

Normandy 2013

Monday 00.05 saw us depart after waving goodbye to several teary-eyed parents. With our bellies full of travel-sickness pills we embarked on the first leg of our epic 17 hour journey with high spirits. Pupils spent lots of time chatting about how much money, sweets, food, magazines and make-up they had brought (and that was just the boys!)

Before we knew it we were stopping at Northampton for a cup of hot chocolate or kebab (Jawaria and Ayisha Mahmood) and a comfort break before we motored down to Portsmouth. Most folk managed at least an hour or two shut-eye before we arrived (slightly early) at the port.

After our passports were all found to be in order (phew!) we alighted the coach to board Brittany Ferries' La Normandie (enormous ferry) and after Mr Collins' group kissed goodbye to English soil we climbed up the steps to the boat to be greeted by the friendly crew who led us to our lounge.

"Can we go to the shops?"

"When can we look around?"

"Can I go to the toilet?" Were only some of the questions the teachers were bombarded with within moments of setting foot on board the boat. Eventually the boat left British shores and we were able to relax and enjoy what the ferry had to offer.

Sea-sickness only claimed a couple of victims on the 6 hour crossing despite the number of travel-sickness pills which were consumed. Three pupils (and nearly one staff member – Miss Akhtar) were consumed with Neptune's Nausea but once out of their systems they were fine and even willing to have a joke about it – isn't that right Idrees!?

We arrived in Caen at 1.30pm (French time) and then set off towards La Mazure. This journey only took an hour and a half.

On arrival we were greeted by our hosts and told the house-rules, the worst of which forbid any sweets or drinks in the bedrooms – how would the teachers manage?

We went for dinner at 7.00pm where we enjoyed cheese and tomato galettes (a French savoury pancake) and salad. This is when the pupils were introduced to their favourite bit of the French cuisine – French bread! Even if the kids didn't like their main course they could always rely on the beautiful fresh baguette!

After we cleared up all our mess from dinner we were given some time to unpack and sort our rooms out before bed. Although the pupils wouldn't admit it they were all ready for some sleep and, with the odd exception, everyone was asleep for 10pm – staff and pupils alike.

Tuesday 7.00am – Staff awoke bright-eyed and bushy tailed ready to wake up the kids – something which was relished particularly by Mr Collins! We went down for breakfast at 8am and the kids enjoyed fresh French bread, hot chocolate, jam and cereals – the bread was a big hit with the kids!

After receiving our packed lunches for the day we got on the coach and set off to Mont St Michel. The journey was a pleasant meander through the Normandy countryside which ended with a breathtaking view of the island and its walls. After a short shuttle bus we arrived at Mont St Michel, split into our separate groups to explore the medieval streets and set off on our way. After a couple of hours of gift shops, narrow passageways, gift shops, cafes, beautiful medieval architecture, swords, armour and more gift shops we met for lunch. We all enjoyed our packed lunches in the glorious sunshine, battling with the seagulls for our food.

On the way back to our accommodation we stopped off to buy presents at a French supermarket. After the staff had stocked up with French food and the pupils had bought a lot of random presents we boarded the coach and set off back to the accommodation.

After another lovely evening meal (although some of the children would disagree!) we settled down for another uninterrupted night's sleep...almost!

Wednesday 7.00am – another early rise for our day out at the zoo. After breakfast and picking up our packed lunches we boarded the coach for a short trip to Chemprepus Zoo. We split into our smaller groups and set off to look at the myriad of creatures from goats to penguins and meerkats to tigers. The chimpanzees were a favourite with the pupils – perhaps they had a lot in common with them! Mr Collins' group really enjoyed the gibbons – perhaps he had an affinity with them! The giftshop had a wonderful range of very expensive presents, which the pupils bought for their little brothers and sisters as did some of the staff.

After the zoo we set off for another short trip to the beach at Carolles. The weather was hot and sunny – a bit windy too! We went for a little paddle in the sea and it was freezing! The waves went over our shorts so we had to dry them out by running around or sunbathing. We played cricket and Umar bowled Mr Collins out with a wonderful fast-paced right-arm over the wicket delivery – which he enjoyed...Umar – not Mr Collins! The staff joined in the games and Miss Akhtar proved herself to be a great batsman – sorry – batslady! Mrs Prest even managed to do a maths lesson on the beach with some of our (more eccentric) pupils!

After we had dried out and de-sanded we set off back to the accommodation for our evening meal – the best one of the week – pizza! By the time we had finished our dinner we didn't have long to get dressed up for the disco. We went down to the boathouse by the lake to boogie the night away and play ping pong. The tuckshop was a particular high-point and provided the much needed sustenance for our budding dancers. Mr Collins had a very capable assistant in Raqem who even managed to try his sales patter with the pupils and staff! He needs more practice!

Our last night in France was a late one after we had finished packing for the journey home. We slept well because we had another long day ahead of us.

Thursday 6.45am - our earliest rise yet! We brought all our bags and suitcases down from our rooms before breakfast then the teachers checked them to make sure we hadn't been eating sweets – all clear, phew!

Our last breakfast consisted of more fresh bread, jam and cereals before we said “merci et au revoir” to our hosts and set off towards Bayeux to see the world famous tapestry.

When we arrived we split into our smaller groups for a quick look around the town where we spent the last of our money and bought ice-creams and souvenirs. We reconvened outside the cathedral and made the short walk to the tapestry. We walked around the amazing 70metre artefact with a commentary played to us on our own individual listening devices – it was very interesting with lots of battles and soldiers.

After that we went to a park for our packed lunch before setting off to the port. Mr Collins went off to buy more presents and came back with crisps and chocolate, which he said was for his wife but nobody believed him!

A short journey on the coach brought us to the port of Caen and we waved goodbye to French soil on the Mont St Michel ferry. We had lots of time (6 hours!) to explore the boat, shops, restaurants and arcade areas on board the ferry. Mr Collins' group particularly enjoyed the café where they all enjoyed a portion of the fine French delicacy...chips! Then they were found shooting, driving and flying in the arcade games area – Mr Collins was rubbish!

Eventually we returned to Portsmouth and disembarked the ferry and back onto our coach for the 6 hour drive back to Bradford.

After a short stop at the service station for a “comfort break” we arrived back to Highgate at 3.00am and by 3.30 (nearly) everyone had been collected.

The trip was enjoyed by all pupils and staff and it was a great success and a big thank you was said to our coach drivers and in particular to Mrs Cormican for organising it all.