
My Study Abroad Experience 2023

— By: Claire Tate —

PARIS

From exploring the gardens at Versailles to playing cards in front of the Eiffel Tower, Paris was an amazing way to kick off our trip and I am so happy it was the first experience I had in France. My favorite part was definitely the boat cruise on the Seine that we went on during our last night there, where we not only got to spend time with almost everyone on the trip but also see so many landmarks and learn about the history of Paris.

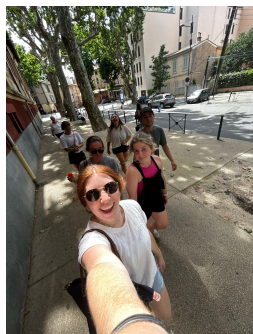


Aix-En-Provence

After Paris we made our way to our new home, Aix-En-Provence! I think Aix was such a perfect place for us to really immerse ourselves into the culture, especially considering that there were so many students our age there that we could meet. Our hosts Zoe and Lucas were so awesome and we even got to meet Zoe's friends and hangout with them for a night where they had a barbecue for us! I am not sure what I was expecting but it was so fun to see how similar we are to the French students and I loved getting to compare our lifestyles to theirs. Aix was such a cool place to explore and it really turned into a home for all of us.



Went to the movie theater 3 times (best was La Petite Sirène)



Daily walks to class!



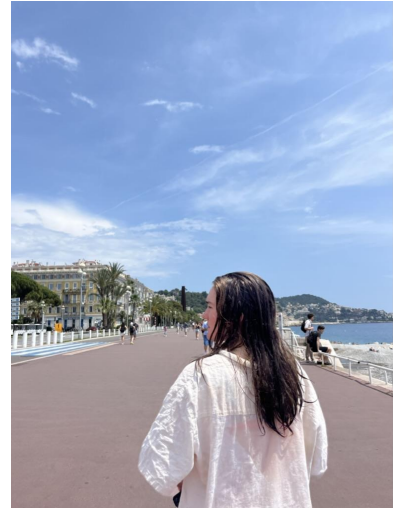
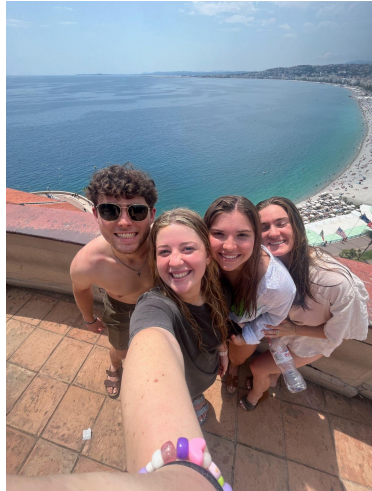
French BBQ!!



Me and Paco on the bus ride there

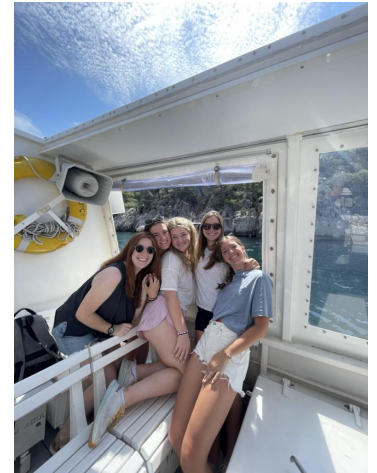
Nice

Before going to Nice, I really had no idea what to expect but was totally blown away by how much culture was there. Though we weren't there for long, we were able to explore the city and walked up to the observation deck to see the incredible views and beach.



The Calanques

Once we got back to Aix after Nice, we went to see the Calanques and it was so gorgeous. Zoe told us all about how she would go on some weekends and hike the Calanques with her friends to spend the day at the beach which I thought was so fun. We spent the day at the beach after our boat tour and it was an amazing day!



Us and Zoe!!

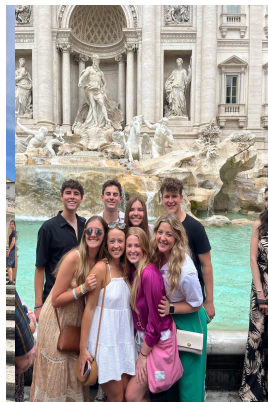
Barcelona

For our 3-day weekend, I went to Barcelona with a big group! Barcelona was easily one of my favorite places we went, it was so alive and such an amazing experience, there was never a dull moment there. We visited so many places like La Sagrada Familia, Park Güell (my personal favorite), the Picasso Museum, and much more! We also met so many new people while staying in our hostel in the gothic quarter!



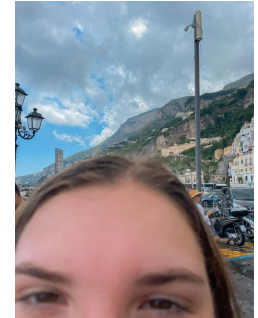
Rome

Starting off our 6-day break, we spent 2 days in Rome and even though it was a short visit, we got to see so much. During our visit to the Vatican, there was an evening mass being held which was such a unique and surreal experience. We spent our entire second day walking around stopping at various places like the Spanish Steps, the Rotonda, the Trevi Fountain, the Altar of the Fatherland and of course the Colosseum. I found it so interesting that we could walk around Rome, turn a corner, and stumble upon something incredible that we had never seen before.



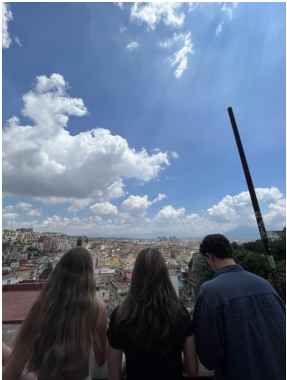
Cetara/Amalfi Coast

For the next 2 days, we traveled near the Amalfi coast where we stayed in a small city called Cetara for one night. Cetara was such a unique place and somewhere I felt so immersed in the Italian culture because of the lack of tourism and English speakers. The night we stayed in Cetara there was a holiday and there were fireworks and a parade going on while we ate dinner that we were able to watch. The next day we spent in the Amalfi Coast where we stayed on the beach for most of the day and walked up the entire strip that went through the center of town. It was also absolutely gorgeous on the coast I have never seen such pretty views.



Naples

Our last 2 days of our 6-day break were spent in Naples where we visited Pompeii, explored the city and had some incredible food. We walked around almost the entire ruins of Pompeii (before it started raining) and it was fascinating to think about just how old everything we were looking at was. One day for lunch we stopped at a famous sandwich shop called Con Mollica o Senso that was SO good - totally worth the 30 minute wait.



The best
pizza i have
ever had



Verdon Gorge

The Verdon Gorge was easily my favorite day trip that we did outside of Aix. It was so beautiful and so fun to get to canoe. Even though the water was freezing we still got in it and paddled under the waterfall and then explored a little bit of the rocks along the side. It was so cool!!! The weather was not so great after canoeing so we didn't get to see much of the town but it was still so fun



The aftermath from the rain

Hiking in Aix

During our last weekend in Aix, we decided to go do some hiking and it was so amazing. We didn't have quite enough time to do the hike to the cross on the mountain so we just roamed around stopping at different viewpoints and eventually ended up down at a creek where we swam. It was so much fun to spend the day seeing how beautiful the surrounding area was and we even got to see some lavender fields!

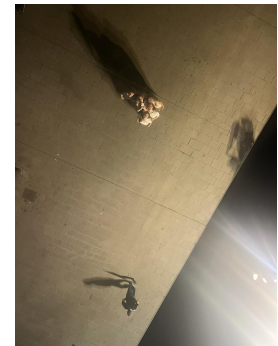
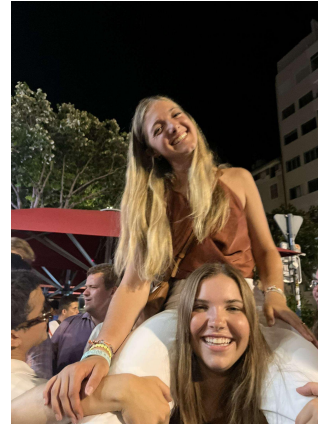


Marseille

To end our trip we all went to Marseille for a few days! The tour we did of Marseille on the day we got there was really interesting because I knew very little about the city. At night in Marseille everything was so lively and so much fun. My favorite part of being in Marseille was going to the beach on our last day with everybody, it was a great and bittersweet way to end the trip.



My new french friend!



Mirror walkway!

Some other adventures!



Winery/technical visit!



The best
classroom EVER



Dinner with Paco!

Reflection

This was easily one of the most influential and best months of my life. Coming to France, I wasn't sure what to expect but felt so welcomed by everyone there (I really don't get why everyone says the French are mean). I had been to Europe before, but never to a place where English was not the first language so this was truly an immersive experience. Though I wish I had made an effort to learn more French before I came, I am so grateful for how much I have learned and how much I can understand now and it is really eye-opening to be on the other side of a language barrier. Not only did I learn more about the language but I also learned so much about the culture and lifestyle of French people that I otherwise never would have known about. I also loved getting to be in such a small classroom environment, it was a really refreshing experience coming from such a big school where it is harder to make connections with classmates and professors. And of course I got to make new lifelong friends that I shared this amazing experience with. I will 100% be going back!!!