

**THE KNOXVILLE/RICHMOND EXCHANGE
TO PAU, FRANCE
JUNE 2015**

The hospitality of the Pau FF Club was amazing. We all felt welcome and were treated extremely well.

Pau is an historic city built around the castle of Henry IV who was born there and later became King of France. It is situated at the foothills of the Pyrenees Mountains and offers a wonderful climate.

Our visit included:

- The castle of Henry IV which holds not only original furnishings and decorations from the 1200s but also many of France's other national treasures
- Reception at city hall with local fares such as wine, cheese and sweets
- Sightseeing of the downtown area
- Welcome party at the regional farm where we had homemade wine, breads and a traditional dish of the area called piperade
- A visit to the Basque country with our home hosts, Alain & Michele Vaissiere, for a cherry festival. There, we experienced local songs, dances and wines. Cherries were abundant and we were able to pick them directly off of the trees
- Bus excursion to Biarritz- a seaside resort town and playground for the wealthy
- A visit to St. Jean-de-Luz with its historic church
- Espellette, a resort village famous for its red peppers. The same evening, Renee, our home hosts and I enjoyed a champagne and Thai dinner prepared by the niece of a FF member who is also a chef.
- The following day, our home hosts drove us for a visit to Lourdes, a city famous for its Catholic shrine and healing waters dedicated

to St. Mary and credited with over 4000 miracles. That same day, we rode a funicular to a surrounding mountaintop to view the city. This mountaintop was the starting point for international cycling races.

- Visit to a vineyard for a wine tasting and dinner.
- Visit to underground caves (grottos de Betharran) with impressive stalagmite and stalactite formations. That evening, we were also treated to an impromptu dinner by a friend of our exchange director Doreen Millepied
- The last full day of our Pau exchange, we visited a very old church dedicated to a Catholic martyr, St. Foy, who was tortured and killed for not giving up her faith. This was followed by a tour of a chateau with exquisite gardens and lunch at a "village restaurant" with delicious mushroom omelets!
- Our farewell dinner was held at a restaurant surrounded by rose gardens with a full view of the Pyrenees Mountains. This was the first opportunity to get a view of the mountain peaks as they were under cloud cover until that day. The evening was finished with singing, dancing and farewell hugs and kisses

The three Knoxville ambassadors, Panos & Renee Ioannides, Joanne Hayden and her sister, Loretta Bunn along with the seventeen Richmond ambassadors had an unforgettable experience and made some lifelong friends in the tradition of FFI.

Panos