

My summer science camp abroad

By **Claire Vollmars**
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While she could have taken a well deserved break this summer, Claire Vollmars instead chose to enrich her knowledge and that of her students with a unique educational experience. This constant quest to learn and do more epitomizes the North East ISD spirit.

Imagine, walking the halls where Albert Einstein once taught and Johannes Kepler formulated his astronomical theories. Imagine waking up to a vista of one of the most beautiful cities in the world. Imagine working side by side with Czech counterparts on new scientific studies. This was all a reality for me this summer as I lived and studied in the beautiful city of Prague in the Czech Republic.

This past July, I traveled to Prague with the first Summer Science Exchange Program. I accompanied 10 Texas science students as they spent two intense weeks absorbing culture and scientific methods with renowned Czech scientists.

Each day, we visited different universities for lectures, discussions and hands-on experiments. There were 13 different specialized universities in Prague, and each one was conducting their own research.

Over the two weeks, we grew crystals, used electron microscopes, spun nanofibers and observed different customized equipment used to conduct the world-class experiments. We heard lectures about spotting thin magnetic layers, hydrogen fuel cells, nanotechnology, and geophysical research such as predictive assessments of geomagnetic activities. The Institute of Molecular Genetics was my favorite. It was

there that one of the doctoral students shared his work about the differences between microtubules in a cell.

VIP tours gave us many behind-the-scene opportunities that the average tourist doesn't always get to have. The American Embassy opened their gates to the inner towers for the best view of the red tile roofs and 1,000 spires of Prague. The 279-step climb to the bell tower of Prague's Castle Cathedral was amazing. We watched and listened as the bells rang for 15 minutes. The inner sanctums of the senate and residences were opened for us. We also toured the Skoda car factory and observed the whole production process from start to finish. There is nothing like having your own personal guide who knows those unique out-of-the-way places that are such rare treats for visitors.

While the tours and sites were fantastic, the most special part of the trip was the interaction between the Czech students and our 10 science students. New phrases were learned, games played, music exchanged, Czech songs sung, polkas danced and lifelong friends made. It was interesting to learn how science provided the universal language for American and European students to share knowledge, experiences, cultures and ultimately bridge the borders between our countries.

Science teacher
Claire Vollmars
accompanied 10
Texas science
students this
July on a
Summer Science
Exchange
Program in
the Czech
Republic. Here
she stands atop
the American
Embassy and
enjoys a view
of the skyline in
Prague.

