

The lessons I've learned while studying abroad



Studying abroad has been one of the rewarding things in my young life. After spending a semester in Sevilla, Spain I have accomplished some life changing feats and created ever-lasting memories. I jumped out of a plane at fifteen thousand feet to land in the middle of Spain. I rode a camel along a desert beach in Tangier, Morocco. I attended the most famous festival in world with forty Bryant bulldogs in October in Germany. And I had to opportunity to see history in person in Rome, Paris, and Edinburgh. I met many incredible and fascinating people from all around the world, ranging from California, Wisconsin, England, Spain, Germany and Australia. I gained a whole new level of gratitude on the little things in life, but the most important thing of all was everything that I have learned in these four short months. I can honestly say I've captivated life lessons that will last with me forever. One of the main reasons I came abroad was to become opened minded and to learn as much as possible. Thankfully, I had the opportunity to do both, and here are some of the things I have learned.

Appreciation and Perspective

I have been thankful enough to have the opportunity to travel around the world prior to my semester abroad, but I never engaged myself in everyday life of the native where I went. Being a Spanish resident made me appreciate the way I live back at home and at school but it opened my mind on how people live all across the world. I realized that the ways we do things at home aren't always the best ways. In the U.S., we do things very quickly. We loose appreciation of what is right in front of us. In Spain, they have a much slower pace, and they appreciate a lot of small things that we rush by. This includes family and friend time, eating meals, style of shopping, and appreciation for the items and utilities that we use everyday. The feeling of appreciation especially kicked in while traveling through Morocco, Africa. Traveling to this country was eye opening. Their style of living is indescribable and it made me be thankful for everything I have at home, and appreciative for the life I have. The state of their country, the high rates of poverty, the conditions of living, the way they have to earn money, their dissatisfaction of where they live and their motives of trying to escape to a new world all made me take a huge step back. It made me look at the world on a much bigger scale and made me feel guilty for the small troubles I have and how I react to them. Overall, I gained a new appreciation of life, and its value

Independence

Prior to abroad, I would say I am a fairly independent person. Going to college you grow up a little and start doing a lot of things on your own. But while abroad, you truly become one with yourself. You learn how to cook yourself, how to navigate around cities by yourself. I learned how to book my travels on my own, and learned how to get from destinations across European borders on my own. Although I had a host family and residing with friends from Bryant, I still gained a new appreciation of independence and it was a big step for myself to help prepare myself for the future.

Useful Knowledge and Practices

Abroad has taught me a lot, and these were the most valuable things that will help me shape my adult life. I learned how to navigate through public transportation, in foreign languages. I never really had to use public transportation. While in NYC or Boston, I've taken the train and metro, and in Smithfield I've used the RIPTA, but those were simple task. Europe is full of public transportation, and at times it wasn't easy to navigate. I found myself in many of these situations whether it was the Spanish bus system, French metro system, German airport, or Italian ubers. I can say I conquered it all.

I also learned how to budget. In the states, I never really had to budget like I did while abroad. Every weekend is essentially a mini vacation and you need to map out how you are going to spend your money. The cost of travel, lodging, food, activities, it all adds up after each week. It was definitely a difficult task, but I learned how to manage my money and my spending and be more of a cautious spender when I return abroad.

As a freelance photographer, I have a huge passion for photography. I love to take pictures of people and places, but this trip made me realize you can't always live your travels behind the lens. I was capturing a sunset in Toledo, Spain early on in my travels and I couldn't get the right picture. I immediately put my camera down and just sat on a park bench and admired the beauty that was right in front of me. I new right there that I did not want to miss out on small opportunities like this one because of a camera or my phone. There were many times I didn't take photos of places at all, and I was totally okay with that.

But more importantly I learned how to relax. It is not like I didn't know how to relax, but I learned how to slow down. Prior to abroad, I was a very regimented person, usually adding unnecessary things to my plate, not knowing the word no. The Spanish culture has added years to my life. They taught me how to enjoy meals, rest my body, and enjoy my leisure time. I learned how to separate my work and my free time, not thinking about either while in the designated time. I will not change my ways of not being late and meeting deadlines, but I will grab a meal with a friend instead of grabbing an extra thirty minutes of sleep. Or I will share a story and a laugh with a group of people than study an extra hour. These small gestures are more valuable to life then things that only matter on that given day.

I couldn't have asked for a better 4 months, and I am extremely thankful to not only my parents who gave me this chance but for Bryant University, for having such a prestigious study abroad program. If there is one thing I would recommend, is that you must take full advantage of this opportunity. Study abroad has made me a completely better individual than I was four months ago. I know this experience will have ever lasting positive impacts and has definitely shaped my future.