

## Ireland & France Summer 2017

My three-week study abroad course was an experience of a lifetime. I experienced so many new things and got to see a beautiful country. The first thing that was a major adjustment was the food. In Ireland, their beef is all grass fed. Beef cows are out on pasture 24/7, and this



gives their meat a different taste and texture. The flavor is different because the breeds naturally have leaner meat along with the grass-fed aspect and the texture is softer. They also tend to serve french fries and/or potatoes with every meal, even lasagna. In comparison to France, they served bread with every meal. I don't think I went a day without eating a version of potato or bread with just about any meal.

Besides the food, the culture was very different, too. During the

late afternoon/early evening hours, you could find people playing street music along with Irish dancers. I was amazed at the crowds they drew in, even if we were in "touristy" cities like Galway and Dublin. People in general are just nicer; they are more welcoming than Americans. Another huge part of their culture is the history. I think you could go up to just about anyone and they could tell you about a certain abbey/castle/battleground. For instance, our first tour guide, Paul, had a story for everything history related during our first week in Ireland.

Another big difference was the weather. In Ireland, it rained pretty much every day. During our stay in Galway, it was very chilly, almost to the point where I wanted my winter jacket. Some days were colder than others. It was almost a continuing cycle of the sun, then clouds, rain, wind and repeat. Connemara was the same way, except it was just down right



cold because we were in the mountains. Yes, that is their summer, but once we made it to Dublin, it was very warm and sunny. It didn't rain nearly as much as it did in Galway. The weather in France was comparable to the weather in Dublin, warm and sunny.



My absolute favorite place we visited was Chevalait, a horse dairy farm in France. They milk 48 brood mares that are draft breeds. Draft breeds produce more milk. The barn is set up similar to a dairy cattle barn. There are tie stalls on each side with a feed alley down the middle with ad libitum hay. After the mare foals, they are not milked until the foal is able to eat hay on its own. During the day, the mares and their foals are brought into the barn at 5 a.m. for morning milking, and then they stay inside all day until the last milking at 4:30 p.m. They then are all released to the pasture for the night, and the foals can nurse off the mare. They have their own stallions and a lot of pasture space.

All in all, this experience was eye-opening. We did quite a bit during our three-week trip, and I am grateful I was able to go. The scenery was not like I had ever seen before; it's so green and hilly.

The landscaping and just the way of life in Ireland and France is so much different than it is here. After visiting Ireland, I came back saying "I want to go back." There is still a lot of places and sightseeing we didn't have time for.