere there was no rivalling a shisha and oriental pastry evening with friends at one of the many salons de thé. The south of France is a hive of activity and I would definitely encourage anyone who goes on Erasmus there to take advantage of Aix's amazing location which allows you to go skiing in the French Alps, take scandalously cheap weekend deals to Barcelona and Rome, go wine tasting in the local domains or even laze on a perfect beach once the weather improves mid Spring.

Aix is a very European town with students from all over the continent and indeed from all over the world so it does take a bit of determination to meet local people and speak French. This is easier if you live in a *cit  universitaire* such as *Cuques* or *Arc de Meyran* but there are plenty of French speaking language opportunities if you're willing to make the effort. University Paul C zanne is very impressive and the French law students themselves are uber chic.

However there's no campus as such like UCD, apart from the lecture rooms and theatres there's only a cafe and the library. People go into town or hang around the student residences once classes are over. The lecturers are a mixture between academics and practitioners and the content of the course is structured as it is for the French although Erasmus students are examined separately.

The price of living in Aix is quite high, our T3 apartment with 2 single rooms cost us 480 euro each per month but there is always the option of the *cites universitaires* which are not as luxurious as UCD campus accommodation but are dirt cheap at approximately 130 euro a month. The CAF is also a big help if you can be patient with the notorious French administration system, it generally knocks about 20% off the rent. Food in supermarkets is quite inexpensive but be wary of the price of drinks in bars-there is a reason why French people don't venture out on the town as early as we do here.

Overall I found the Erasmus experience in Aix to be invaluable as it allowed me to become more independent and afforded me a chance to meet new people from different backgrounds and improve my language skills. Academically it was excellent as I was able to do subjects that I wouldn't have been able to take at UCD. You get out of an Erasmus experience in Aix what you put into it and I found it a very rewarding challenge to say the least.