



## MY EULER TOUR

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*Jonathan Benefiel*

Being the first undergraduate on the acclaimed MAA study tour was definitely a wonderful experience. One might think that it would be intimidating being in foreign countries with group of mathematics professors. My roommate was nearly twice my age. However, as soon as I arrived at the hotel and got acquainted with the group, I felt integrated.

### *Why did I go on this trip?*

I am a mathematics undergraduate from Oakland University, Rochester, Michigan. The Honors College I attend here pushes studying abroad, so when plans to study abroad in Japan fell through, I had to come up with a new honors thesis topic. Traveling for theses was also encouraged, but at first I felt it was not necessary if I was writing a mathematical paper. Then, I remembered being told of the MAA Euler Tour and knew what I wanted to do—have my thesis be about Euler, his achievements, and his influence on mathematics. Before I knew it, I was adding to the chorus of many mathematicians celebrating the tercentenary of Euler's birth.

### *What happened in the Tour?*

The trip spanned the three cities where Euler lived: St Petersburg, Russia; Basel, Switzerland; and Berlin, Germany.

We were at places associated with Euler's lifetime, such as his apartments and Academies of Science, as well as the place associated with his death, the Alexander Nevsky Monastery. Of course, the trip wasn't just going to these places, which was definitely extremely worthwhile, but we also heard lectures honoring Euler and his achievements. At Humboldt University, we heard lectures about Euler's Berlin period and how he was part of the eighteenth century, and another lecture about Euler's correspondence with Goldbach.

A really neat part of the trip was visiting the archives at the Academy of Sciences in St. Petersburg, where I could page through Euler's original documents and papers. I mostly paged through his second notebook. This and the gravesite event were probably the two pivotal emotional experiences for me that really made me connect with distant past.

### ***We did other stuff, too!***

The trip may have been called the Euler Tour, but occasionally we just toured the city themselves, visiting churches and museums in St. Petersburg, more museums in Basel, and several educational institutions. Sometimes lectures discussed modern issues such as German or Russian education. In St. Petersburg we even visited an observatory! At one of the Berlin universities, we saw extremely new technology involving a 3D printer as well as virtual reality. This part of the tour really made you aware of the 300 years since Euler's birth. It made it not only a tour of the past but also a tour of the future.

### ***Did people take pictures?***

One of our tour leaders, Phyllis Katz, wanted to make photography an important element of what we did on this trip. I took some pictures, but not very many, and they were very bad compared to others' photos, such as Ron Rosier's and Andrew Potter's, whose photo I am using in this article.



*Here is most of the group at the Academy of Sciences in St. Petersburg.  
The flowers are supposed to spell out " $V - E + F = 2$ ".*

***Have I've convinced you into going  
on next year's Euler Tour?***

If an undergraduate can get enough money raised with grants and family, the MAA annual study tour is definitely worth it for undergraduates. Undergraduates and anyone interested in the upcoming tours should contact Lisa Kolbe to get details on future study tours. Most undergraduates do not have thousands of dollars to spare, so it is recommended that attending these tours be done with a research focus in order to accumulate enough grant money and support from family.