OP/ED

'National Lampoon's European Vacation' Part 2

Gabe Uhr continues his travelogue of summer misadventures across the pond

This is the conclusion of my two-part series on "What I did on my Summer Vacation."

Today I'll be discussing my adventures after I left London to travel through Europe.

Breeze *Reader's View*

— Gabe Uhr

The first lesson I learned during my travels was the complex physics of packing.

You see, sometimes the clothes you packed yesterday took up more space then when you pack them the next day. And sometimes the clothes you packed take up less space than they did the day before; this means you forgot something.

The first stop on my whirlwind assault of Europe was France. I thought France was beautiful. I found Paris especially impressive architecturally. I did not, however, enjoy Paris because I got my pocket picked about five minutes after I got off the train.

Train stations in Paris are filled with three different sorts of people: officials, such as police and city employees, travelers and thieves.

The individual percentages of these three groups are approximately 10 percent to 25 percent to 75 percent.

In fact, the only signs printed in English in Paris read: Beware Pickpockets. There are also some great stick figure drawings, which display the same message. You can find these signs at all major tourist attractions.

Even more so than in London, I found French culture to be much different than American culture.

The biggest difference is that French people breathe cigarettes instead of air. In fact, viewed from space, Paris actually forms the world's largest ashtray.

Paris is also very expensive. The Parisians might have a problem with their economy because, as far as I could tell, most Parisians just hang out in cafes, smoke cigarettes and make fun of Americans.

To subsidize the faltering economy, all of the public toilets (or toilettes) in Paris are coin-operated. The toilets are protected by a heavily-armored shell in the shape of a cylinder.

I felt safe until I learned the hard way that there's a time limit for use, after which the door props open.

"Pardon my French" was the only French I learned, which was a problem since a surprising number of people in Europe speak foreign languages.

The one country where the language barrier wasn't a problem, though, was Germany.

I discovered that all Germans speak "a little bit" of English. Just ask any German if they speak English. First, they will answer, "a little bit." Then they will go on to speak English so well that it makes you feel creepy.

I imagine that ex-Cold War spies are now tour-guides, taxi-drivers and McDonald's employees of Germany.

As well as being cunning linguists, Germans also serve fine food. Germans must be very creative because they can make so many dishes out of the same basic ingredient — sausage.

The food was tasty, but I can still feel one of the sausages lodged in a major artery.

My favorite food in Germany was definitely beer. No, the beer was not made from sausage. At least, I'm pretty sure it wasn't.

The final stop on my adventure through Europe was Amsterdam. The highlight of my visit to Amsterdam was the Heineken Brewery tour. It was the best two Guilders (about one buck) I've ever spent.

The first half of the tour is an extended Heineken commercial, and the second half is possibly the most brilliant public relations concept ever — all the beer you can drink in an hour. The servers really encourage you to grab a Heiney.

Amsterdam is also well known for its coffeehouses, however, I didn't visit any of the coffee shops because they're obviously not non-smoking.

Clouds of thick, funny-smelling smoke pour out of the entrances; it kind of smelled like my brother's jacket.

Amsterdam is also famous for its Red Light District. My two female traveling companions and I were a little intimidated by the thought of visiting the Red Light District, but when we got there, we found we had nothing to fear.

With all of the different tourists, the Red Light District is a lot like Disney World, except there are hookers sitting in the window fronts, and no one is wearing mouse ears.

Traveling through Europe was an amazing experience, though at times it was stressful arriving in unfamiliar places with uncertain showers.

I can't wait to go back, though. I'm already dreaming about my next trip to Europe and the Heineken Tour. I hope you enjoyed my misadventures in Europe.

Gabe Uhr is a senior English major who is full of crepe after returning from France.