

## **Things to be mindful of when renting an apartment in Paris**

### **1. Lease**

There must be a written lease, which, among other details, spells out your monthly rent. Make sure you understand if rent includes “charges” (it will say “charges comprises”) or not. “Charges” are common-area fees which are pre-billed to the tenant. These fees include cleaning of common areas, electricity in the common areas, cold water, garbage pickup, elevator usage, etc. Once a year the true charges are published and the tenant will be rebated any overage, or charged for any underpayment. (Generally you are pre-paying more than the real “charges”; the landlord never puts him/herself at risk for not getting enough money from you). Rarely, “Charges” can include your own electricity and heat in the apartment; if this is the case, make sure this is written in the lease. “Charges” do not include telephone or internet connections.

Pay close attention to the notice your landlord is requiring for your move-out date. In France, you give a one-month’s notice for a furnished apartment; a three-month notice for an unfurnished apartment. Your lease may stipulate move-in and move-out dates, e.g. “From November 1, 2011 to June 30, 2012.” You should still protect yourself by giving notice via registered letter (called “une lettre recommandée avec avis de réception”) 30 days prior to your move-out (for a furnished apartment), even if the lease spells out the end date.

Sometimes a landlord will ask you to put down the entire lease’s rent if you want the apartment. This is not legal. But it is up to you; if you truly love the place, you may be willing to prepay your year or semester. I advise against it, because even if you love the apartment, you may come to find that you have neighbors who party all night long, or there is a dog in the building who barks continually, or they have decided to renovate the apartment directly above yours and you have to live with the noise of that. Know that the landlord is not required to refund any of your money in the event you decide you cannot live in the apartment due to circumstances such as these.

Do not hand over any money without a legal lease, and without an exchange of keys. **Do not ever wire money for an apartment** for which you have no lease. (See “Scams”.)

### **2. Rent Payment**

Be very careful if the landlord asks you to pay in cash; this most likely indicates that the landlord is not declaring the rent as revenue and trying to hide this income from the French IRS (the “fisc”). A legitimate rental is paid either by French check or a monthly wire transfer from your bank account to the landlord’s (called a “virement bancaire”). **Never wire money via Western Union or Moneygram; this would indicate a scam.** (See “scams.”)

If you accept an apartment that is “cash only,” you may not qualify for the CAF, the government rent stipend that all foreign students residing legally in France can obtain. Your landlord may try to assure you that you can get the CAF as a way to convince you to take the apartment, but if he is insisting on cash for the apartment, he may be unwilling to sign the documents you need to file for the CAF, since doing so would reveal the existence of a rental property. My advice is to never rent an apartment that is undeclared; only rent an apartment for which rent can be paid by wire transfer or check. Of course, if you love the apartment, the price is right, and not receiving the CAF isn’t an issue for you, you may decide to take a cash-only apartment.

Note: *Spring students may not apply for the CAF; it is only available to year-long students in possession of a valid titre de séjour.*

### **3. Your responsibilities**

You are required to pay renter's insurance, which the UC Study Center will set up for you, and which is included in your EAP Program fees. As soon as you have signed a lease, please communicate to the Study Center the address, type of housing (e.g. studio, one-bedroom...) you've rented, and the Study Center will take out a policy for you. Give a copy of the policy to your landlord as proof of insurance. **Do not let the landlord charge you for renter's insurance since you have already paid for it in your program fees. Do not accept your French bank's offer of rental insurance, since you have already paid for it in your program fees.**

You may also be responsible for the "taxe d'habitation," which applies to any tenant renting an apartment on January 1<sup>st</sup> of a given year. In other words, if you are the renter on January 1, 2012, the payment of this yearly tax is your responsibility. Note to spring students: *Most of you will be exempt from this, as you will be arriving in Paris after January 1<sup>st</sup>. However, if you sign a lease indicating a move-in date prior to January 1<sup>st</sup>, you will be responsible for the payment of the taxe d'habitation, even if you don't physically move in until later.*

#### **4. *État des Lieux***

It is essential that you and the landlord do an "État des Lieux" upon move-in. This is a verification of inventory and wear and tear on the apartment. Your landlord will have a pre-established list, which details everything from number of plates, utensils, sheets, towels, etc. in the apartment, to the state of the carpet, woodwork, paint, tiles, appliances, furnishings, etc. I advise you also to take date-stamped pictures of all the existing damages; that way the landlord cannot charge you for any damage a previous tenant made to the apartment. If anything is chipped, burned, broken, nicked, worn out—basically, anything that is not new—write that down on the États des Lieux AND photograph it. Things to look for include:

- pre-existing water damage in the WC and/or bathroom (check the ceilings, too)
- Faucets or toilet which doesn't work correctly, or leaks.
- burn marks on countertops
- tiles or carpets that are coming up from the flooring or are worn
- broken window panes
- paint chipping
- marks on walls, dirty paint
- nail holes in walls
- wallpaper coming off walls

**Both you and the landlord need to sign the État des Lieux for it to be valid.** Do not make the mistake of you signing it only and giving a copy to your landlord. If he does not sign off on it too, it is not a legal document.

An État des Lieux needs to be done when you move out, as well, in order for you to get your deposit back. Make sure you are present for this move out État des Lieux.

#### **5. *Getting your deposit back at the end of your stay***

Legally, the landlord can ask for **one** month's rent as a security deposit, known as "la caution." The landlord has up to two months after you end your lease to return your security deposit. This is inconvenient for our departing students, since these euros do you little good after you've left France. It is worth asking your landlord if, once he has checked you out from the apartment and you are ready to give back the keys, he/she can refund your deposit immediately.

#### **6. *Other***

You should be ready to put down the deposit and first-month's rent when going to see an apartment. It is a landlord's market here, and competition is stiff. A landlord will not hold an apartment until your parents send money or you set up a bank account. If you like the place and everything seems legitimate, be ready to do the paperwork and pay what is needed to secure the apartment. **GET A RECEIPT** for any money you give to the landlord, and never hand over money until you have both signed the lease and you've got the keys.

## 7. Apartment Scams

We are seeing an increase in the number of housing scams in Paris, especially from Craigslist.

It is worth your time to read this site to familiarize yourself with typical scam language you might see as you search via the internet for your Paris housing:

<http://parishousingscamwatch.wordpress.com/tell-tale-clues/>

The biggest tip offs in a scam ad are:

- Overly flowery language and bad grammar
- Owner is out of town and can't show you the apartment—he'll often "be in the UK right now".
- Request that you send money via Western Union or Moneygram (two services which don't require a bank account or ID to pick up funds.)
- Contact information is in the UK (phone number begins with a +44 prefix, or the email address is yahoo.uk or other .uk suffix)
- Landlord is a Prince, a Sea Captain, a Priest or other religious figure.
- Rent is too below normal market price for area

I am always happy to review any apartment (ad, website, lease) you may be considering. Please do not hesitate to ask my opinion on a potential rental—it could save you time and money!

*Any questions about leases, neighborhoods, CAF, rental agencies, etc...contact Shelby, the UC Paris Study Center Administrator at center@ucparis.fr*