

## **One week across five countries in Europe**

On the 09th of August, I flew from Heathrow to Warsaw International Airport. I rested for a few hours at my hotel until it was time to meet the rest of the group and the reason why I had signed up for this program - to indulge in English-speaking conversations with Polish natives. This organisation places English speaking natives with Polish natives so that the Polish participants can practise their English with people who come from the English-speaking countries. It is meant to further enhance their English beyond what they just study in schools. This particular trip was jam-packed with adventures, city tours and dinner events across five cities which included Warsaw, Paris, Belgium, Amsterdam and Berlin.

Our typical day in each city started off with breakfast, and then the coach would take us to wherever the highlight of the city was. For example, in Paris, this was Disneyland Paris. Each of the English speaking participants, including me, were given a group of five kids to spend the day with in Disneyland. On another day, our day would start off with a city tour where a local would come and explain the history behind some of the key buildings in each city. For instance, in Berlin, this was the Holocaust Memorial, and the land where Hitler would often command the Stormtroopers. We'd then go for river cruises around sunset times which were the most beautiful visuals to experience. It was very fascinating to hear all the stories and see the locations with your own eyes. Some of these stories were also the syllabus covered during GCSE and A-level History, so it was even more fascinating for me as I had studied most of the history in such detail.

I was quite lucky in that I was given a lot of free time as an English participant. I guess the coordinators understood that we were adults and would ideally want to explore some places by ourselves. Me, and some of the other girls who had grown quite close with each other over the days decided to explore Champs Elysees, and the Arc de Triomphe once the kids were taken back to the hotel. On another day in Belgium, me and another friend of mine also decided to go after the famous Belgium chocolate shops and famous fries. It was indeed very praiseworthy. Additionally, I used some of my free time to meet some of my relatives who lived in these cities. For example, I had an uncle living in Paris, and an aunt who lived quite close to Berlin. I was meeting them after a decade so it was quite emotional, but they were very sweet and even sent some fruits for all the participants.

Some of the best highlights from the trip were eating snails in France, my first water park experience in Berlin and buying cute souvenirs across all the cities. Two of the Polish participants had also approached me to ask if they could stay with me forever, which was so touching. I had so much fun spending time with some of the kids and made lots of new friendships from people across the world, including two very kind and funny sisters all the way from Chicago. There were some hard times but most of the trip was jam-packed with adventures and fun times, and I was amazed at how much travelling was possible in just one week.

Exactly one week after the 09th of August, I boarded a plane back to Heathrow airport, and all I could think of was how this trip was possible because of the funding opportunity that was

provided to me. I am someone very thorough with planning my finances, including all possible expenses. When I found out that a flight to Warsaw and accommodation costs were not possible within my budget, it was quite disheartening to not be able to apply for such an amazing opportunity. However, that day when I found out about the Expeditions Fund and decided to give it a go, I was truly grateful for all the support that came my way.

