**Caitlyn Trumm - May 2009 report**

May Update

Hallo, Ahoj, Ciao, Bonjour, Hillu and Hej.

That is your 'hello' in the languages of afew of the countries that I visited on Eurotour this month!
I know I say it in every report, but this month really was the best so far! I'm thinking the whole 'travelling Europe for three weeks on a bus with forty one other 18 year olds' thing might have something to do with it, what do you think? I know that I have to try to keep my reports short and sweet & I promise I'll do my best, but keep in mind that I DO have to squeeze the majority of Europe into this one, so I'll try to just give highlights from each day of the tour.

So the first couple of weeks of the month were basically spent prepairing and planning everything for the tour. Unfortunately, being a teenage girl, I couldn't just pack the night before and hope for the best. Nope, I was shopping and planning days in advance. Never mind the fact that I didn't wear half of the things I took - point was I was prepaired! We boarded the bus (affectionately referred to for the duration of the tour as the Bumble Bee, as it was embarrassingly bright yellow) at the Odense Banegård Centre at 7.30am on the 14th May. Our first destination was Berlin in Germany. After afew hours driving & a couple of rest stops along the way we got to the hostel we would be staying at, and spent the evening walking around in small groups discovering the city. Our second day in Berlin was spent signing the Berlin Wall, visiting Checkpoint Charlie, seeing the Division Point, and going on a bear hunt for the infamous 'Berlin Bears'.

Our next destination was Prague, in the Czech Republic. Our first stop along the way was the Terezin Concentration Camp. Without a doubt the most humbling experience of my life, the majority of the group walked out from the tour feeling as though we had been holding our breath the entire time. We took the 'Last Steps' walk (a 500m underground walk that led to the gallows and gasing chambers) and walked through the camp for afew hours before getting back on the bus to continue to the hotel. Because Prague was so cheap ($1AUS will buy you 29.8CHK) everyone took slight advantage of the shopping complex next door to the hotel (beginning to realise why I didn't make it through all my clothes over the period of the tour AND had to make the dreaded 'spending money' call to back home halfway through the trip - love you dad!). Everyone in the group saw a movie together that night (Madagascar 2 - not exactly the cultured European experience our parents invested in but it helped pass the time) and then went to bed early. Our second day in Prague saw us visiting the Parliament Housing and the Czech Republics oldest cathedral, as well as watching the changing of the guards ceremony outside the Presidents living quarters. Spent the evening out to dinner and shopping in the city.

We left the next day for Vienna, in Austria. Our first rest stop was in downtown Vienna, where we took a tour through a cathedral and then went in groups of four on horse and carriage rides through the city. We spent a long time watching the various street performers scattered around the city before going to the hotel. Our hotel was at the top of a mountain, at least an hour out of Vienna. So rather than pay the 40€ taxi fair, the majority of the group elected to stay in and familiarise ourselves with the area by hiking around the mountain and meeting other tourists staying in the same hotel. The next day we went to the palace in Vienna and took an English and Danish tour throughout all the rooms and chambers. Our bus driver treated us to a mini sight seeing tour around the city before our afternoon free time, when we went and bought tickets to a Mozart Tribute Ballet and Opera performance that night. To fill up time before the performance, we visited the Spanish Riding School, souvenier shopping and walking to the Palais Auspberg, where the ballet would be held. After seeing the performance everybody went for dinner together and then took maxi taxis back to the hotel to crash for the evening!

Next stop - Lido De Jeselo, Italy! The three days spend in Lido were my favourite on the tour, as the weather hit a perfect 31 degrees and the beach was 20 steps from the hotels front door at most. The drive itself to Lido was amazing - through the Austrian/Italian mountain ranges, absolutely breathtaking. The second we got to the hotel, without even waiting for room assignments or worrying ourselves with minor details like where our luggage was, there was a mass stampede to the beach. Our tour guides had to virtually drag us back to the hotel for dinner at 7. Upon finishing dinner - BACK to the beach we went. The second day in Lido was actually spent in Venice. Took a ferry ride over to the Venica Army Barrocks (base camp for the day) and first stop after that was a gondala ride through the canals. Unforgettable! Spent our free time at stalls that would make masquerade masks personalised to your face and style, watching street performers, visiting market places, and sleeping in the 30 degree sun by the canals. Had coffee at a water front cafe before going back to the ferry to return to the wharf in Lido. The last day in Lido was a free day, as Bus 2 (there were three tour buses all together, our bus of 42 was the smallest) would be arriving late afternoon. Slept in and then went for a pizza lunch at an open beach front cafe with my good friend Adam, another Australian exchange student from Perth. Rented a 3 person bike to cruise around the beach town in to pass the time until the second bus got there (had an embarrassing moment when a bright red sportscar pulled up behind our oh-so-cool bike and honked because we were going too slow). Arrived back to meet the second lot at the door and join them for dinner before spending the night on the beach at the huge beach party our tour guides oranised for us.

Early start next morning to pack the Bumble Bee and head for San Remo. Stopped along the way to see Juliet's Balcony (which Shakespeare supposedly based his play on) and the Love Wall, a huge memorium of people's post-it notes, sharpee markings, postcards and photos accumulated over 50 years or so showing love notes and messages. We visited the arena in the city centrum and saw the chambers where lions used to be held, and where they would discard deceased gladiators after a tournament. That was an interesting experience. Got to the hotel to find we were 3 floors up with no elevator. Fan-flipping-tastic. Fortunately enough, chivalry aint dead just yet. The boys on the bus proved they were raised right by lugging all the girls suitcases up multiple flights of stairs (no easy feat as we all had 'over packers' sydnrome).

France bound next, headed for Avignon. Stopped in Monaco along the way and chanced upon the Formula One Grand Prix, who would've guessed it? Used our international status to get in and watch part of the race before lunch, which was eaten track-side (a tad bit noisy but TOTALLY worth it) and then left to visit the markets and souvenier stores. Continued to our next stop, a perfumery on the Avignon border. Took a tour and came out smelling like roses .. and violets, tulips, musk, vanilla, cinammon etc. You get the idea. Were absolutely ecstatic to find out that the hostel we would be staying in had a laundromat, and elected to not go into the city and stay in to have a five and a half hour laundry party isntead, i-pod speakers and all. Second day in Avignon was a bit more eventful - went to a lookout point that showed the entire city as well as a garden showcase, perfect place for photos. Had crepes and coffee, shopped, and bought croissants. We were incredibly French that day if I do say so myself. Headed back to the hostel to change then go back into town for dinner and .. more crepes! Had to be done, we were in France after all.

Left for Paris the following day. 6.30am start in order to pack the bus and leave enough time for a full days drive to get there. I managed to irritate the whole bus due to my over excitement. Paris has been my dream destination since I was about 10 years old so I was busting to see if it would live up to my expectations. Every rest stop along the ridiculously long way there was agonising! We got to our hotel at about 6.30pm and went for dinner as a group to L'restaurant Bleu Orangé. Sitting on your butt on a bus all day is surprisingly tiring, so everyone called it a night and packed it in early. Our second day started off early as we were stopping for lunch at the Eiffel Tower and taking a sight seeing tour, as well as a river sightseeing cruise. Took a walk down the Champs Elyse after the cruise and then went to see the Arc De Triomphe. Met back to climb the Eiffel Tower at 9pm - the perfect time as it meant we got to watch the sunset and see Paris light up from the top of the tower. Went back to ground level in time to see the Diamond Lights show and then took the metro back to the hotel to eat and head off to bed. Our last day in Paris was a free day as we would again be meeting up with Bus 2 that afternoon. Got up quite early and headed off to Notre Dame. Walked through it and came out to go to the Louvre. Took it at a virtual run as we only had 4 hours or so there, but did see the Mona Lisa, the Venus de Milo, the Egyptian exhibit and the Renaissane and French Exhibitionist pieces. Afterwards we split up into groups of those who wanted to go home and shower before going out that night and those who wanted to Sácre Coeur and the artists street. I went back to the hotel to wait for Bus 2 to take them into the city, but unfortunately an incident occured before we got the chance. As we were walking with the Bus 2 students back to their hotel to change and head for the metro, one of the students from New Zealand got mugged and beaten outside the hotel. This meant Adam and I, as well as all the students from the that bus, spent the evening in their hotel to go through the process of translating to the police, keeping the peace and helping the Bus 2 counsillors with incident reports. Suffice it to say, our last night (and Bus 2's first) in Paris was a memorable one.

Belgium was the next stop. Brussels to be exact. I was so excited about going there because of the things Heloise had told us about it, and because it was a country where I could still understand the language and keep pace with the locals. No language headache for me! Went to visit the Manekke Pis (apparently translated almost exactly to 'The Peeing Boy') and then had free time to do what we wanted. That, of course, meant WAFFLES! Belgian waffles live up to the name, with the waffle being yay thick and the toppings about 4 times as much. Was extremely entertaining to the point of crying laughter to watch some of the others eating them - they were about the size of our heads! Went to the hostel (the nicest one we'd stayed in so far) and got changed and dressed up to go into the city that night. Much like our luck with chancing upon the Formula One, we happened to encounter the Belgium Jazz Festival on our night in Brussels. So spent the night relaxing to jazz music. We met two Australian girls there who were from QLD, spending 6 months travelling Europe on a whim with no real plans. Spoke with them for a while and then said goodbye and headed back to the hostel to go to bed.

Our final destination was Amsterdam, Holland. Had to be up fairly early to leave on time as we were taking another morning river cruise to see the city from a different point of view. We were shown Anne Frank's house, the Prime Minister's home, the red light district, many water front cafes and shops and Holland's oldest building along the way. After the cruise we had free time so myself and two of the other Australians went for lunch at one of the water front cafes and then headed for the red light district with a large group of the other exchange students, clinging carefully to our bags and wallets as instructed. Well, to call it an experience would be an understatement. As if the city's .. ahem .. window displays weren't shock enough, walking into souvenier shops to be greeted with the offer of 'hemp lollipops' and 'mushroom teabags' was definitely the icing on the cake of the strangest day yet on tour. This aside, Amsterdam was one of the most picturesque cities that we had the privelige of visiting and is definitely a place I would visit again. On our stroll back to the bus, we heard someone yelling "oi, Australia" from behind us, and turned to see the two QLD girls we had met the previous night in Brussels waving at us from a cafe table on the corner of the street. Getting over the initial shock, we all had a laugh about where we would accidentally meet next before heading for the bus and off to the hostel that we would call home that night. The hostel was situated a good one and a half hours out of downtown Amsterdam - three guesses as to why. We were however lucky enough to be staying in one with pool tables, air hockey tables, wireless internet access and a cafe, so noone minded too much the inconvenient location.

Homebound the following day. Up at 4.40am to pack the bus and head off on another full days drive. Was a bit of a sullen ride home as it was going to be the last time many of us ever saw each other again. The goodbyes definitely weren't fun. But this coming weekend we do have a District Farewell so we will get the chance to say goodbye to maybe half of the oldies on the bus, which we're all very grateful for! No surprise that I was pretty happy to be home. After arriving on time for our 1am curfews every night and then getting up for breakfast at 6am most mornings on tour, I REALLY needed afew good nights sleep in DK to recover.

And that was that. With no exaggeration whatsoever, it was close to the best 3 weeks of my life. A fantastic chance to make new friends, form stronger bonds with old ones, see the world and experience things that aren't easily done back home in Australia. Many of us did find that we came home with an even deeper sense of appreciation for our home countries and families. It really was the experience of a lifetime that I am and will forever be extremely, ridiculously grateful for it! And again, can't thank you enough for aiding it to happen.

So, evidently my attempt at a short and sweet report has been an epic failure, i'm sorry! But I hope you liked hearing about my trip, and if my computer hasn't carked it from exhaustion just yet i'll send through afew of my favourite photos from the trip! Hope everything's going well at home - sorry to hear Denmark's stolen all the good weather from you!

Snakke snart min venner,
Kærlig hilsen
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