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Jennifer's Corner

by Jennifer Bowman

The Chronicles of Cambridge: Part III



The epitome of my trip was independent travel – a small group of us travel the continent of Europe, beginning in Rome, to meet up in Paris two weeks later. My group went from Rome, to Venice, to Salzburg, to Interlaken, to Amsterdam, and then to Paris. It was one of the most memorable experiences of the whole trip, as it should have been. Not as great as the States, but you can't be so biased not to realize the beauty of the whole WORLD, as God intended.

I have realized, after travelling throughout Europe for two weeks, that English is the best language in the world. This may or may not be true, but the language barrier is something that isolates you and makes you feel stupid, no matter what. Especially in France, where they pride themselves on making you feel as such.

Okay, let me defend France for a moment. I never thought I'd be doing this, honestly. Not everyone in the country hates Americans. Gypsies, for instance, love Americans. They run up to you, asking frantically, "Do you speak English?" and as soon as you instinctively say "Yes" they hold up a little card with a sign explaining how their babies are dying and need money immediately. You may feel bad, but this happens all over Paris all the time and they all have the same story. You see them laughing one minute and begging for money the next. Interesting.

One thing I really hate is the assumption by all homeless people that I am rich or even have spare change. They never want to ask their own native people for money - just tourists, and American tourists at that. Are they not aware that the dollar is worth 75% of a euro, and 50% of a pound? You're asking the wrong people for money, here.

Also, food in Switzerland is so expensive. SO expensive. I was astounded. Hamburgers at McDonald's cost 9 francs – which is comparable to U.S. dollars. The thing is, that's what I've been paying all along. A hamburger for four pounds seems like a bargain in the UK – but that's eight dollars right there! Which is quite ridiculous.

Rome is dirty. There's no other way around it. Yes, it has beautiful aspects to it, but at least they pick up their trash in Paris. And Venice is kind of small and uninteresting unless you have the money to pay for a gondola, which I didn't.

Amsterdam was wonderful. If you ignore the sex shops and "coffee" shops, there's a world of parks, museums, and great food and people. I really enjoyed the atmosphere, even in the bizarre hail storms amid the sunny skies.

And really, the only time I encountered truly rude French people was on Easter Sunday at the Notre Dame service. We got there really early to get seats, and ended up in the very second row. Some of the laymen put up a sign, mentioning "reservais" or something. I thought, do we need to move? So, because everyone around me was American, I asked the one close French person, "Parle vous Anglais?"

He immediately began to scream at me in French, listing off languages that he spoke and rolling his eyes at me and refusing to answer my question in English. I later found out, due to a French translating friend, that the signs read "Reserved for American ambassadors at 10:00 AM." This made them angry, and I couldn't have picked a worse time to ask "Parle vous Anglais?" I later witnessed them rip the sign from the back of the seats and stuff it in their coat pockets. Also, Asian tourists are everywhere. They travel in massive groups and take tons of pictures with lots of flash. Even during communion on Easter Sunday. I'm not sure they realize that's like kicking Buddha in the face on Chinese New Year, or something.

Overall, I'm so grateful for my England/Europe experience over the past two and a half months. Cambridge will always have a special place in my heart, and I know I'm going to have to come back someday. The beautiful sky, the locality, and the peacefulness are reminiscent of a simple time in life. I can only hope I am afforded the opportunity to come back. But I'm ready to come home, too. I can't wait to see my fiancé, my cat, my family, and my friends. I may have changed a little, but for the better. I will never regret this experience.

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