

INTAG 497: Comparing French and US Agricultural Systems

What I Learned and What I Will Never Forget!

By

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Many people say that traveling to Paris is a once in a lifetime experience but for me having the chance to visit Paris for a second time was an opportunity that I could not pass up. The first time I visited was in 2006 when my high school took a trip over but we only spent 3 days in Paris and really didn't get to learn a lot about the country. When I heard about INTAG 497: Comparing US and French Agricultural Systems I knew immediately that I wanted to take the course to fill the voids that I felt I missed on the last trip. Going into this class I thought that we would learn all about the way that the French do things in agriculture but really I learned just as much about how the US does things as well.

Looking back on the trip and class now I can tell just how special this opportunity was to me. First, I loved having several of my friends go along on the trip but also got to make many new friends while on the trip. Rooming with Koichiro from Japan was an amazing experience because we talked a lot about Japan and the United States and how they were different from France. He taught me a lot about Japan and their customs but most of all he was just really nice to be around because he was always willing to do whatever we wanted and he always seemed to be amazed at the sites. I could not have asked for a better roommate. Also, it was really nice to get to meet the girls from Illinois and just getting to know how people from different parts of the US and to see how Illinois differs from Pennsylvania. I know this was a class but I feel that having all these people from not only the US but the world as well, taught me just as much as what I learned from the class and presenters.

Another reflection that I have is the professors: Vincent, Vanny, Ketja, Ted and Dean McPherson. Vincent and Vanny I could not thank enough for all the wonderful presenters, field trips and everything else that they set up for us because everything was amazing and I don't think very many people get to do some of the things that we got to see. Also, they were very welcoming and if we had any questions at all they were more than willing to answer them or find an answer for us. I wanted to personally thank them because without them I probably would have never known that the French Open was going on and

where to even find information about tickets or anything. The French Open was probably one of the best parts of this trip because you see it on TV and wish that one day you could have the chance to get there and to see a match but now I can say that I did that and its all thanks to Vincent and Vanny for telling us about it and looking up ticket prices for us. Ketja, Ted and Dean McPheron always made sure that we knew where and when to meet for class the next day and to me they seemed part of the group then the professors. The metro cards were great instead having to buy tickets all the time and thanks to Ketja we never had to worry about trying to fill the cards. Ted and Dean McPheron always kept the conversations during the presentations and I really loved how everyone did try to get involved in the conversations, even if the topic was something they were not studying, because it just made the class more enjoyable. Also, I would like to thank my scholarship donors who, even though they didn't know me, still donated money to the college because they want to see Penn Staters travel the world and become more rounded students. So I thank them for helping me on with the trip and believing in students at Penn State and in the College of Agricultural Sciences and for giving us this opportunity to travel overseas.

As for a destination to take a student abroad trip I could think of no better place than Paris. Also, since the goal of this course was to compare US agriculture to another country it seems only fitting to visit France because they are the biggest agriculture country in the European Union. Paris blends the old with the new in a way that it is hard to do anywhere else. Paris and France have the history with Notre Dame, The Louvre, Latin Quarter, Arc de Triomphe and the Champagne region, which we visited all of them, but at the same time have to more modern Pompidou Center, Eiffel Tower, La Defense, The Museum of Evolution and Montparnasse and everything just seems to fit together very well. There are not many places in the world that have that much history and yet there are some modern parts to the city. This time that I visited it was very nice to have free time and to get to explore the city, once we figured out the metro, and after awhile I really began to feel like a Parisian and it felt just like home.

There were two places that I really wanted to visit this time while I was in Paris and I can say that I accomplished one. I wanted to see Napoleon's Tomb and the Flame of Liberty which is close to where Princess Diana died. I accomplished seeing Napoleon's Tomb which was absolutely amazing and I caught a glimpse of the Flame of Liberty but I didn't get to go up and see it. The three places that I feel were the best experience for me was getting to go into Notre Dame during mass which was something that amazed me because we don't have huge churches like that in the US and just being there during mass was a special moment. Also, going up the Eiffel Tower at night was very enlightening to say the least because it was absolutely wonderful to just look out from the top and just see lights everywhere and as far as the eye can see. Then the third, as I mentioned before, was the French Open because it was one of the most world renowned tennis tournaments in the world and getting to see some of the best players in the world play on the clay courts was a special thing to see.

Overall though, this was a great trip between the people I got to meet, the food I got to eat, the places I got to see and the things that I learned from class I don't think I could have had a better trip. The dorms were dorms but the location was great and being around all the other international dorms was really cool. Just living in our dorm we got to meet other students from all over the world and they were very kind. Plus being right beside a metro station was nice and just being to get on the metro in 5 minutes being in the Latin Quarter was great and I think that living at Cite Universitaire was the best place to stay for a group of students. The field trips to the Champagne Region, Rungis and the Organic farm were amazing because I got to learn so much about each place but at the same time not everyone can say they got to visit a Champagne High School. The food, oh the food, was absolutely delicious and nothing like I ever had before. I am hooked on baguettes and cheese now and I don't think I will ever eat just white bread again because I am going to stick to baguettes. I would not change anything about this trip because everything we did or learned about I took something from and now I have a wider view about agriculture across the world.