

Amanda Higley's travels with the *Pasporta Servo*

After graduating from college, Amanda Higley decided to spend one month in France using Esperanto and the *Pasporta Servo*. *Pasporta Servo* is a network of Esperanto-speakers around the world who host visiting Esperantists in their homes, often providing their guests with meals and showing them around the town at no cost. Amanda wrote to several hosts in France and planned out her trip before leaving, but after one month she was having so much fun – and had so much money left, since she didn't have to pay for lodging or meals – that she continued to travel in Europe for 16 months, visiting 16 different countries and staying with over 100 hosts! Travelling this way was not only inexpensive, it was also a wonderful way for Amanda to get to know the peoples and cultures of the countries she visited, in a way that she never could have if she had travelled as just another American tourist using English. Amanda shared in the daily lives of her hosts, living in their homes, helping them prepare meals, and speaking with real people about real issues.

(Below are excerpts from Amanda's online travelogue which I've translated from the original Esperanto. -Hoss)

Introduction

Hi everybody! I'm Amanda Higley, a 24 year-old wanderer from Sacramento, California. Since the 27th of April 1999, I've been travelling in European "Esperanto Land" for more than 7 months... and I don't know when I'll be returning home. Europe is so rich in Esperanto get-togethers and active Esperantists, and travel with *Pasporta Servo* is so inexpensive and friendly that I could easily stay a whole year or more.

Right now I'm typing on the computer of a host in southern Germany, one of many Esperanto speakers who opened their homes, refrigerators, guest mattresses or beds, and even their Internet access to me, through which my relatives and friends can always contact me virtually. Honestly, I don't always sleep at the house of a *Pasporta Servo* host, but often at the homes of Esperanto speakers whom I met on route, or who invited me to visit.

Only three times I've stayed at a non-Esperantist's house during the entire trip, and it was really very different -- so different that I'm certain that if I'd used Servas or another in-home hospitality organization, and spoke English with my hosts, I'd have already grown bored of travelling.

It's difficult to explain to non-Esperantists our natural accord and feeling of familiarity, but certainly you understand. Not always, but most often, when I meet a new host, the conversation flows from the very beginning, and I never feel like a stranger or a heavy burden for them. That's why I was able to travel this long in Esperanto-land... because this kind of trip is always changing, always interesting, always a adventure surrounded by friends.

Why did I want to travel with the *Pasporta Servo*? Oh, many reasons. To improve my Esperanto, to see how Esperanto endures on the continent where it's used the most, to absorb other cultures by way of my hosts' viewpoints, to do something independent to assert my self-confidence after separating from my ex-fiancee... but mainly, to have an inexpensive adventure.

Now you'll hear the story of my travels, for people who dream about such a trip, or are considering becoming a host, or simply wonder how the whole thing works. Read on!



My travel philosophy: spontaneity and flexibility

Possibly the most useful thing about the *Pasporta Servo* is that you don't need a lot of planning; you can just pick up and go wherever you want. Usually I'll contact only hosts who don't ask for more than 3 days of advance notice, though a few times I've phoned others to ask if they'd be interested in a sudden guest. Most often the response is, "Yes! Did I write '2 weeks in advance'? It doesn't matter!" Often I'll plan only one or two hosts before the current one, and thus avoid complicated



Zalaegerszeg, western Hungary

rearrangements when I decide to stay longer with one, which often happens.

Itinerary, or, so where did I go?

I began in Paris, for two reasons: first, it was the most inexpensive destination for a flight from San Francisco, and second, because I'd studied French and could use it on the street. Now I realize that was a very wise choice, because I wouldn't have been ready for the complete inability to communicate in Hungary for example, which I visited much later, as an experienced traveller.

Actually, I have to confess something: I didn't plan on staying in Europe this long. My cheap plane ticket had a condition: come home after 30 days. That was short, but better than nothing I thought, certain that the rest of my money (about \$1300 after the plane and train tickets) would last only a month in any case. (Ah, how naive!) So I accepted that, and planned a round-trip through France.

That I did, and during that month I visited Paris, a village in Alsace, red-roofed Lyon, the ancient alpine-peak city of Brianche, coastal Montpellier, southern Toulouse, castle-surrounded Tours, and beachside Caen. A few days before the end of the month, someone commented: "It's a shame you couldn't stay several months more until the

IJK (International YouthCongress) in Hungary!"... planting the seed of an idea in my head.

The French, against my expectations, almost always fed me for free, even invited me to restaurant meals, and I thought hopefully: "I've probably saved so much money that way... maybe I still have several hundred dollars left!" So I phoned my bank to find out how much money I had. The ATMs in Europe don't tell you how much money is left in your account, (as I was accustomed to in the US and expected here), so I didn't have any way to check besides an expensive phone call! Imagine my amazement when the woman calmly announced: "Your account balance is a thousand dollars." "Aaaah!" I cried happily, hopping up and down in the telephone booth, "Thank you, thank you, good day, bye!"

And thus began my spontaneous, unlimited travels of Europe. I just didn't use the return ticket and had to buy another (round-trip plane tickets often are cheaper than one-way, in any case, so it's useful to buy round-trip without needing to return; that's the airline-industry logic!?)

In France I stayed almost two more months, calmly sunning on the beach in Caen for two weeks, visiting castles on the Loire river and the green hills of Swiss Normandy, deeply familiarizing myself with the beautiful coastline and modern dances of Brittany, and at long last revisiting my friends in Lyon on the way to Switzerland.

I spent two weeks in pricey Switzerland, hurrying east towards Hungary. I loved Geneva and considered moving to that paradise and finding a job with the UN (that's before I visited the UN and grew disillusioned when I learned how unfair its structure is). Next I went to the student village of Lausanne, the Esperantist Culture Center at La Chaux de Fonds, and a few villages in the Swiss hills.

At long last I spent the week before the IJK in Munich, southern Germany, with an utterly wonderful family who spoke Esperanto at home, living their peaceful everyday family life -- where their one-year-old daughter stole my heart. And next came the excellent IJK... but I'll describe that next (see the "Meetings" section).

After the IJK, as you may have already guessed, I wasn't ready to go home... I desperately wanted to stay even longer than before, more than 4 more months, until the famous I.S. (International Seminar) after Christmas, a celebration that I'd heard about since I was a beginner and learned the IS-song. So again I phoned the bank... and I had four dollars in my account. With that I couldn't even buy a plane ticket home! After a short phone call to my parents and abandoning my resolution not to borrow money, I was able to remain an aimless wanderer.

During the next two and a half months, I explored Hungary. More than a month in all I spent in the beautiful, huge capital city of Budapest and its surroundings before I made the rounds to all corners of that country: Eger, Debrecen, Szolnok, a village near Szeged, Pecs, Zalaegerszeg, Szombathely, Mosonmagyaróvár, plus many side trips to nearby sights like the family vineyard, a grassy bird refuge, charming villages like Sopron, etc.

In the middle of the Hungarian trip I made a funny side trip with four Hungarians to the Mountain-Cabin Meeting in the center of Austria (see the “Meetings” section), a small weekend mountain-climbing trip that I’d heard about from a host.

At the end of October, I left Hungary with three young Hungarians, with whom I chatted and had fun on the night train on the way to Strasbourg, where we took part in an amazing TEJO-seminar, whose organizers fortunately accepted me via the Internet (full description in “Meetings”).



Ludwigshafen, Western Germany

And since the beginning of November, I travelled through Germany, slowly, visiting Offenburg, my distant relatives near Stuttgart, again Munich, Karlsruhe, Ludwigshafen and Mannheim, Bonn, and Cologne so far.

Meetings, or how not to sleep

IJK (International Youth Congress, in Veszprem, Hungary)

I really enjoy get-togethers (mainly because so far I’ve had the enjoyable role of a carefree participant; probably that positive impression would quickly disappear if I became an organizer). My first international get-together was a bit confusing, however.



Brittany, Northwestern France

At the IJK, there were so many events that my main problem was making choices... in fact I chose poorly and was very sad to learn afterward that I missed a bunch of interesting talks while I took part in various guided trips to surrounding factories, villages, museums, etc. (although those were also very interesting!)

I was a busy bee, buzzing from one thing to another, chatting with everyone, always trying to meet new people at each meal. I met people from countries that I knew absolutely nothing about, and I, interested, had dozens of questions for them (our education about other countries in the U.S. is pushed aside by the need to understand our own huge country, unfortunately). Thus I had many fascinating conversations and new acquaintances, though there wasn’t enough time to get to know everyone very well... that’s the problem with big congresses, isn’t it?

For me, as someone who comes from a country with less than 100 young Esperantists (not to mention how few active ones) the most amazing and best event was the whole-group program when we celebrated in a group of several hundred!

For example, undoubtedly the most memorable moment of the congress was the spontaneous Amplifiki concert, during which I was shocked and amazed by the amazing atmosphere created by that talent, Kim, who absolutely ruled the singing, dancing mass of people. Also during the National Evening, after a professional dance group from Hungary presented their fascinating dances to us, they invited us to learn to dance -- and people *ran* from their chairs, forming a huge spiral of hundreds of enthusiastic, hand-linked participants (including me, of course!).

And not least, our group excursion to Budapest -- and more specifically our arrival at the Budapest train station -- was absolutely thrilling for me. We poured out of our privately reserved train, filling the entire platform with a huge mob of Esperantists, green-star flags leading us down along two long staircases, which we completely filled -- and there were still more people!

For more, see the original online at: <http://tejo.org/ps>