

Kari expects to learn greater responsibility and better command of the Spanish language during her stay.

Exchange student programs are for those kids from Europe, Indonesia , Korea, Japan and Russia to come to the United States, right? Wrong -- at least if you're asking Windom Area High School senior Kari. The 18-year-old daughter of Geoff and LeAnn of Windom left Jan. 19 for a four-month stay in Trigueros, Spain, a small suburb of 8,000 just outside the larger city of Huelva in southwest Spain.

"I'll be about 30 minutes from the ocean's" Kari says. "I e-mailed my counselor in Spain asking what the weather will be like. Will it be cold? hot? should I bring pants? Shorts? And he said, "Well, you have to remember it is winter here and it can get kind of cold. Right now it's about 65 degrees (Fahrenheit) with sun, but it can get colder.' And I'm like, 'You don't know what cold is'.



Windom Area High School senior Kari is attending a very tropical look and feel. Kari says the school building resembles a building one might find in Florida or California and is located just a five-minute walk from the home in which she will be living for the next four months.

Kari
 Age: 18 Spanish home: Trigueros, Spain
 pop: 8,000; suburb of Huelva,
 pop. 150,000.
 Exchange Program: Nacel International
 Windom family: Parents: Geoff and LeAnn
 Johnson, Windom; sister: Lisa, 17.

By DAVE FJELD
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"It's supposed to be about 8 below when I leave and about 70 when I get there. So, it's 'going to be really nice'.

Kari is taking in the semester in Spain through Minneapolis-based Nacel International.

But the warmth of Spain is far from what's drawing Kari to the Spanish coast.

Responsibility and language are her two primary motivating factors. Indeed, she desires a better command of the Spanish language. While she knows it will be somewhat easy to take comfort in speaking English, especially around other students her age (English is a part of school curriculum Spain), she wants to distance herself from using her native tongue. She wants to use Spanish as often as possible.

In addition to two years of classroom Spanish, Kari also has taken two years of independent study in Spanish at WAHS.

"During my second year of (spanish), I really enjoyed learning and speaking the language. And I have a few opportunities to speak Spanish and it's a really really good feeling knowing that I'm communicating in a different language" Kari explains. One situation, in particular drove home that point.

"I work at Dino's Diner and they have a few Hispanic people who come in and they didn't know how to read the menu. But I knew all the (English words in Spanish) and I asked them what they wanted in Spanish. They kind of looked at me - with relief. Ever since then I've wanted to go to a Spanish-speaking country". But is her classroom and independent study enough to communicate in a Spanish-speaking country?



High School program in Spain:

Testimonial of a American student

Cottonwood County CITIZEN
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"I called my family a week ago and we had a little double because you couldn't point at things to explain yourself and you couldn't use facial expressions," Kari explains. "But I talked to them for 45 minutes - and they don't know any English."

Kari also talked with Alexis Towler-ton, who spent the second semester of last year in Spain. Towler-ton billed it the best experience she's ever had and that was good enough for Kari.

Kari also knows that spending four months away from home is going to teach her responsibility - getting up on her own, getting around on her own, adapting to new surroundings on her own. She considers it a good trial run for when she enters college this fall, possibly at Minnesota State University-Mankato, or Normandale Community College in Bloomington.

Kari has already learned bits and pieces about the family with whom she will be staying. Her host mother is a 60-year-old, stay-at-home mom. She and her husband are the parents of five children, three of whom still live at home - the youngest of which is 21 years old.

"Part of their culture is that they will live with their parents until they are married," Kari explains "They are a very family-oriented Culture."

But Kari won't be alone in her room in Trigueros, Spain. She will be sharing it with a 17-year-old Brazilian exchange student who has been with the family since the start of the school year.

And, yes, Kari will be attending classes as part of her stay - along with her Brazilian roommote. School runs from 8 30 a m to 2 30 p m , Monday through Friday. And since her home is just five minutes from the school, she'll be able to walk to school.

She also hopes to get involved in some type of sports club while in Spain.

And what about meeting requirements to graduate in Windom in May?

She is just a half-credit shy and will fill aunt with an on- line microeconomics course through Minnesota West in Worthington. Kari returns to Windom May 19 and four days later will graduate from WAHS.

Sight-seeing, hopefully is on her radar too. In addition to the sights she will see in and around her host city, she also hopes to be able to make a trek across the country and into Paris, France to see the Eiffel Tower.

She knows adjusting to life in Spain won't be easy.

"I'm expecting it to be hard at first and I don't know how long it's going to take me to understand everything," Kari admits. "The only things I'm really worried about are the airports and homework in some of the classes. They're all in Spanish and they talk very fast. So, I don't know if I'll be able to understand everything right away. But it'll come to me.

But she's excited for the opportunity-to be an exchange student rather meeting them.