

2018 French Study Tour to New Caledonia

By every account, the inaugural study tour was a gigantic success. The French-speaking gem in the south Pacific lived up to everyone's expectation of charm, fun, culture & snorkelling heaven. All tour participants were rewarded for their long 9 month wait and I certainly forgot about the intensive organisation endured once we arrived in Noumea.

Fourteen elective French students from Years 9 to 12 spent eight glorious days in New Caledonia during the Term 1 break. They were Michael Woodman, Alexis Ngai, Sophia Henssen, Emma Bramham, Jake Robinson, Emma Le Maitre, Elizabeth Jenkins, Georgia Wallace, Hannah Rothnie, Kimberly Bryan, Harry Costelloe, Rachel Murphy, Lily Klose & Natalie Perez de Villarreal. All students were fantastically well behaved, represented JPC abroad beautifully (in fact this was later mentioned by a member of public who shared the same flight), and were proactive in getting the most out of the trip on a cultural, linguistic and not to mention, fun, level. Mrs Madeleine Harley accompanied me on the tour and she packed in her luggage her high degree of professionalism and competency in caring for the students that she shows every day at JPC. She was a highly enjoyable and dependable travel companion and I thank her for her assistance.

Despite the much-loathed early meeting time of 4am at the Jolimont Centre, the tour got off to a good start. After the easy coach ride up to Sydney airport, we met our representative from GET Educational Tours and progressed smoothly through the check-in and customs, ready to board Air Calin flight SB 141 to Noumea. Three hours later we landed on the Polynesian island. We checked in to Hotel Nouvata and resisted the urge to dive into the ever-inviting swimming pool and headed out to dinner all together. End of an exciting but tiring day one.

Day two saw the students commence their **French language classes at CREIPAC**. In total, students had 4 mornings of classes from 8.30-11.30. The lessons were very engaging where students played games, acted, sang and learnt language relevant to their stay that they could use at the market, with their host families or while shopping. The lessons were held

on the grounds of New Caledonia's first and biggest **penal colony**. Later in the week we had a guided tour in French of the site where we learnt how convicts were sent from France to the island from the 1860s to the 1890s, and the penal colony continued to operate as late as the 1930s. Students were surprised to hear the convict similarities between Australia & New Caledonia, and the accords established between these two countries that facilitated their colonies.

On three afternoons, we had various tourist activities. One afternoon we had a two-hour guided tour of the city aboard the **Chou Chou Train**. It was a fun tour with commentary in French & English, allowing us to get our bearings of the city and visiting two panoramic view points. Another afternoon we visited the impressive Noumea **aquarium**, highlighting the aquatic life in the country's fresh water rivers & lakes, the estuaries and of course its world-famous lagoon and reef systems. The reef systems of New Caledonia are considered to be the second largest in the world after the Great Barrier Reef of Australia, the longest continuous barrier reef in the world with a length of 1,600 km and its lagoon, the largest in the world with an area of 24,000 square kilometres. On another afternoon we visited the **Tjibaou Cultural Centre**. We had a two-hour guided tour in French about everything Polynesian. The Centre educates visitors and locals alike about the indigenous kanak culture, who were the original inhabitants before the French. We saw some traditional art and were enthralled to learn about traditional medicinal uses for local plants, and also about local customs and superstitions.

A highlight for many was the full-day excursion to the island containing the **Amedee lighthouse**. The 24 kilometres distance between Noumea and the island was covered by a comfortable high-speed cruise boat. On the island we enjoyed a delicious tropical banquet, a spectacular Polynesian dance show, a glass bottom boat tour of the nearby reef and of course, hours of snorkelling! Many students were even fortunate enough to swim with and gently stroke green turtles feeding on the sea grass! Some were less fortunate to have a close encounter with the local, venomous sea snakes- one even slithered into someone's beach bag and then casually left as the owner of the bag reached in for her sunscreen! We climbed the lighthouse and were rewarded with spectacular 360 degrees views. Some

students also enthusiastically participated in demonstrations in coconut tree climbing, the traditional Pareo tying, and Polynesian dancing.

For five consecutive nights students were warmly welcomed by **host families**. Students were paired or in threes and placed in carefully selected families. Our students were excellent, fully embraced the local culture, were polite and respectful, and thoroughly enjoyed the experience. They had the wonderful opportunity to practice their French and broaden their minds culturally and linguistically. Apart from the evenings, they had one whole day together and one pair of JPC students were lucky enough to visit a location what some locals say is the most beautiful part of New Caledonia, Poé and Bourrail, about 2 hours' drive from the capital. Students and families exchanged gifts & memories. Many students were sad to say their farewells and I hope they think about maintaining contact.

Voilà! A résumé of a fantastic and highly successful study tour to New Caledonia. Thank you to all parents and guardians of the students for allowing their son/daughter to participate in the tour and consequently gifting them with hopefully some life-long memories and the passion to continue with their studies of French. Thank you also to Principal Mrs Catherine Rey for supporting the inaugural tour and spruiking the many benefits learning a second language can bring.

Keep your eyes and ears open (and your fingers crossed) for the **study tour to France** in April 2020! Merci et au revoir!

Mr Battaglia

