

Local student ambassador gains global perspective

Written by CAROL POMEDAY

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Belgium girl's summer includes trip to Europe with People to People

If Leah Bohlmann of Belgium is asked what she did on her summer vacation, she will have lots to talk about and plenty of photographs to illustrate it.

Leah, 13, an eighth-grader at Cedar Grove-Belgium Middle School, spent 19 days in Europe as a student ambassador for People to People.



She was one of 40 students from Wisconsin and among the youngest to participate in the program. Leah was recommended by her teachers and principal, but had to go through an interview process to be chosen.

It was not only her first trip abroad but also the first time she had flown in an airplane. Leah said she was more excited than nervous about the adventure.

She kept in touch with her parents Jessica and Kevin through text messages and e-mails.

The students, who ranged in age from 12 to 18, usually stayed in hotels and traveled together with chaperones. Local members of People to People arranged cultural opportunities for them.

Leah stayed three nights with a German family that had three daughters, ages 10, 12 and 15.

She went to a restaurant, a historical museum and go-karting down a mountain with the

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family. She also went to the girls' school.

"It was cool, but I couldn't understand anything," Leah said.

The group went to Italy, France, Austria and Switzerland, visiting numerous cathedrals, castles and museums.

The first stop was Rome, where they saw the ruins of the Roman Forum and Colosseum.

"It didn't feel real, that I was actually there," Leah said.

The group was in Italy for six days. They rode in gondolas in Venice, saw the leaning tower of Pisa and visited Tuscany and Florence.

On July 4, they went to a symphony concert in Vienna. The United States Independence Day wasn't a big deal in Vienna, but someone in the city shot off red, white and blue fireworks, Leah said.

The group went to a German concentration camp and graveyard, which was disturbing, Leah said. It is something she will not forget.

In Switzerland, she made apple strudel with a commercial baker and rode to the top of an Olympic ski hill.

The group stayed in Paris for three days. A visit to the Eiffel Tower was the highlight for Leah.

"It was like a dream come true. It's something I always wanted to see," she said. "I didn't expect it would be as good as it was. We went to the top. It was so cool. You could see everything."

The visit was at night, but they talked the bus driver into stopping the next day so they could take more pictures.

Leah also took pictures of Paris' locks of love bridges, where couples sealed their love by putting a padlock on a fence and throwing the key into the river.

Image Information: THE ROMAN COLOSSEUM was one of the first places Leah Bohlmann of Belgium visited during a 19-day trip to Europe as a student ambassador for People to People.

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