



GUIDE: EUROPEAN SOLIDARITY CORPS VOLUNTEERS AT L'ECOLE CREATIVE

BY DANIELA AND JOHANNA

We are Daniela and Johanna, former European volunteers, and we have created this guide with care and love so you can make the most of this wonderful experience. We have added all the information we have collected after living this incredible experience to the fullest throughout this year. We have included small details and tips that we would have liked to know from the beginning. Do not hesitate to contact us if you need it and start enjoying life in the Pyrenees to the fullest.

C'est vraiment chouette!!



SCHOOL LIFE

L'école Creative is a dream place where a lot of beautiful things take place. There are three spaces divided by age's groups. The first one is maternal with Maeva, pedagogic teacher, and includes children of 4-5 years old. The second one is managed by Estelle and there are students between 5 and 6 years old, but she also works with older children. The last one is Charlène's group which is the larger group and includes children from 7 to 10 years old.

When you arrive, it will take you a little bit to get into the environment and finding your place. It is normal! Don't worry about it 😊. It is really cool to see and to experience all the different spaces and what they do, so you can choose which one suits you better. Being there with a positive attitude and with a lot of energy to give will make things easier!

Moreover, there are a lot of useful things that we will let you know so you can get used to everyday:

- ✓ **TO HEAT MEALS:** normally you will need to go to the kitchen and bring the lunchbox to make it hot. There are 3 services (the smallest, the middle ones and the oldest) and they eat in different hours. 30 minutes before every service there is someone who must take care of putting all the plates in the oven. In addition, during lunchtime you will be supporting them, helping if there is a clear need, staying there for supervising after. Of course, there are several adults, and you will keep an eye on one group and after there will be someone else who will cover you for having your lunch. (Tu vas vite fait comprend 😊 T'inquiète pas!)
- ✓ **CLEANING TOILETS:** this school is particular, and they have des toilettes seches, that can do without water and is useful for the compost. Therefore, at the end of the day it must be empty and cleaned for le lendemain.
- ✓ **WASH THE CUPS:** in order to keep the students hydrated there is always a plate with all children's cups (identified each one with their names) you will take this plate to the kitchen during the lunch time and after, you will bring it to the school area for them. At the end of the day, you must clean it and let it proper for the following day.

✓ **PEDAGOGICAL MEETINGS:** there is one day of the week where after school between 17h or 17.30h, teachers and volunteers have a meeting for speaking of the evolution of every child, next projects, some ideas, organization, actions to take and lot of useful things in the school. It is important to know that your voice will always be considered and there is a time for expressing yourself, asking questions, proposing methods, activities and games.

✓ **ATELIERS TIME:** you have freedom for letting your footprint at L'École Creative! You will have one or two days for developing a workshop, for giving lessons, teaching something new, exploring your abilities with the students and proposing something different. It can be dance, yoga, music, languages, or some other talents that you surely have. Teachers and the pedagogic team will be always there for supporting and encouraging you. Also, children will be very happy and curious to try with you.

✓ **EDUCATIONAL SUPPORTING:** being there for preparing the pedagogic material, doing photocopies, helping children to search information, animating an activity, preparing activities to make discover your country and your language. (It's a chouette opportunity to bring a little piece of your culture). Also going to the school forest every Friday.

✓ **COMMUNICATION:** it will be nice if you take care of the social networks like Instagram or other platforms as long as your creativity will guide you! That can be shooting photos and videos, helping develop a long-term communication and promoting the association and their activities, creating, managing, and distributing information.

SOCIAL LIFE

Transport: how to move in rural areas?

You will have at your disposition a bicycle provided by the association. With the bike, you will be able to go to school and it will allow you to discover

the surroundings. The Pyrenees is a beautiful place with spectacular views that you can enjoy from your bike, but... we are not going to lie to you, it is also true that it is a mountainous area and, therefore, there are many climbs and it is not always easy to move around.

In these cases, you can always ask for help to the members of the association and they will always find you an option of *covoiturage*. For everything else, to visit other cities and discover France, the best option is to travel by train. The volunteer program includes a SNCF discount card that makes the price of the train tickets much more affordable. Thus, you will be able to move around all of France easily. The place of depart is usually the station of Capvern or Lannemezan, depending on the destination you choose.

When we see the big picture, after a year in the Pyrenees, we have realized that not having our own car here has made us leave our comfort zone and has enriched the experience on many levels. It has made us socialize much more with local people around us; it has motivated us to use the bike more and exercise and has developed our autonomy and problem-solving capacity. For all this reasons, we strongly recommend you to embark on an adventure and enjoy the magic of the Pyrenees by bike, on foot, by *covoiturage* or by train!

Leisure time: what to do in the surroundings?

The spirit of associative life that characterizes the school is a lifestyle shared by the vast majority of the surrounding villages. Over time, we discovered a wide network of alternative places that work under the same principle. From associative cafes to neighbourhood meetings. The small towns of the Pyrenees have much more to offer you than you imagine.

✓ **Anères: Café du Village**

A small associative café that works under the principle that each person pays what they can afford. It is always open because it does not need staff to function. You can serve yourself a coffee and put in the "cochon" what you consider. Every Wednesday there are musical events called "boeuf" in which everyone can participate. You just need to know how to play an instrument or simply enjoy good music. In Anères there is always a convivial atmosphere of sharing and exchanging. It is a good place to meet people and to exchange conversations that help you to feel integrate.

✓ **Touche pas ma forêt: get involved!**

Touche pas ma forêt is a non-profit organization that emerged as a protest against a project that would destroy a considerable part of the Pyrenees forest. Under this approach, they often organize awareness and outreach events. It is an organization that has a close link with the school and sometimes they collaborate together. You will hear about it sooner than later.

✓ **Abbaye de L'escaladieu:**

At the foot of Mauvezin Castle, Escaladieu Abbey is located in a wooded valley in the Baronnies close to spa towns of Capvern and Bagnères de Bigorre. It is an old monastery that has been rehabilitated and today can be visited. It is also known because several cultural, artistic or technological events are organized there.

✓ **Les Baronnies à vélo:**

Les Baronnies is a beautiful place to visit by bike. It is close to the village you are going to stay and their rivers and green spaces will immediately captivate you. However, you have to be prepared to ride all on the way back... parce que ça monte beaucoup!!

✓ **La Garagerie Friperie de la Neste:**

If when you arrive in France, you realize that you have forgotten to add some essential clothing to your suitcase or that little by little you realize that you need more clothes for winter or special occasions, *La Garagerie* offers you hundreds of alternatives. It is located in one of the neighbouring villages and offers you the possibility of giving clothes a second life. It is an alternative store where you can find clothes of all kinds. Of course, you should go with time because you can spend hours looking through so many options. It is without a doubt, the best way to dress and fight textile waste.

✓ **Lou Madrigal (café associatif):**

Café and associative hostel that proposes different meetings: On Wednesday, there is a shared pique-nique where everyone is invited and live music concerts on Sundays at 7:00 p.m. It has a small charity shop of second-hand clothes and offers a safe place to spend the night for those who need it.

LES MARCHES

If you want a local and organic alternative to supermarkets, this is your place! You will find several markets in the different towns in the area. The ones we used to go the most are:

- **Marche de Capvern : Vendredi soir**
- **Marche de Lannemezan : Mercredi matin**
- **Marché de Bagnères-de-Bigorre : samedi matin** (C'est vraiment chouette)

However, there are many more! Here we attach a link where you can check the dates of all the markets in the area 😊

- **<https://marches-reguliers.pagesperso-orange.fr/65-marches-hebdomadaires-hautes-pyrenees.html>**

