



## **George Washington's Young Ambassadors to France**

**"Dost thou love life? Then do not squander time; for that's the stuff life is made of." Ben Franklin, United States Ambassador to France, 1776**

Last June a very special group of 13 of our IB students left for France on a unique tour called Young Ambassadors to France. Accompanying them were some students from Colorado Academy, Thomas Jefferson, Chaparral High and GW's fearless French teacher Liz Ward. Tour organizers Catherine and Robert Bayne were waiting for them in France. The group started their trip in the city of Pau, the capital of the Bearn region in the majestic Pyrenees mountains between France and Spain. In Pau we had our own private residence at the Chateau d'Idron where we had some very fun home cooked dinners with the owner. From there we began our local excursions each morning in a private bus.

Pau is the birthplace of King Henry IV, and a private guided tour was given inside his castle. We were impressed by the lavish furnishings and then were told that during the French Revolution the mobs broke in and everything except one fork was stolen and had to be replaced later. Other excursions included a visit to the beautiful botanical gardens of Tarbes and a trip to a purebred stallion farm, National Haras de Gelos, founded by Napoleon for his cavalry. We went to the Wright Brother's museum – did you know that the Wright Brothers went to live in France soon after their first flight because the French government was more interested in aviation than the American Government? So the brothers ended up in Pau because of the climate and started the world's first airport and pilot training school there! We went to the Museum of Berets and had a fascinating time learning about the different types, how they are made and taking photos of each other wearing berets. Later we had refreshments in a trendy café with a mountain view on the Boulevard des Pyrenees.



We visited a French high school in Pau and were treated to lunch there. Our arrival had been communicated to the city Mayor's office and they gave us a welcome reception for our young ambassadors. This was the first large group of American students to come visit them in such a manor. One evening we went to a big outdoor music festival where the performers had been preparing for months. Disaster struck! A downpour began big enough to make everyone dash for any cover and the city cancelled the festival. The kids were having a great time escaping the rain with their new French friends who showed them the way. When we rounded up our wet group they were all laughing and taking photos. On our last night in Pau we had a big farewell dinner at our chateau and then it was off to a chalet high in the Pyrenees.



We had the whole chalet to ourselves in the Pyrenees National Park, and a super guide who took us into Spain through an old pass the Romans used. We had a beautiful hike and went to see a huge fortress which the Spanish hoped would defend the pass against Napoleon. He captured the fort. We had delicious Spanish hot chocolate at the Pilgrim Café by the fort and went to explore the old medieval quarter of the city Jaca in Aragon. After dinner at the Chalet, we went on an extraordinary night hike by moonlight, passing flocks of sheep on old Roman trails. One of the students said it was a moment she will never forget. The next day it was on to the beach!



Our next residence was right on the beaches of the lovely resort of Saint Jean de Luz. On the way we stopped in the port of Bayonne, where the first cocoa beans, chili peppers, and potatoes from the new world were brought into France. We went into the famous cathedral there and the massive organ inside was actually being played. It was easy to see how that tremendous music could put the fear of god into medieval peasants. We also visited the super ornate church where King Louis XIV married Marie Therese of Spain. Then it was on to the Basque villages in a private tour where we did some shopping and looked at the picturesque countryside. Back at the residence in the evenings we had our own Basque chef who went out of his way to prepare different French, Basque and Spanish styles of cuisine for our group. While we were in Saint Jean there happened to be the city's annual festival and we took part in the big party on the plaza with fireworks.

Going down into Spain once again by train we visited San Sebastian and managed to do some shopping in spite of rainy weather. We went to see the city's captivating Aquarium of the Sea where just about everything was swimming around you while you walked through transparent tubes. Back at Saint Jean, we had a picnic up on the cliffs overlooking the bay and the Atlantic Ocean with a group of great French high school students who wanted to meet their American counterparts. This was organized through Catherine's contacts with the English teachers there. We hope that everyone exchanged

email addresses and are establishing new friendships. We even had a big article and photo of our young ambassadors in the major newspaper there – the Sud Ouest!

On our last day we had really good weather and went to the elegant beach resort of Biarritz and the kids did whatever they wanted. Some hung out on the beach watching surfers and some went shopping and sightseeing. Everyone came back with a suntan - some with sunburn- and all of them had a big smile on their face after such a fun day.

That night, as just about every night, the kids stayed up talking and laughing in their rooms until the wee hours. Since we had to get up at 4:30 am to catch the plane to Paris, they got little sleep. Nevertheless they were up at 4:30 ready for action, and accompanied on their way by the undaunted Liz Ward. These kids were real troopers and we were proud of them. Our next trip, June 21-July 4th 2008 will be just as fun, and this time will include a week in Paris – once again with a private chateau residence and a chef! Who wants to come? Check it out on our trip website at [Voyager-France.com](http://Voyager-France.com) (coming up soon) or call/email: Young Ambassadors to France at (303) 744-8810 [voyagerfrance@gmail.com](mailto:voyagerfrance@gmail.com)

Catherine and Robert Bayne, tour organizers