

Nine take summer tour of Italy and Greece

Written by Jes-c Brandt

Education First Tours organizes group of 51 from Colorado, Nebraska and Oklahoma communities

Five Holyoke High School students went on a nine day tour of some of Italy and Greece's most famous tourist attractions. Led by teacher Tracy Trumper, students Sarah Heermann, Austin Killin, Sara Kumm, Chantel Rafert and Dustin Wieland departed June 1 to Rome, returning to Holyoke after a full week on June 9.

Also on the tour was Christine Heermann of Holyoke, Trumper's mother Kay Norman and Julia Wechsler. The Holyoke group was joined by others from Nebraska and Oklahoma, for a total of 51 on the tour organized by Education First (EF) Tours.

Trumper noted this trip was the first for her, and it was so rewarding she is already looking into another. EF is intended to be an experience that is packed full of sightseeing, history and new experiences. From the accounts of those who went, it certainly sounds as if the group was kept busy with an abundance of activities.

To start their time abroad, they spent their first evening settling in, getting their first look at Rome and eating some authentic Italian food. On the first full day in Italy, the group got an early start at sightseeing. A tour guide led them through Vatican Museum and St. Peter's Church.

Later they visited the Colosseum, followed by Trevi Fountain, Pantheon and Piazza Navona. Of course all the while, the group was snapping photos and buying souvenirs to remember their time in Italy. Pictures, however, do not do it justice, said Trumper. There is nothing quite like seeing these sights first hand.

Trumper said it was hard to leave because they enjoyed their time so much. Rafert agreed it was difficult to go, however that observation was based mostly on the amount of shopping they all did while there.

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Continuing their tours, they traveled to Pompeii where Trumper said they had a phenomenal tour guide. It was her favorite part of the trip, and she gives part of the credit to the stories and history the guide shared. It really brought the place to life, said Trumper.

The second half of the trip was spent in Greece. The EF tour took an overnight ferry from Italy to Greece. Riding the ferry, said Trumper was totally unlike what they expected. It was relaxing and enjoyable, and truly an experience within itself. Kumm agreed the ferry ride was very fun, especially the disco they attended while on board.

While in Greece they visited the Acropolis and Mt. Olympia. Athens, said Rafert, was one of the best parts of the trip. While there, the group had a chance to get some time to themselves. Kumm commented on visiting the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, saying the guards there were particularly memorable.

Especially exciting was the "Greek night" they attended. There was music and dancing, said Rafert, and very Greek food, said Trumper.

Regardless of what sights they saw, Trumper pointed out the students have learned life skills from their time abroad. They gained experience in being out in the world. They've learned about safety, protecting themselves and looking out for one another. Learning about different currencies and cultures is something all the students can take away with them.

While all good things must come to an end, Trumper is looking forward to another EF tour in the future. It is her hope the educational trips can become a regular tradition for Holyoke High. At this point, she plans to organize a tour of London and Paris in 2011. It seems like a long time from now, but planning ahead is crucial said Trumper. For this summer's trip, students began planning in August 2008.

Commenting on trips to come, Trumper stated she hopes more students will be able to attend and that there will be more interest from people in the community. The trips are high-paced, she said, but you get a lot for your money when you tour with EF. Participants are challenged daily, and the whole experience proves very rewarding. Already, many from this year's trip are planning to attend another.

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