

GHS students travel to France, Spain and do a bit of math

Written by Elizabeth Barrett
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Mass, gardens and beach trip highlights for some.

Amanda Kowalewski always wanted to visit Europe.

As did several other Gothenburg High School graduates and seniors.

So when GHS math teacher Kris Epke decided to join her sister, who was taking Hershey students to France and Spain, Epke offered the trip to interested students.

Eleven signed up for the 10-day trip.

On June 2, they joined Hershey students and several from Tennessee, California, Colorado and Missouri on a flight to Paris.

There, they spent 4 days before traveling by train to Barcelona.

After the group arrived home, only Epke, Kowalewski and Holley were available for an interview.

Although students visited several sites such as the Eiffel Tower, Notre Dame Cathedral, the Louvre and the Gardens of Versailles, both Kowalewski and Holley said France was their least favorite country.

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“They were much more welcoming in Spain,” Holley said.



Kowalewski said she thought she would struggle more with the language in France but was surprised to learn that most of the French people she came in contact with could speak some English.

A highlight of the vacation for Kowalewski occurred at the famous Notre Dame Cathedral where she attended Mass.

“I didn’t understand a word but I knew what was going on and could still participate,” she explained. “The rituals were the same.”

While in France, Epke enjoyed the Gardens of Versailles next to a royal palace that she described as beautiful.

When leaving Paris, the group took a bullet train to Barcelona that traveled 185 mph.

They did a little math on the train when converting kilos to miles per hour and throughout the trip in figuring out temperature and converting dollars to euros (the European Union currency).

For Holley, relaxing on a Mediterranean coastal beach at Sitges, Spain, was a highlight.

Epke said a visit to the Holy Family Cathedral (Sagrada Família) in Barcelona was a surprise

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for her, explaining that the structure—that uses Gothic and curvilinear Art Nouveau forms—was started 132 years ago and is still being built.

“It’s still living history,” she said.

Kowalewski was surprised that most of the people they encountered, in both France and Spain, could speak some English.

“In Spain, it was easier because many of us have taken Spanish,” she explained. “People in Spain were also more willing to help out and try to understand what we were saying.”

Each state in Spain speaks a different dialect, Epke noted.

Despite the wonderful, eye-opening experience, Epke said she appreciated the ice and free bathrooms upon their return to the States.



Many stores and tourist attractions in the places the students visited charge money for the use of bathrooms while some are free if merchandise is bought in the store, she said.

Kowalewski said she learned to appreciate the friendliness in smaller Nebraska communities like Gothenburg.

“We never got that in France.” she said, noting that the people they encountered in Spain were

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warm and friendly.

In addition to visiting the Gardens of Versailles while in France, the group also viewed such sites as the Latin Quarter, a lock bridge, the Louvre (one of the largest museums in the world), the famous landmark Eiffel Tower and took a boat tour on the Seine River.

Other sites and places in Spain included Gaudi's Gardens in Barcelona (a magical park with amazing buildings, sculptures, and tile work designed by a famous architect) and a restaurant where they learned Spanish dances.

In Madrid, they saw protestors, upset with the new king and soldiers with guns, the Prado Museum (the main Spanish national art museum) and dined in a dungeon where people were tortured during the Inquisition.

Holley and Kowalewski said they'd recommend such a trip to other students.

"It was a once-in-a-lifetime experience," Holley said.

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