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Reflections on my Time Abroad Essay

'It was the time of my life' is a phrase that has become cliché and banal, overused to the point that the profundity of the words themselves is often lost; but as is the case with most clichés, I find that it has become a cliché for a reason, and to anyone who asks me about my time in Germany, I begin my response with. 'It was the time of my life'. My time abroad was a plethora of new experiences which may be summarized, both concisely and accurately, by a series of clichés that ring with truth in spite of their jadedness. e.g., I was able to meet people with backgrounds very different from my own, experience a new culture, learn a new (and historically important) language, etc.

Studying abroad is a fantastic experience that is fortunately growing in popularity. Regrettably, I find that the great majority of students who do not go do so simply out of negligence: either because the notion never really occurs to them, or requires too much initiative. It is possible, do it. It is of course natural for one to feel trepidation at the notion of being completely immersed in a culture entirely unfamiliar, to travel abroad for an lengthy period of time (I spent six and a half months in Germany alter having never been out of New England for more than a week at a time) is to leave one's comfort zone; yet I whole-heartedly encourage all students who have the means to go abroad, which is most of them, whether they realize it or not, to do so (there are a number of scholarships available). Even one who is truly frightened by the prospect of a looming unfamiliarity or to whom the idea of being enveloped in another culture does not particularly appeal, I would urge to go; a different culture is not a different planet (at least as far as Western Europe in concerned). I give my assurance to anyone who goes without a markedly negative attitude: you'll find something you like.

Ultimately, more than anything from my time in Konstanz, what I took away was the people. It's very easy to meet people abroad, you'll be taking language classes, and quickly discover that you have a great deal in common with the other international students you meet in there: none of you are fluent in the native language, you know very few, if any, people in the country and are thus looking to meet others, and are all looking to have a good time during their studies abroad (also, everyone will probably speak at least decent English). Outgoingness does not stand among my most prominent traits, yet I found no difficulty in meeting and befriending students from all over the world; after my German I have friends
on every continent, with the obvious exception of Antarctica (although I did go to a zoo and an aquarium there and saw penguins both times; I thought they were thoroughly adorable, so that sort of counts). One should be hard-pressed to find him/herself lacking for something to do while abroad. There are a number of programs through the University designed to assist incoming international students. It can be arranged so that a German student meets you at the airport/train station and helps you find your dormitory; this person will also usually take you out in the city so you can familiarize yourself, meet other locals, and learn where the best bars are. The university can also set you up with a language partner, giving you an opportunity to improve your German and a native speaker the opportunity to improve their English. Konstanz's student organization (LEI) was fantastic. The student, were amiable and relentlessly organized activities and events for us foreigners, everything from hiking through forests and climbing the Alps, to visiting other cities such as Munich to bar hopping nights.

An essay enthusiastically encouraging everyone to study abroad should probably include a sentence or two about studying itself (only one of very many elements of the experience). In terms of academics, classes in German structured differently than classes in the USA (midterms are uncommon!) and students are expected to participate more (and actually do the readings), it was a change of pace and I enjoyed it.

Before I conclude, I feel obliged to address the following question: was my time in Germany nothing but sunshine, unicorns, and rainbows? Of course not, nothing is. Maps on the street of Stuttgart lack a 'You Are Here' designation, the German bureaucracy is at times maddeningly excessive, and it is not uncommon for adults in Wuerttemberg to come across as cold and joyless (something that 1. the people there openly acknowledge and 2. Doesn’t apply to a who work with the international students, they're fantastic). I must stress however, that none of the things I just mentioned should be taken as discouraging. The positives outweigh the negatives tenfold.

To summarize an essay of over eight hundred and fifty words studying abroad is a super cool thing to do, so do it.