

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, such as “From November 1, 2013 to June 30, 2014.” 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. Shelby at the UC Center can help you write this official letter.

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. Never wire money for an apartment for which you have no lease. (See “Apartment Scams” below.)

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 “Apartment Scams” below.)

If you accept an apartment that is “cash only,” you may not qualify for the CAF, the government rent stipend that qualifying foreign students who have completed the *titre de séjour* process 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: only annual students may qualify for the CAF; it is not available to semester-only students.

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 UCEAP 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.**

You may also be responsible for the "taxe d'habitation," which applies to any tenant renting an apartment on January 1st of a given year. In other words, if you are the renter on January 1, 2014, the payment of this yearly tax is your responsibility.

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.

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 two months' worth of euros does 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 security 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.

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 the following 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/>

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
- 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 far 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!

For housing resources, refer to the **Housing Instructions** in your Predeparture Checklist. Also be sure to check out our [UC Paris website page](#) — I add new links as I learn of new housing resources.

For any questions about leases, neighborhoods, CAF, etc., contact Shelby, the UC Paris Study Center Administrator, at center@ucparis.fr.