

Foreign Travel at Lopez Island High School

Lopez is a beautiful place to live. There is community support, countless opportunities to explore nature, an emphasis on healthy living, and exciting activities. I speak from the heart, though, when I say that sometimes I need a change of pace and feel the constraints of living on a small island where “everyone knows everyone,” words that are both a blessing and a curse. Lopez Island High School does a remarkable job, however, of opening students’ eyes to the world beyond “The Rock.” Every year, there are school trips including to Québec, Paris, Tokyo, Managua, and recently, Guizhou Province in China. Each provides an eye opening experience to both the students of Lopez School, and the community when students show their slides at public shows. In 2008, the French Club continued the tradition of traveling to Québec by train. They went up the Toronto Tower and enjoyed a tantalizing view; they enjoyed learning about and eating syrup in a maple shack, and watched an exciting hockey game. It was a wonderful trip, and will be repeated next year.

My freshman year, I spent two weeks traveling in France, going to countless museums and eating tons of delicious food. I stayed with a host family for five days, enjoying the Easter Holiday, and having the time of my life communicating with an incredibly sweet family. I saw the Hall of Mirrors in Versailles, the nearly one-thousand year old Bayeux tapestry, and accidentally walked past the Mona Lisa multiple times while in the Louvre.

As a junior, I participated in an exploratory service trip to Guizhou Province in China. I spent time working with ethnic minority and blind students. Later, we explored the beautiful region and attended several Miao festival celebrations; we even spent the night in a tiny mountain village in the hills. While I adventured through the mountains of Avatar, some of my friends were in Japan, seeing temples, dressing in traditional kimonos, walking through a thousand torii gates and visiting the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum.

My senior year, I hope to go on yet another service trip to Nicaragua. Usually, the Spanish club stays just outside of Managua to learn about Nicaraguan culture, speak Spanish, and work side by side with the people from the village. The group also goes to the mountain village El Por Venir, a co-op coffee plantation, to see how coffee is grown and to spend time working with the people there. Lopez School stays with the Center for Development in Central America which is a unique opportunity because this host organization generally does not accept high school students, but has a good relationship with Lopez students because of their level of maturity.

I will admit that it is rare for a student to go on all of the trips, but it is possible. For both the French and Spanish trips, there is a three year language requirement.

Students on the Japan trip go through an intensive selection process and travel with high schoolers from Anacortes and/or Orcas Island. A surprisingly large number of students go on these trips, have incredible experiences, and come home brimming with excitement and knowledge about the larger world. I can say that my trips to France and China have changed my life in numerous ways. I have grown more independent, sure of myself and begun to understand the world beyond Lopez Island.