Soroptimists South West and Channel Islands on tour!!!

Why the trip to Geneva? We were delighted last year to have as our speakers for the March Regional Meeting Soroptimists Sabine and Wilfred, they described their roles as Soroptimist United Nations Representatives. Listening to the workings and origins of the UN I asked if we could visit them in Geneva. So the seed was sown. Melanie of SI Weston and club members generously hosted the ladies for our Region. On the 21st of March 2018 I had nineteen very excited Sisters Soroptimists plus four Soroptimisters who came with us to Bristol airport to start our adventure. Sabine met us all at the airport in Geneva. We were all delighted to see her again lots of continental kisses!!. She sorted us out with tickets for our day out and gave us invaluable travel tips for buses and trains. Melanie stayed with Sabine in Nyon. On the Wednesday evening Sabine arranged for members of her Club De Nyon to host SI Weston and a couple of us to a delicious buffet in her stunning apartment overlooking Lake Geneva. The rest of the ‘on tour’ group had a super evening with food and a glass or two of local wine I am told. An excellent opportunity to get to know one another better we had members from seven clubs in our Region.

Thursday saw us up bright and early, as was the sun, travelling by train in our own reserved carriage. Sabine had generously put all 24 tickets on her personal credit card to ensure we had an amazing reduction on the cost. We were able to pay her back on the day in with our Swiss Francs. We had a super train journey and then a bus to Chaplin’s World. Which is Charlie Chaplin’s beautiful house and museum. It surprised us all and we spent three hours there. We were fascinated to see and hear about his life and the influence he had on the world. We were impressed by his many accomplishments in the world of music and art. One accomplishment was to father **eleven** children by three ladies, two of which he married. He loved living in the Manoir de Ban with eight of his children. Clearly he loved his family and they loved him from the photos all over the house. There were many wax works of him and his wife Ona. They were just amazing to see, incredibly lifelike and fun. If you ever visit Geneva this should be high on your own must see list. It is as an excellent tourist attraction that has been expertly put together. Lots of photographs and it felt he had just stepped out of the room for a moment. Many of his film sets were shown and I think the rest you would need to see for yourselves. Very much worth a visit. He died aged 88, however, his legacy lives on.

Next was the enchanting Castle Chillon a thousand year old monument, set beside the lake with the back drop of snow topped mountains in glorious sunshine. We all wandered around chatting and getting to know each other better as well as being fascinated by the castle. We made our way back to our two Ibis hotels and enjoyed an evening in various restaurants. Swiss wine is particularly good and the chocolates, well that is another story. Friday saw us gather outside of the United Nations building for our group visit. A massive building with 34 meeting rooms hosting over 10,000 meetings each year. The Geneva office is the second largest of the four United Nations Centres. SIGBI holds special Consultative Status at the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). Our young Spanish tour guide was very informative and we toured the building and saw art works and heard about the history of the United Nations. There is a very good web site and the information on what they do and how the meetings held there have transformed our world and its people. Please complete ensure your club completes the Programme Focus Report Forms, this is how we keep our UN status.

We stopped for lunch at the Red Cross Museum which was excellent. Some of us stayed to see the interactive displays, but found it very depressing, in one room were the war records were kept we found very moving. Everyone they can possibly trace is recorded in rows and rows of records floor to ceiling. Such a loss of life represented there was very sad, so how many families have been effected by wars. All over the world wars that they had not started or wanted to happen but have to bear the consequences.

Everyone was able to have some free time to visit the Lake or the Botanical Gardens, admire the designer shops or just enjoy people watching. Friday evening we had a group meal for thirty four, which Sabine had organised for us to give us a taste of Geneva. We had locally caught speciality of Perch followed by delicious desserts. We had some Soroptimists and one Soroptimister join us for the evening, which was a super idea and everyone one had a very enjoyable time. On our last morning Sabine took us on a tour around the sights of the old town which included the Reformation Wall and Saint Peter’s Cathedral. Look them up and you will see why we all loved Geneva and I think some of us will go back again for a longer stay.

I have been the Friendship link office for SI Tiverton for years and years and within that time I have been able to visit our own friendship links in Japan and to take a group to SI Gouda three times and for them to visit us. So the idea of a South West and Channel Islands Friendship link to the United Nations in Geneva was too good an opportunity to miss. Sabine was exceptional in her help and advice in making the tour happen. Thank you to all of those who came with me. You were always on time and always happy to mix in and appreciate the surroundings. Everyone had enough time to do their own thing and to be part of the group. Melanie and SI Weston are going to take the idea of a Friendship link with Sabine’s club through the proper procedure to start a Friendship link. There are 441 members in the South West and Channel Islands Region and it would be good to know that you are finding time to keep in touch with your own links. If anyone wants to know more about Friendship links and ‘Open House Open Door’ groups, please ask me. Friendship links should be prominent on your Websites and Face book pages. We are an International Organisation lets have even more contact with our friendship links. The first Friendship Day was in 1958. The United Nations declared in 2011 the 30th of July officially International Friendship Day, why not make contact with your links on that day, just an email or a card, or a colourful post card from your towns, a photo of your club members anything to make contact. My Theme over the last two years has been Soroptimists - Sisters 4 Sisters, Friendship, Goodwill and Understanding in our Region. Here is an opportunity to promote friendship from our Region to all parts of the world making us truly an International Region.

Yours in friendship

Daphne

Soroptimist Regional President South West and Channel Islands