



## 'I had to pinch myself': Teacher's travels take students to Galapagos Islands and Peru

KAREN KADILAK

MAY 16, 2023

4:30 AM

William Mascari, a world language teacher at Marshall Middle School, likes to visit Spanish-speaking nations and use what he has learned in the classroom.

The 35-year-old Marshall resident booked a trip to the Galapagos Islands last summer with the Global Exploration for Educators Organization, a Montgomery County-based nonprofit that helps teachers travel for discounted prices.

He spent nine days learning the history of the islands in the Pacific Ocean that are part of Ecuador and interacting with the animal life that inspired Charles Darwin's theory of evolution following his visit in 1835.

Recently, Mascari used photos from the trip to teach his students in the North Allegheny School District colors and descriptive adjectives in Spanish. He used pictures of iguanas to show the difference between big and small.

**good traveler**

"As a Spanish teacher, I bring what I learn about language and culture into my everyday teaching," he said. "This includes sharing regional vocabulary and dialects from different countries, filling my classroom with realia and photos from my trips and sharing my travel experiences with my students.

"I strive to motivate students to appreciate other cultures and develop a passion for learning other languages.... They must make real world connections to what they are learning."

His photos showed the famous Galapagos giant tortoise, which weighs up to 500 pounds and can live more than 100 years.

"They are so cool," Mascari said. "I was amazed at their size and how slowly they move."

He said he was lucky to snorkel near sea turtles, who came right up to him. But his favorite part of the trip was connecting with local residents.

"I love talking with hotel and restaurant employees, shop owners and other residents to gain a deeper understanding of island culture and listen for regional vocabulary," he said. "I find it important to practice my Spanish with native speakers since I don't have many opportunities" at home.

Marshall Middle School principal Daniel Swoger said Mascari's travels have provided him with a deeper understanding of the cultural context of languages.

"Language and culture are closely intertwined," he said. "One of the most obvious benefits of traveling abroad is the opportunity to improve language skills.

"Being immersed in a foreign language environment allows teachers to practice speaking, listening, reading and writing in a natural context, and to learn new vocabulary and expressions they may not encounter in the classroom.

"This has helped Senor become more proficient in the language and better equipped to teach the language to his students."

Mascari's first trip with GEEO was to Peru in 2018.

Christina Gjelsten, a GEEO spokeswoman, said programs are tailored to teachers with an adventurous side. "The Galapagos and Peru definitely check that box."

Mascari said his most memorable experience in Peru was arriving at dawn at the Sun Gate for an amazing view of the historic sanctuary Machu Picchu.

"I had to pinch myself. I couldn't believe I was actually there," he said.

He became hooked on traveling after studying in Spain as a Duquesne University student. He is considering a trip next summer to Argentina or Chichen Itza in eastern Mexico.

Marshall Middle School assistant principal Matthew Buchak enjoys hearing about Mascari's travels.

"Bill's stories of visiting Machu Picchu and the adventure of camping, hiking and the preparation of the cuisine while traveling are amazing," he said.

"The stories shared from his visit to the Galapagos Islands are just as vivid. His photography of both places increases the allure of his travels."

*First Published May 16, 2023, 4:30am*

---

### Enjoy reading this free article?

Read unlimited articles when you subscribe. 8 weeks for 99¢.

**Subscribe**

Limited time offer.

---

## Popular in the Community