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Postcards from Abroad

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Sunshine in Spain and Norway's National Day

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Sunshine in Spain and Norway's National Day 05/20/2014



Left: the children's parade honor the royal family by singing Ja, vi elsker Right: a little Norwegian girl enjoys a ice-cream cone

Oy oy! So much accomplished in so little time and with so little time remaining!! Being in Spain for 6 days allowed me to explore much more than the typical tourist streets. What a big change from this quiet little town! Hustle and bustle of the city occurred around the clock. Our housing was in the Gothic quarter of the old town, right next to Barcelona's Cathedral. We decided to start things off right and take a tour of the old town, where we learned fun facts and stories we were able to share with the rest of the group that arrived a few days later. For instance, the sections of the Roman wall that once surrounded the town are still viewable in certain areas, and the Cataluña flag is said to be the product of four fingers dipped in the blood of battle and smeared across a gold shield. It was neat to wind through the narrow streets and listen to the history of the area. That night we walked to the magic fountain water and lights show across town and found a cool garden on the way. By taking a bit longer route we got our first panoramic view of the city.

The next day was another filled with walking; we toured the surroundings of Park Guell, a mosaic park constructed by Antoni Gaudi from 1900-1914. Lunch was a unique opportunity to eat with a Spanish host mother who prepared a large assortment of tapas. Tapas are a common Spanish cuisine of appetizer-style foods. We had fried calamari rings, shrimp and salmon salad on bread, cheeses, meats, eggplant pizza, and more. She even picked fresh nespres (loquat) fruit off of the tree in her garden for us. It was a fruit I had never heard of before. As we ate together we got to hear about her life growing up in Barcelona and difficulties in the job market, a problem for many in recent years. She was open and welcoming and as authentic as it gets!

The rest of our group of 7 arrived that night and the next day we spent time on La Rambla, the "tourist" street. Vendors selling souvenirs, plants, flowers, and food stretched end to end. The greatest part of the street is the market La Botiqueria which sits adjacent to it. There were bold and beautiful stalls of every fruit, vegetable, and meat you could imagine. Fresh fruit cups and juices were for sale everywhere you looked. There were also enormous candy stalls that dazzled passersby. Though crowded, this area of town was well worth visiting.

I was fortunate that the other American from Linfield is adventurous, because when he decided he was going to get to the church on top of the hill WAY off in the distance his mind was made up. After debating modes of transportation, he decided on taking the metro and then walking to the top. Another American from Wisconsin and I joined him. The Temple of the Sacred Heart of Jesus sits cozy with an amusement park on top of this hill. This struck me as rather odd. The hill and stair hike to the church was well worth the grand overview of Barcelona. You could see the city, ocean, and less developed area with trees stretching the opposite direction.

It would not have been Barcelona without visiting the overcrowded beach! The weather just kept improving as the days went on and there was plenty of time spent soaking up the sun with friends. The trip was another great experience of architecture and culture and we went from this one straight into the next after the plane back to Norway and spending the night in Oslo.

May 17th marked the 200th anniversary of Norway signing their constitution of independence (though they were still under Swedish rule at the time). The way the day is celebrated is rather unique, and a great cultural experience. I was able to join in on the festivities with two other American friends in Oslo, the nation's capitol.

If you wake up at 5am to leave the hostel by 6am to get to the royal palace for an ideal view you will be waking up too early because no one else will even start showing up until 8:30am for the 10:00am parade. Lesson learned. We were out and about before the flags were even hung. It was eerie quiet at first, but then almost all at once the town came alive! Boy, I have never seen so many flags in one place before. It is tradition to have a parade wind the main streets and up past the palace. This parade is composed of mostly children and young adults waving flags and holding banners. There are bands and cheering and this parade lasted for the better part of the day, a good 4-5 hours! We had a perfect view of the royal family coming out onto the balcony of the palace to wave and watch the parade. Shortly after they came out, everyone in the courtyard began singing *Ja, vi elsker* the patriotic anthem of Norway.

My favorite activity of the day was observing the bunads (traditional dresses) from different counties around Norway. My favorite is from Telemark County (where I'm studying). It is black, red, green and gold. bunads have intricate flower embroidery and can consist of a skirt, vest worn over a white long sleeve shirt, apron, attached purse, belt, and headband. They are truly a work of art. There are also male bunads, though less common from what I observed, that had high socks, a buttoned vest and jacket, trousers, and sometimes a hat. Children were dressed in mini bunads as well as average clothing. There is much diversity within the parade as more and more cultures become a part of Norway. I saw quite a few people wearing traditional costumes from outside Norway as well.

The other significant custom should be called throw away your diet day. Hotdogs, soda, and

ice-cream stands were EVERYWHERE and enjoyed by adults and children alike. I spent time during the day just sitting and people-watching from beside a fountain soaking up the celebratory atmosphere. Even though I am not Norwegian, I felt welcomed to join in the festivities.

Now that I am back from this adventure, I have pure excitement coursing through my veins slightly buffered by a lingering final paper to write. This paper for Norwegian Perspectives on Outdoor Education stands between me and the west coast, where I will spend my final two weeks chasing my dream of visiting the Lysefjord and particularly the Kjerag boulder which has stolen my heart since before I left the States. My route includes spending a weekend in the town of Stavanger before the fjord and ending up in the town Bergen before taking a train cross-country back to Bø.

I'll write again soon!

My Best,

Nicole Kachel