

Top Ten Reasons why Leaders from Kuwait and Saudi Arabia liked the NORAGS ATC

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At the end of March four Girl Scout leaders from Kuwait and Saudi Arabia traveled to Sonthofen, Germany to attend the 45th NORAGS Annual Training Conference. Adrienne Bean, Karla Meyer, and myself set out from Kuwait City on a plane that left late on a Monday night and flew to Bahrain (look it up, it's an island off the coast of Saudi Arabia) where we met Gayle Smith, who came to travel with us from Saudi Arabia. The four of us spent a week traveling and attending the conference and decided we'd like to share with you our "Top Ten" list from the ATC.

Number 10 – In Germany there are actually mountains and snow, not to mention trees. Coming from the deserts of the Arabian Peninsula, we were thrilled to be somewhere with some topography, some green plants and a chance to actually wear a jacket for a change. No sand, a little snow and rain, beautiful fresh air in the Alps – we were in heaven!

Number 9 - The fantastic selection and helpful service at the Girl Scout shop. When you order all of your Girl Scout merchandise from a catalog, it's amazing to see tables full of all the uniforms, badges, and more books than you could possibly carry home. We love Duane and the NORAGS Girl Scout shop staff!

Number 8 - We met Connie Matsui, National GSUSA president, and heard her give a speech. We figured we were all pretty special if the president traveled to be at the conference. We also met Deborah Reyes, the International Commissioner from GSUSA to WAGGGS. They are both nice, down-to-earth ladies and we feel like they really do represent us well. They were actually interested in meeting us!

Number 7 - Great trainers. Wow! There were a lot of women there who really were knowledgeable about all of those things we'd like to learn to help our troops back home. They knew all sorts of songs; games; all the latest awards; how to deal with those adolescents, "problem" girls, and parents; how to build a fire with slightly damp wood; how to create sun prints; and they knew how to teach us those things without boring us.

Number 6 - International night. One evening we all gathered to experience songs, dances, and entertainment from some other countries. There were young adults at the conference subsidized by NORAGS from Poland, Russia and Belarus. We also met the long time director of Our Chalet and admired national costumes of many leaders who brought them along. (Yes, the four of us wore abayas to International night.)

Number 5 - We met Sandy Thomas and Lupe Garza. We've been emailing New York and receiving seasonal program packets and all sorts of other things from these ladies. It was nice to "put a face" to the people with whom we've been corresponding. Those of us served directly from USAGSO in New York spent an extra day and a half meeting with Sandy and Lupe to learn more about USAGSO and review the new LTCC manual (Yes! It's coming out soon and it looks like it will be a great resource for all of the Lone Troop Committee Chairs who are out there all by themselves.....)

They also listened to all of our “wants and needs” and have been collecting items to send to us ever since. (Thanks for that Outdoor Training outline, Sandy!)

Number 4 – Songs. A Girl Scout event isn’t complete without songs. And this one was no exception. There were several “songs” classes and we sang a few songs at various gatherings. We thought the best songs were those led by an 8th grader at the Gala Celebration. We could hardly believe that an 8th grader had the poise (and voice) to lead 250 women in song, but we saw her do it!

Number 3 - Great classes. Want some ideas for science projects to do out-of-doors or in the kitchen? The Science and Nature class taught us to dissect owl “pellets” and do leaf chromatography and the Kitchen Science class taught us to make a fire extinguisher using baking soda. Want to know more about crafts for those badges and interest project awards? The Folk Arts Class taught us quilling and tole painting and the Craft Fair class taught us to make mosaics and “Green Angel” necklaces. Need to take an “Age Level” training because your daughter is getting older? They had great ones at the NORAGS ATC as well as my favorite, “Living with an Adolescent.”

Number 2 - We met other USAGSO leaders and found that we have a lot in common. There were lots of pretty important people there – other leaders! We each went to the conference thinking that our own location had its unique peculiarities, problems, and cultural differences. We found that although we ARE all a little different, we have a lot more in common than we first realized. It was funny to find that Kathe from Iceland also needs a break from wind and flat terrain; that Katrine from Bucharest participated in a service project like ours; that the ladies from Moscow are also dealing with long commutes and bad traffic; and that Lisa from Milan and Patricia from Athens held events similar to those we held in Kuwait this year.

Number 1 - Where else could you get the inspiration that being in the same room with 250 Girl Scouts can provide. That was the best part of all. We’ve been inspired and energized by the ATC! All of us hope to share what we experienced with other leaders in our locations. We are going to start fundraising right away to finance our trip back to the NORAGS ATC next year. We hope that more of you will do the same and that we’ll get to meet YOU in Germany in 2002.