

ACIS Travelling through tough times

Ward Dilmore, traveling after 9/11

I had 120 students ready for a France Concert Tour when 9/11 hit. As you can imagine, it altered our plans dramatically. Instead of France, I opted for a tour to Canada. We felt it was a safe option, and gave us a sense of international travel on a more local level. We travelled during a heightened security level issued by the State Department—a much higher level than is currently issued. We were impressed with Canada's security, and felt safe at all times.

The following year, we were in France, and travelled every two years following. We were in Paris in 2003 the very week that our troops entered Iraq. Although our news at home showed violent "protests" and suggested that things were very dangerous in Paris, we had not a moment of trouble. In fact, I searched the newspapers (English and French) and didn't see any news of protests or problems. I asked our tour manager and a few other locals, but no one had heard of any dangerous protests. France is very well organized, and their security and police are excellent.

We did see very tame protest in front of the U.S. Embassy, near the Place de la Concorde. There were maybe 50 people walking calmly along, news cameras pressed in close around them. Nothing dangerous whatsoever. It was an interesting time to be in Paris. One of my colleagues went into a barber shop to get a haircut, and the man cutting his hair made sure to express that Parisians did not blame each American for what the U.S. government did. He said, "My government does not speak for me, and I'm sure yours does not always speak for you."