THE GOAL OF THE GLOBAL EDUCATION OFFICE IS TO FOSTER AN INTELLECTUAL EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCE FOR BOTH CURRENT WASHINGTON COLLEGE STUDENTS WHO WANT TO STUDY ABROAD AND INCOMING INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS.
A TIME TO EXPERIENCE.
A TIME TO REFLECT.

“Rewarding!”
“Shattered pre-conceived notions”
“Gained greater cultural sensitivity”
“Life long memories”

These are just a few of the sentiments expressed by Washington College students about their overseas experiences in the pages of this edition of 4 Corners. Whether a junior from small-town America traveling to Seoul as the first in his family to study abroad or a student from “across the pond” spending a semester in Chestertown, each of the authors speaks to the life-changing nature of an overseas educational experience. For one author, it meant volunteering at an Ethiopian Jewish community center, providing activities for impoverished children eager to learn. For another, it was undertaking the risky pier walk tradition at St. Andrews in Scotland. For yet another, it was about shattering his stereotypes regarding the weather, treatment of women, lack of diversity and political climate in Morocco.

While no one experience was the same, each student shared a heightened appreciation of other cultures and the confidence and personal growth that comes with taking risks and stretching comfort zones. We hope these students inspire readers to pursue a study abroad opportunity because as one of the authors writes, shattering her “comfort zone” ended up being “the best decision I’ve ever made.”

Many thanks to all the study abroad and exchange students who have shared their experiences in these pages, especially Koppany B. Jordan who, in addition to writing a piece, designed and edited this edition of 4 Corners. The Global Education Office is also grateful to Dainius Jasinevicius and Erin Oittinen, our colleagues in the College Relations and Marketing Office, who assisted with the production of the publication. I would also like to thank Sallie and Pete Lilienthal on behalf of Washington College. Their generous support made it possible for two WC students to study abroad last year. Last, but absolutely not least, as the new director of the Global Education Office (GEO), I want to express my personal appreciation to Theresa Capule, Assistant Director of GEO, and Alex Levy, GEO’s Study Abroad Coordinator, two colleagues who every day contribute their immense talent and indefatigable commitment to the advancement of international education at Washington College.

GEO Director
Kay King
A TALE OF TWO UNIVERSITIES

BOND AND ST. ANDREW'S

Written by:
Katie Zabel ‘15

Ever since I was little I knew I wanted to travel the world. Unfortunately it wasn’t until my sophomore year of college that I finally got my passport.

My first time out of the country only lasted three short weeks but I managed to visit Edinburgh, Paris, and Amsterdam in that time. Then I was hooked. Traveling between Maryland and New Jersey wasn’t going to be enough anymore.

I knew studying abroad for a semester would be the best chance that could provide me the opportunity to travel, but I had a choice. Do I study in Australia, a country I had dreamed of visiting for years and one that would be hard to visit if I let this opportunity pass? Or, should I study in Scotland, home to Edinburgh, the city that helped me fall in love with traveling? I’ll admit that I also have a Scottish boyfriend living in Edinburgh, which made my choice even harder. But finally my decisions were made and I was on a plane to the Gold Coast of Australia.

Bond University has a breathtaking campus only a few miles out from the beach and it was very much a “study abroad school.” They knew the students there wanted to travel and I passed the school’s travel agency every day between my dorm and class, frequently stopping in. While my friends back home spent their weekends writing papers and studying for tests I spent mine kayaking with whales, scuba diving the Great Barrier Reef, and browsing the Sydney markets.

During my study week I went on an “extreme New Zealand” trip where every day we went on a new adventure such as rafting, bungee jumping, and canyon swinging. It was also a road trip through all of the different views that New Zealand has to offer. New Zealand is an incredible place and my week there was the highlight of my travels.

After a crazy week there and a few finals (did you forget I was there for school?) it was time to wind down with a week of island hopping in Fiji. As my time in Fiji ended I headed back for one last night in Australia. At the airport were tearful goodbyes to my new best friends who had been travel-
ing with me since day one. My trip from Australia took 40 hours but finally I landed, not in America, but in Scotland. Because of the hard choice of where to study, I decided to spend an entire year away from home, despite my mom’s protests. I made it to Scotland on Christmas Eve and once I got over the jet lag I wandered through Edinburgh's Christmas festival for the days leading up to Hogmanay, Scottish New Year. Most of the Australian slang I picked up transferred well to Scotland. Things were still rubbish, I could still go grab a drink with my mates, and I would still throw on a jumper if it got cold out. One huge change, though, was the weather. No longer was I risking sunburn on my walk to class; it felt more like I was risking frostbite. While the temperatures were much starker compared to Australia, it wasn’t as bad as I had prepared for.

The rumors I heard of the constant rain in Britain proved wrong, but those of St. Andrews being a demanding school appeared very true. I spent my months in Scotland shuttling between Stirling Edinburgh and St Andrews, doing my homework on the bus, and growing envious of how convenient their public transportation is. One thing I learned on the bus, which has nothing to do with my homework, was that there is no such thing as a Scottish accent. It seems that every town has its own accent and slang. I never learned how to understand most of them. Anyone that didn’t bear a crisp Edinburgh accent was a struggle for me to talk to. Throw them a few drinks and they turned into a lost cause.

After a few months of staying in Scotland, I was itching to jump on a plane again. So my boy-friend and I set off to Budapest where we ended up staying with a Hungarian friend. During our week there, he gave us a full tour of the city before setting us off on a sleeper train to Prague. Without a local to guide us, we were on our own. However, despite getting lost more times than I’ll admit, we still managed to see all the sights. Finally, we headed to London and Belfast so that I could get the full UK experience before departing home. After a long year of travels, it was nice to see some familiar faces and sleep in my own bed once again. Although both my bank account and myself were exhausted, I continue to count down the days until my next adventure where I’ll be able to get another stamp in my passport.
Studying abroad was something I always knew I wanted to do. In fact, I made the decision before I even got to college. In my heart, I always knew that study abroading was a definite, non-negotiable fact. What I did not know that I would end up in Cork, Ireland. Making the decision and getting accepted was exciting for so many reasons, especially because I could then set my sites on a specific destination. It wasn’t just something I wanted to do, but something that was actually happening. I could look up my apartment and know where I’d be living. I could find the best things to do in Cork. I could actually picture where I would be living for four and a half months.

After making many to-do lists and checking off every item, I was left to count down the days before my departure.

On my own, my roommates became my best friends, and I was able to grasp that tricky ‘Cahrk’ accent. I still remember the first person I spoke to in Ireland. He was a police officer and I asked him which taxi to take outside of the airport. His thick Irish-accented response sounded like a completely different language. Here I was thinking I was lucky to be in a country that spoke English. Everything that started out as unfamiliar eventually became familiar. Cork became my home. I fell in love with the history, gained a renewed interest in the literature, found my favorite pubs and got to know the city.

Coming home was an adjustment, but the more time that passed, the more I was able to absorb what I had learned. The most amazing thing was how much I learned about myself without even realizing it. What I first noticed was how I was able to use the tricks I learned to deal with homesickness while in Ireland to dealing with the adjustment of being home.

While abroad, I learned that there are so many experiences to be had and that present circumstances are only temporary. I discovered what it means to be an American, the good and the bad. Finally, I learned what I’m capable of, and that there’s so much more that I can do than I previously gave myself credit for. If I ever
get nervous about something or doubt myself, I realize that I traveled Europe and moved to a new country alone and it turned out all right. If I can do that, everything else seems manageable. Looking back at my time in Ireland, I smile at the small and specific things (inside jokes, laughing at the pub, certain cultural differences), but I’m most proud of the bigger things I learned. I have amazing memories and came back knowing myself more than I ever thought I would. I pushed myself out of my comfort zone and as a result my comfort zone has grown.

Written by: Evelyn Mantegani ‘16
The night before I left for St. Andrews, Scotland, I had no idea what I was in for. I knew I was studying abroad and that I’d be far from home. I knew I was going to be at a prestigious university, walking in the footsteps of great scholars, living in the halls of British royalty (super exciting), immersing myself in the haggis-and-bagpipe-filled culture of Caledonia, and leaving everything familiar behind. And I knew more than anything that I was scared. What I didn’t know was that a little university town on the edges of the North Sea—3,400 miles, a 7 hour flight, and a 5 hour time difference away from everything I’ve ever known—would steal my heart and become my home. I remember getting off the plane in January and then driving on the “wrong” side of the road to get to my dorm and wondering how on earth I would make my way in a foreign country totally alone. But then the next four months happened, and looking back, I wish I could tell my jetlagged self that I was about to have the time of my life, and that shattering my comfort zone would end up being the best decision I’ve ever made. I feel so lucky to have spent the last semester at the University of St Andrews. No, I still can’t golf or do a decent Scottish accent, and I kind of cheated on May Dip (a tradition when everyone runs into the frigid ocean at dawn), but I learned so much in those precious four months, not only as a student, but also as a person. I learned all about Scottish music, I can now (somewhat) play the penny whistle, and I (think I) can visually analyze Caravaggio’s paintings—hopefully as well as Kate Middleton. I learned how to shoot a bow and arrow, how to read maps, navigate public transportation, and mentally convert all kinds of currencies. More importantly, I learned how to make a life far from home and how to live every day to the fullest, even when homesickness was at its most debilitating. I made new friends from all different places, who gave me a makeshift family when my other one was so far away. And I made memories that I will carry with me for the rest of my life.

I remember taking part in my first pier walk, a St. Andrews tradition that happens at the beginning of each semester for good luck in classes and exams. Students put on their red gowns and walk to the end of a long pier that
juts out into the cold North Sea. Then they climb a small metal ladder to the upper level of the pier, and walk back to land with nothing but unwavering faith and balance to guide them. I remember climbing up that little metal ladder with confidence, but then getting to the top, feeling that relentless Scottish wind, and wondering what the heck I was doing. But then I looked in front of me towards the town. I saw friendly red gowns, a sailboat-dotted harbor that reminded me of Chestertown, and the medieval ruins of a castle and a cathedral. I looked behind me and saw a vast expanse of deep blue sea that stretched out endlessly. And I looked down at my own two feet, realizing that I was caught up in it all. I was in beautiful, breathtaking Scotland.

In my eyes, I was the luckiest person on Earth, and I was going to do this pier walk. And so I did. I ended up doing it multiple times during my semester, feeling luckier and luckier each time—not just for making it to the other side safely, but for living in such an amazing place steeped in history and traditions that would make anyone feel like they belonged, even thousands of miles from home. I remember hearing the seagulls squawk outside my window, walking to Jannetta’s for ice cream, always taking the sticky toffee pudding for dessert in the dining hall, practicing field hockey in the freezing cold, marveling at ruins that were a stone’s throw from my room, getting chills at the patriotic sounds of the bagpipes, learning St. Andrews like the back of my hand, and feeling my heart get a little bit fuller every day I spent there. I may not have a penny left to my name after the last 4 months, but I can say with absolute confidence that I leave St. Andrews feeling like the richest person alive. To say that studying abroad does not come with challenges that truly test every bit of your strength would be a lie. But to say that it isn’t all worth it in the end would be an even bigger one. Studying abroad has simultaneously been the hardest, most trying, and most rewarding experience of my life. It’s given me the world, in every sense of the phrase, and I’ll never forget that. So, here’s to Dervish and Dominos, to EasyJet and RyanAir, to a miserable exchange rate, to pier walks and castle ruins, to Highland coos and bagpipes, to new cities, new friendships, and a million new memories. Cheers, Scotland. I’ll be back.
Before you go abroad to a foreign country, there are a number of preconceived notions.
When you first arrive in a new place, you can have the feeling of being overwhelmed. People seem to be walking up and down very quickly and you are just trying to wrap your head around the fact that you are in a very different place from the one you departed from just hours ago. Everything not only looks and sounds different, but also the customs of the people can appear strange as well. In my case, when I first arrived in Morocco, I heard everyone speaking French, Arabic or some form of Berber. Some even rotated between the three in a single sentence. This made navigating rather problematic, but I was fortunate to have a great group of people that were helpful.

Going in, one can feel like they have to know everything. But the truth of the matter is, this is very difficult, if not impossible, in a new environment. It is important for one to be engaging and be quick to accept that they may not know everything. In fact, the first thing you have to accept is that you do not know everything and you do not have to know everything. This can be very difficult for some people. I remember being confused as to why some people behaved in certain ways and trying to wrap my head around the situation. However, I reminded myself that the purpose of study abroad is to not only learn in the classroom but also from the culture I am living in. While academics are important, if you focus solely on academics, then you will not learn about the country you have chosen to live in. In fact, you end up disengaging from it and doing more harm than good by not taking advantage of the opportunities provided by an experience abroad.

One of the most difficult things can be trying to find the right balance between being social and also staying academically on top of things. Being abroad
especially for the first time, can be very daunting. There seems to be so much going on, but how can you get involved when it is so easy to stay in your room and use a VPN to watch Netflix? Or even Skype or WhatsApp friends back home that you miss very much?

One thing that I have noticed about many students during my year abroad was that there are certain types of people that study abroad. Just like you, they are scared and looking for ways to get involved! For me, the first month was rather difficult as I was still trying to make sense of the fact that I was all alone in a foreign country where people were very, very different from myself. However, I realized, like many others do, that you need to step out and explore. I began to talk to the locals and began to make a lot of great friends along the way. I joined the Interfaith Alliance and ended up with a leadership position that opened doors for me. In my second semester, I was even a part of the school’s swimming team, which made my experience more memorable. During my time there, I asked many questions about Morocco. I hungered for knowledge and began to discover my want to make a difference.

While I was in Morocco, I noticed the power of breaking down stereotypes about cultures. Although some Moroccans had assumptions about the internationals and we had some about them, many of us took the opportunity to get to know one another. I remember a Moroccan girl telling me how she worried that her American roommate would be what she called a ‘gucci girl,’ who was conceited and breaking the rules. However, when the time came for her roommate to move in, this image changed as she became really good friends with her and learned that the U.S. is different from what she expected. In fact, what I noticed when barriers were broken most was when I traveled with a group of Moroccan students. It not only allowed me to learn more about their culture and how they react to certain aspects of life in the nation, but also provided them an opportunity to see parts of their own country that they
had never been to before. Together we learned from one another and explored our common interests.

Although I came into the country with some preconceived notions of a warm climate, many women having their freedom restricted, and a very religious society, I had many of these shattered. Despite being in Morocco, which is known for its Mediterranean warm weather, I was struck by the monsoon like weather that I experienced during the month of November.

Additionally, though there were some societal restrictions placed on women, it was still nothing compared to what I imagined. Regardless of the occasional taboo topics, for the most part, I felt that I could express myself well to the best of my ability. As a Christian, Morocco intrigued me for its religious diversity. With a historic Jewish population and small Christian community, I was fascinated by how the communities worked together. Often when you think of the Middle East and North African (MENA) region, religious strife and great uncertainty is what comes to mind. However, it would be unjust of me to not highlight the interfaith dialogue that occurs. As a member of the Interfaith Alliance, I had the privilege to attend a conference run by Jews, Christians, and Muslims and was able to learn and see for myself the great strides being made towards peace.

Spending a year in Morocco, I was able to learn a lot about the environment by experiencing it very intimately. By making an effort to learn and taking risks, it was perhaps the most rewarding experience of my undergraduate experience. Had I spent my junior year at Washington College, it would not have been as thrilling as getting lost in the Fes medina, only to try a camel burger at Café Clock. The major takeaway you can get from a study abroad experience is that there will be stereotypes that you and others will have. But you have one job. Shatter them and discover the real you.
From its ancient hieroglyphics in the pyramids to the minna-rets that tower the streets, Egypt is certainly the crown jewel of the Nile. A crossroads between continents, this land has transported goods between Africa and Asia for thousands of years while making its mark on Western Civilization.
I will never forget the day I arrived in Egypt. After nearly 18 hours of traveling from Chicago to Cairo, I had gotten through the surprisingly easy customs and passport check, to find myself surrounded by six cabbies demanding the “Pretty American” take their particular cab. Like a prayer, the university driver I had requested arrived and I was whisked into the streets of Cairo. Prior to studying abroad in Egypt, I did not expect to go through much culture shock. If anything, I thought myself to be a relatively experienced world traveler in regard to my awareness of cultures, especially within the Middle East. And yet, I was being bombarded almost immediately by a world unlike my own.

During my five months in Egypt, I went through changes in behavior and customs towards the Egyptian culture. From the crazy driving, the harshness of the Arabic language to my English speaking ears, and the overall cultural clash between the United States and Egypt, Cairo was unlike anything I had ever previously experienced in my entire life. To continue though, the first cultural difference I experienced in Egypt was the overall treatment of women. To say the least, women are treated terribly in Egyptian culture, in which for most women, verbal, and unfortunately, sexual harassment is a daily occurrence. As an American woman, this was incredibly hard to process, especially since I had traveled in the Middle East before, although facing nothing quite like what I experienced in Egypt. Regardless, it was hard not to compare my life back home to what I experienced in Egypt.

I remember having conversations with my fellow Americans, in which many of my sentences would start with, “Well, if we were in the States...” After a couple weeks into my study abroad experience, my perception quickly changed. I realized that although I was treated disrespectfully on the streets, Egyptian women usually faced much worse. While talking with my fellow female, Egyptian classmates, I found out cases of domestic violence, sexual harassment, and even rape, are usually thrown out, and sometimes seen as a joke. Even more surprisingly, although Egypt is a predominately Muslim country, women who wear the Hijab are usually treated the worst, mostly due to the confines of Egyptian society, not because of Islam itself. With this realization in mind, I quickly began to understand, and more importantly learn, the multi-faceted aspects of Egyptian culture as a whole, both good and bad.

Although Egypt was challenging, I soon began to embrace all that Egypt had to offer, from going to Tahrir Square, the site of the 2011 Egyptian Revolution, to traveling all over the country, including Alexandria, Siwa, Luxor and the Sinai. Egypt is approximately the size of New Mexico, but it has hundreds of cultures, and even more languages within those cultures. For example, Upper Egypt is vastly different from the Bedouin tribes of the Sinai, and the culture of southern Egypt is almost indistinguishable from that of the north. It was soon after this, that I moved to the ‘Adaption’ stage. It was during this period of my study abroad experience that I truly began to learn, becoming more passionate about the region and even more so, Egypt itself. Coming to Egypt, I was overwhelmed by how much one can learn about the region. With its great diversity, I soon realized a country in of itself could take many years to only begin to understand.
WALK LIKE AN EGYPTIAN

Soon afterwards, I completely embraced all that my classes, professors, and friends had to offer, asking questions, listening to peoples’ thoughts, ideas, and arguments, and ultimately, being more open to trying new experiences. Some of my favorite experiences while being abroad was visiting the homes of my Egyptian friends and seeing the country through their eyes, whether it be talking to their parents and siblings or going to a family party. These experiences were what made my study abroad experience so amazing in the end, offering me an insider’s perspective into a very controversial part of the world.

As an Anthropology minor, I would like to think that I have a relatively objective perspective to the Middle East, but that was not always the case. Reading about the Muslim world is universally different from living in it. I know that many of my pre-conceived viewpoints were shattered during the five months abroad. When my Egyptian friends bestowed upon me the title of ‘Honorary Egyptian,’ it made me beam with happiness in the realization that I had officially been accepted into Egyptian society. Although Egyptians are incredibly hospitable and kind, the country itself tends to be abrasive, confusing, and challenging.

Honestly, it wasn’t until about three months in, that I truly began
to feel comfortable and confident in my abilities to navigate the maze that is called Egypt. Two weeks before I left Cairo, I had a difficult time processing the last five months. I found it incredibly frustrating that I had finally found, and become comfortable with my place in Egypt, yet it was time for me to head home, but I was already at ‘home’ in Cairo. After studying abroad in Egypt, I was not the same person that had arrived five months earlier. In many ways I had transitioned towards greater cultural sensitivity.

Ultimately though, studying abroad in Egypt gave me the tools necessary to understand, navigate, and ultimately, achieve intercultural sensitivity in a region that has some of the oldest, and most complex conflicts in the world.
What does this mean? Well to begin it is a popular Hebrew phrase that means, literally, “to repair the world,” or perform acts of community service. Throughout my semester in Israel at Ben Gurion University of the Negev in Be’er Sheva, I was blessed to have an opportunity to participate in this process, and give back to the generous community that had given me so much for the six months I lived there.

A few weeks after my arrival, I embarked on a project where I volunteered at Shavu Banim, an organization that provides educational and recreational programming for the Ethiopian Jewish community in Be’er Sheva. Every Monday afternoon, I rode the number 25 bus twenty minutes from my apartment to the Ethiopian Jewry House in the Bet neighborhood. There I would help run programming and activities for the children of the adults taking a free Ulpan (Hebrew language class) provided by the center. Many of the Ethiopian families that the center assists are recent immigrants to Israel who do not know much Hebrew and are still struggling to integrate into Israeli society. Many of them live below the poverty line and hold low-wage jobs due to the lack of access to government services and other issues in the political atmosphere. Because these families cannot afford babysitters, Shavu Banim provides this program so the parents can learn Hebrew without having to worry about their children, in hopes of improving their Hebrew to further their job pursuits.

When I started volunteering there, I struggled to connect with the kids, but after I started to remember everyone’s names, we all warmed up to each other. I even had a group of girls who acted as my little assistants and translators! The children ranged in age from toddlers to middle-school, and on any given afternoon, we had from 10 to 25 children attend the program.
Most of them only speak Hebrew and their native Amharic, although some of the older ones were beginning to learn English in school, so the biggest challenge for me was the language barrier.

My conversational Hebrew skills were very weak when I first arrived in Israel, so I mostly communicated with the kids through simple Hebrew words and pantomiming in the beginning. I can honestly say that although I was learning a lot in my university Hebrew class, I learned much more from talking to the kids. They taught me new words and phrases and allowed me to practice in a new setting. By the end of my time at the center, I was able to have conversations and give directions without too much difficulty. Being in a situation where you have no choice but to speak the language really improves your language skills quickly! In return, I taught the children some English words and helped them with their English homework. There wasn’t an afternoon that went by where the phrase “Ech omrim b’anglit” (How do you say in English) wasn’t asked at least five times.

The children were so curious and wanted to learn, and I was so excited to see that sort of passion for knowledge! They made me pictures with words I taught them in English, which now hang proudly on my dorm room wall. One night, when I was waiting for the bus, one of the older girls walked past me on her way home, and said “Hello Rebecca I dinner house bye” before sitting next to me as we waited for the bus together. I was so proud that she came up and spoke to me in English, and that moment will forever stick in my mind.

The time I spent volunteering with the kids of Shavu Banim made a huge impact on the way I viewed and connected with the Ethiopian community in Israel and the work of community-based non-profits, and allowed me to build confidence in the language and in myself.

Written by: Rebecca DeSantis ‘16
Between the clouds and advancing hour, the lightning was one of the few things we could see apart from the rain and silhouetted hills. Though I felt I could easily cover the distance in about a 20 min. jog, our group resisted running until the persuasion of limited time and increasing wind won over. If we missed this bus, none of us would be making it back to Istanbul tonight. So we chose our steps wisely, and picked our way forward through the sand dunes, reeds, and rain.

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We ran through a fallen and frayed electric fence, making sure to avoid places where it might have been obscured by sand, and kept our balance on a patched wooden foot-bridge after we made it through. The immediacy of live wires made us uneasy, but we had a storm to beat and a bus to catch. I feel I should note: the word “Here” is an inadequate translation. While I don’t speak Turkish, my conscience as a linguist compels me to clarify. Burada is more expressly a statement of “In this [place]” which holds a completely different nuance. When in Turkey, to be “here” is to be completely present.

If the tangible line of my comfort circle could be drawn, on Day One it would have been near
skin-tight, hugging myself within my alleyway apartment behind my barred windows. Now, that sphere has tangibly expanded to include not only my neighborhood, Hisarüstü, but the better portion of the country and quite literally the adjacent continents within my reach. Despite the lightning, today day seemed comparatively mellow when set aside all of my other days and all of my other storms.

How many spheres have I moved through today alone? I went to classes I’d prepared for, crashed a quiz I didn’t. Witnessed a generous gesture of Turkish hospitality from a Köfte worker via a free lunch and was completely scammed about 20 minutes later by a Turkcell phone shop for a problem still unsolved. Leatherly coffee, biscuits, and socializing in the afternoon, a walk on the beach, dinner with friends, and of course çay tea washing down each of these events. I looked down at myself now.

In my sopping clothes, muddy shoes, and sandy tights discussing politics (on a bus I almost missed) with a friend (whom I’ve only known for a few hours), the day feels like a striking microcosm of my entire time in Istanbul: Leisurely. Social. Intermittently. Translated. Calm, despite the ever-present undercurrent of energy, an ideological humming just beneath our feet. Forever a charge, needing only a catalytic spark.

Even as I’m scribbling these notes instead of doing my homework, numb cold but safe from peaking patches of electric fences and tempests, it’s a hard sensation to let go of, that world of being perpetually punctuated by lightning. I’m not sure if it’s a sensation I want to let go of. And, quite honestly, the last few months constitute the only segment of time I can legitimately lay claim to where there was not a single day -not one- that I took for granted. Everything I’ve experienced Istanbul to be: the people, the atmosphere, the music, the impromptu debates, the instinct to haggle, the lack of all driving caution, the soccer fanaticism all of it can be funneled into one single, addicting element: Electric.

Written by: 
Julia Jakus ‘17
For me, deciding to study abroad in Israel was the best decision for me because it was a representation of everything I was looking for in a six month experience – a journey to somewhere I had not been yet, a place that would give me a culture shock, and a place that would help me grow as a student majoring in political science. When I reflect on my time in Israel, it is sometimes overwhelming to realize how much I grew as both a young adult and a scholar.

Israel is unlike any country I have ever visited. I like to call it a mixture of some European characteristics, and some characteristics I have witnessed in my childhood travels to India. While Israel is incredibly advanced in terms of infrastructure, transportation, and technology, certain elements remind me of India like the block-style buildings, along with the typical Israeli personality. While some streets in Tel Aviv reminded me of strolling through streets in Bhubneswar, India, other streets in Jerusalem looked exactly like European cobblestone alleyways.

Prior to my departure to Ben Gurion University of the Negev, all I knew in Hebrew was “Shalom” and “Mazal Tov” (I later found out I had been mispronouncing mazal tov for years.) Enrolling in Ulpan (an intensive Hebrew course) was smart. It is safe to say that first week was the most frustrating. From having to learn a completely new alphabet, to continuously mixing up my knowledge of French vocabulary with Hebrew vocabulary, it was difficult. However, after six months in the country, I have developed a new appreciation for mastering foreign languages. Not only was I able to get around in Israel, I developed more fruitful relationships with local Israelis.

At Washington College, within my political science major, I have a concentration in the Near East. This was my main driving factor for choosing Israel as my study abroad location. Therefore, for six months, I got to live in the Middle East, and more importantly, my understanding of one of the most controversial issues in the region deepened immensely.
For years, I have read about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in textbooks, from numerous media outlets, and I have written papers on the subject. From conversing with Israeli Jews and Israeli Arabs to visiting Jerusalem and many other significant religious sites, I really learned about the conflict from a grassroots level and enhanced my knowledge of the conflict. While I never once felt in danger or unsafe during my time in Israel, I was exposed to the reality of living there. Most of my Israeli friends had served in a war, and hearing their personal accounts of experiences during the past Operation Protective Edge in 2014 opened my mind tremendously. While I still do not completely understand the conflict, my appreciation for traveling to other parts of the world and communicating with locals to learn more effectively has increased.

My time in Israel has been one of the best times in my life. I look back at my experiences there with nothing but a smile on my face. While there were obstacles I had to overcome – from the language barrier, to finding my place in a completely different part of the world, I have emerged as a much stronger and confident individual.

For these reasons, I encourage people to step outside of their comfort zone and immerse themselves in a new culture and a new way of life. I never expected to find myself at 21 and craving to move to Tel Aviv and find a job there instead of staying in the U.S. But life has a funny way of playing out, and I have Israel to thank for inspiring me in more ways than one.

Written by: 
Ekta Panigrahi ‘15
HONG KONG

TAKING ON THE BIG CITY

Written by: Lily Britt ’16

It was August 17, 2014 when I first stepped foot in Hong Kong. That moment for me was truly indescribable. I remember at the end of the day, my neck hurt from staring at all the skyscrapers. My first ride in a HK taxi was most memorable, holding on for dear life. The hours seemed to turn into days and days into months.

As I remember sitting on central pier overlooking the vast Victoria Harbor, I cannot help but wonder where the time has gone. It seems like just yesterday I traveled all around Mainland China, Macau, HK, Taiwan, Thailand, and Japan. I will try my best to briefly explain my experience this past year, because it is hard to articulate the so much about Asia, the global business sphere, and myself. It is impossible to imagine myself today without my study abroad experience! The one decision I made that changed my life, was applying and being accepted into the Hong Kong Federation of Business Students. This elite organization gathered business students from the nine universities in Hong Kong to create an immense network. The mentorship program was my favorite, introducing me to Annie Suen, a corporate general manager at Li & Fung Limited.

I never thought in a million years that I would be going back to Hong Kong June 17, 2015 for an eight-week summer internship program as a Corporate Communications intern at Li & Fung Limited’s international headquarters. As a global business concentration, this was a dream come true. Studying and working in Hong Kong provided me with two completely different experiences.
made quite a few memories. While some were embarrassing and others fun, plenty of them I’m glad to have made. Years, months, and even days before I set foot on that American Airline plane, I hadn’t thought that flying to another country and living there was even possible for me. I had completed a goal two years in the making: the first person in my family to study abroad.

For me, studying abroad in Seoul was the first time I had ever lived in a city. Let alone one in Korea. Although I lived in Baltimore for a few years, I had never quite lived right in the middle of a metropolitan area!

Seoul is a city filled with shopping malls, street markets, and some of the best restaurants one can find (I loved eating there as you can see). Not to mention almost every place had free wifi. You can infer that Seoul is probably one of the most tech savvy and modernized places in the Asia Pacific region. However, the most memorable spots for me were the historical and natural locations.

PALACES

Seoul has quite a few traditional and natural locations despite being a metropolitan area. The first areas I explored were the five Grand Palaces in Seoul. The first one I went to was Gyeongbokgung Palace. Gyeongbokgung was the main royal palace of the Joseon dynasty and was built in 1395. This was the first Korean Palace I had visited. The other ones were Changdeokgung, Deoksugung, Changgyeonggung, and Gyeonghuigung. On a side note, despite these places being relatively close, I still
got a little lost; luckily those beginning level Korean classes at Yonsei paid off in some way. Even though these palaces had remarkably similar architecture, I still enjoyed walking around and exploring the areas within them. I felt a sense of peace and timelessness inside their ancient walls.

MOUNTAINS AND MORE MOUNTAINS

My second mini story takes place on a national holiday celebrating, well, children (did I mention Korea loves children so much that they named a holiday for them?). On Children’s Day everybody had the day off. In addition, fathers and mothers would take the kids out to an amusement park or a zoo. Surprisingly, I was childless. So I did the next best thing: mountain hiking! However I had no idea that I was hiking until I was actually at Bukhansan and unprepared with jeans, boots, and a polo shirt. The friends that invited me were my roommate Tzu Chien Hsu, his girlfriend Jaewon, and my classmate Jian Hao.

We hiked up one of the easier trails. Well, easy for seasoned mountain hikers like my roommate. Early on I discovered something: There was a gap in skill; everyone was athletic except me. So I decided to let them go head and reach the end of the course without me. At one point, I saw that I was at my limit. Eventually I reached a crossroads, a literal crossroads, and attached to the sign was a loose-leaf piece of paper. “For Leon- Keep going bro!” In the center was a big arrow pointing to the right trail. The fact that they were waiting for me gave me an extra push to keep going.

Honestly, I felt bad that everyone left me behind. I thought that I couldn’t keep up with anyone (on the mountain and off). However, as I kept going and going I came to a realization; everyone in life goes at their own pace. Whatever they are doing or working towards, everyone develops at their own pace. Tzu Chien and the others may have passed me by far but that didn’t matter. I wanted to finish. Before I knew it, I had reached my destination.

PEACHES

After my first experience with mountain hiking; I was ecstatic. I had finished my first hike and I wasn’t even prepared for it. However, at the peak we had reached, we saw higher peaks in the distance. A lone man stood
there as a silhouette in the distance. So I decided that I would come back and climb higher.

For this excursion, I had invited my friends Ben and Cheltzie. We met that morning outside their boarding house at 11:00 a.m. We were supposed to meet at 10:30 a.m but Cheltzie was running late (normally I’m the late one). We took a bus to the national park.

As the overzealous one, I hiked ahead of all three of us and led the charge. The first one to eagerly climb over rocks and lead and was the first one to tire out. As expected, we lacked proper preparation. My friend had worn jeans and none of us brought hiking gear. Just our water bottles, money, and resolve.

Mountain hiking leads to some of the friendliest encounters. The first time I had fallen down and scraped my legs, elderly people passing by came to my aid and ensured I was okay. One of the people we met while hiking was a young man who lived near the area. He spoke pretty decent English and had tons of hiking experience, and he hiked Bukhansan regularly. As a matter of
fact, he had already hiked the day before, but his friend suffered an injury so he ensured that his friend got down safely; therefore, the young man came back to reclaim his belongings. This man stayed with us for most of the climb. He looked after us and slowed down when we needed it; after all, Ben and Cheltzie were twigs while I was practically a chocolate marshmallow. At one point, we sat down and had a talk. Ben and the young man talked in Korean; Ben was good at Korean. In the middle of the conversation the young man pulled out a can of peaches. We passed the can around until the last slice was gone. Then the young man offered us what he called “water tissues” and then we abruptly got up to finish the hike. He stayed with us for most the hike. From then on, we named him “Peaches.”

This hike up Bukhansan tested me even more than the first time. Ben, Cheltzie, and I took the trail that would lead to the very top of Bukhansan. At one point, we began to tire so I admonished “Don’t worry guys, we’re halfway there!” As I said that a fellow hiker giggled overtly. We hadn’t even reached the halfway point. Earlier we had we assumed took the intermediate path but no, like the foolish beginners we were, we had taken the advanced trail.

Near the peak, the mountain became higher and steeper. This was the most dangerous point. Slippery edges, steep climb, and a bird’s eye view that reminded you that one minor trip and you die. As we climbed, something snapped. I froze, I stopped. My legs and my willpower ceased to move. I froze. All my anxiety and latent fear of heights suddenly rushed back into me. The only thing in my mind was “stop just stop. I can’t do it.” All my weakness spilled out. I wanted to give up. I looked up and there was Ben and Cheltzie patiently waiting and not a single look of judgment in their eyes. Ben helped me take the first step. Ben and Cheltzie reminded that wherever you go, there will be people to support you and hold you up. I had lost my composure, but I soon regained it and finished the course. Standing atop the peak, we looked out to see all of Seoul and an endless horizon. With that view and the Korean flag behind us, we accomplished a difficult task and we sealed the deal for a lifelong friendship.

Overall, I got to see some cool stuff you don’t commonly find in a city area. The Bukhansan National Park and Five Grand Palaces were some of my favorite spots to visit while abroad. Plus I got a couple of life lessons, and made a couple lifelong friends from all over the world.
“Brasil eats, sleeps and drinks football. It lives football.”
--Pele

When you hear someone calling Rio de Janeiro the “Cidade Maravillinosa,” they probably do not realize just how wonderful the city truly is. Between the highest mountains and the coolest seas on the East coast of Brazil, you will discover a little slice of Paradise.

My experience in Rio was nothing like I could have imagined. Sure I expected football, the music, the dancing and the warm people, but nothing could have prepared me for the beautiful sunsets, and the true joy of their society. From the millions of tiny monkeys and toucans on my way to school to the street parties, my experience was very diverse. Brazil is home to one of the modern Seven Wonders of the World, the Christ the Redeemer. Taking the hike up to the statue was absolutely breathtaking. Located on the highest point of Rio, the “Cristo” allows you to see Rio in all of its complex beauty. Although Rio is truly magical, it also contains a strong vibe of social class division.

Favelas in Rio can be a sad tourist attraction, but they possess a bigger story through their tiny roads and houses. I was privileged to have the opportunity to work as an English school teacher in one of the favelas, called Vidigal. There, I worked every week.
with children, mostly girls, who lived in the community and had the intention of learning a second language. Although, I thought I was there to improve their lives, in the end they improved mine through their outstanding determination. With their never-ending joy, their appreciation for even the smallest things truly made an impact on me. The opportunity that I had to see the problem from the inside allowed me to have a better understanding of Rio's complex social map. Even though Brazil is a massive country, traveling around is fairly easy because most of the main cities are located along the east coast. I went up to Minas Gerais, where the food was incredible. This is the state where the Portuguese first colonized Brazil. With its diverse history, it was great to see that its traditions were still intact. I also went down to São Paulo, which is the largest metropolis in South America. There you will find a mixture of nature, industrialization and art radiating under the beautiful Sun.

One of my favorite places during my experience was Ilha Grande, which as its name explains, is a huge island made up of 23 beaches surrounded by vibrant and transparent turquoise ocean. Lucky for me, thanks to its proximity, I also had the opportunity to travel around Brazil's neighbors, Argentina, Chile and Uruguay.

My experience in Rio was more magical than I ever could have imagined. As a result, Brazil will forever have a place in my heart. So now I encourage you, my dear reader, to visit this slice of paradise or another in disguise, where you too can have your own magical tales in lands near and far.

Written by:
Raquel Gomez Fernandez ‘16

http://www.washcoll.edu/offices/globaleducation/4cornersnewsletter.php
When people ask me how my year abroad went, this is the unbelievably inadequate answer I supply. Great.

Why is my answer so short? Well, what's the best way to explain 369 days of a life changing experience? Honestly, I don't know but hey ho, Washington College has graced me with some words to take a stab at it. Bear with me as I trundle down memory lane, WAC. International students arrive a week before the Yankees roll in, the idea being to give them a chance to get over their various degrees of jet lag and to assimilate to the unprecedented levels of freedom in rural Chestertown. But, joking aside, the College is fantastic at making international students feel welcome during that first week. After several icebreakers, a

**TAKING ON AMERICA**

Written by: Aldo Ponterosso, Exchange Student from the United Kingdom Royal Holloway, University of London
trip to Annapolis, and a questionable karaoke night, we foreigners had formed an international clique so close that we didn’t even have to wear pink on Wednesdays. My initial trepidation transformed into temerity as I made friends and began to understand the American schooling system.

Now it was time to meet Goose nation.

Firstly, we Brits are an awkward people. We’re terrified of friendliness – we assume we’re being robbed if somebody approaches us to say hello. So, just for a moment, imagine you’re a redcoat. Now, imagine a flock of WAC students bombarding you with dazzling white smiles, enthusiastic ‘sure things,’ and a level of hospitality so high it would make a Canadian blush. I was overwhelmed by the affable American, the gregarious goose, and the easy-going east-coaster. By the time classes started, I had made friends from all across the globe.

The year flew by in a flurry of reading, essays, and college events. In Britain, students are confined to their one subject, be it history, chemistry, maths, or whatever else one feels like studying for three years. Hence, I decided to take full advantage of the liberal arts education that was on offer to me and took piano, acting, and scuba classes alongside my history degree. I soon learned to keep pace with that tenacious American work ethic and fell in love with my subjects all over again. I even got to present a paper on Renaissance sodomy at Georgetown – huzzah!

In between the studious stuff, I gave thanks, traveled to Toronto with friends, and celebrated the birthday of a real troublemaker at Washington College’s Birthday Ball. But, as you may or may not agree depending on your affinity for clothes, there was one event that could not be topped. There’s something quite liberating about running around a field naked with your fellow man and so May Day is a special day at WAC, one very worth attending.

Far too quickly, my time at Washington College was up. The slow goodbyes of packing and a quick farewell at the Presidents house left me quite upset. But, for all my tears, I knew that I would leave America a changed man. I had found lifelong friends and a new place to call home. Until next time, WAC.
Taking a Trip to Philly with other internationals

Photo by: Camila Freire Barrios
**A WHOLE YEAR ABROAD?!**

*Written by:*
**Camila Freire Barrios,**
*Exchange Student from Peru*
**Pontificia Universidad Catolica del Peru*

“What would happen if I didn’t get used to this new college? Is my English not as good as I think? What if I’m not a good Teaching Assistant, or if I don’t make friends? It’s a whole year!” Even though I started with a lot of fears and insecurities, I still remember sitting down with my suitemates the first night and my little notebook filled up with doubts. After some weeks, I realized that this experience would be what I made of it. Therefore, I started going out of my comfort zone, participating more in the different spaces that WAC offers, and today, when I look back, the initial fear was worth the immense experience.

To list some of the things I did: I went to the Eastern Psychological Association (EPA) meeting in Philadelphia. I was a Teaching Assistant for Spanish Language classes and was able to integrate some of my life experience into each class. I conducted a psychological experiment in class, and assisted one of my professors with a research paper. I did a summer internship in the Disciples Center for Public Witness in D.C. and went to the University of Oxford through a Washington College research seminar. I learned something from every person I met at Washington College, from the amazing teachers (who took time for unhurried conversations and personal interactions) and from my beloved “international family” (the other international students and American friends from Washington College) who are now spread across the world.
A FRUITFUL LIFE

Written by:
Jimmy Tong,
Exchange Student from Hong Kong
Lingnan University

The days I spent in the United States for four months have been one of the best moments of my life. While being away from my country to fully experience life was scary at first, it was also very exciting.
MY TIME IN AMERICA

At first, it seemed as if I had stepped into unknown territory, with many adventures under its veil. With the expectation of exploring things that I set my heart on and seeing things that I have never seen before, I went to Washington College (WAC) to begin my unforgettable exchange experience. It was time for my tiny world to fully embrace a whole new culture. Moving to a small town, the quietness and the fresh air purified my soul and body soon after my arrival. It was a chance for me to get away from the crowded city and relax from my busy life.

Consequently, I stayed on campus most of the time. Fortunately, a number of activities were organized throughout the semester to overcome my boredom, such as Birthday Ball, parties, field trips, the Color Festival, the WACappella concert, dancing and drama performances, piano recitals etc. Also, it has been my first time in life to watch a lacrosse and a baseball competition. They were all exciting. A shocking event, “May Day,” rang a bell. Whether or not it was appropriate, it was not anyone’s concern, students freed themselves from the pressure at the end of the semester while having fun.

For a long time, I had dreamed of going to classes riding a bicycle on campus, and it finally came true when I studied at WAC. Borrowing a bike cost me nothing, but the bike chain that fell all the time scared me a lot. Regardless of the chain problem, and despite waking up before the sunrise and fighting the chilly and fierce wind, it was worthwhile to observe the rowers training early in the morning with the coach on a speedboat. The coldness was set aside when I was able to film the beautiful scenery at WAC, and the tenacity of the rowers. Also, running around the campus for filming might not be possible without the help of my international family.

However, it was not easy for me to adapt to the new environment. Luckily, the university community was kind and friendly, helping me and other international students who came with me along the way. With the variety of courses offered at WAC, I was able to choose courses that my home university could not offer and ones that I was truly interested in. Also I found the professors very flexible. Many cared about students and would tailor a course based on the will of a student. No matter the small class approach or supportive university staff, the emphasis on whole-person development of students through the liberal art teaching has deepened my understanding of the education system in the United States.

Washington College stands beautifully on its own with its long-standing history and great facilities including well-equipped gymnasium, but it is the people who come here that make it extraordinary.

With the lack of public transportation, there seemed to be some inconveniences, but I learned to make the most of my situations. However, renting a car, I was able to go to downtown to watch a NBA match and tour Philadelphia to spend a day with a local family. Despite the inconvenience of transportation, I managed to travel to New York, Chicago, Pittsburgh, Vancouver, Seattle, Washington D.C., Williamsburg, and Pennsylvania.

I enjoyed my time at WAC with friends as we hung out, went shopping, laughed, cried and spent four happy months together, keeping each other as company throughout our days at WAC. It made our lives fruitful and meaningful! Though time flies, I will never forget the wonderful memories and friendships I made during this adventure, and I am grateful for the support people gave me along the way.
LEAVING SUMMER, STARTING NEW

Written by:
Martina Belen Funes,
Exchange Student from Argentina
Universidad Católica Argentina

Honestly, at the beginning I was so excited to share with the WAC community what my experience was like. But then, every time I sat in front of the computer, I faced this dilemma...what on earth am I gonna write about?! There are so many things to say, and yet I don’t want to spend my time writing a twenty page story. Every single memory about my experience in the United States has been remarkable. I remember everyone talking about the culture shock I would experience before leaving. Of course when you leave the comfort of your house and friends to live in a foreign land very far away from home, there will be some things that are shocking. But, I believe that is all part of the thrill. I once read that accents are a sign of bravery and that is exactly how I felt the first day that I arrived to WAC. Arriving on a freezing night, the shuttle driver told us, “you know where your rooms are, right?” We looked at him and then at our surroundings, being completely lost. While we later discovered he left us at the back of Min- ta Martin, I thought how I had just left summer behind in my own country for this cold weather.

Bravery was used in every aspect of my international college life. From the beginning, I was moved by it to make new friends, whom I soon started calling “my international family,” and to whom today I still speak on an almost daily basis. During my first days at the dining hall, I was faced with the challenge of what to eat and who to sit with. Very
quickly I grew used to all that Washington College had to offer. I loved Zumba, PiYo, Insanity, Pilates, Yoga, the gym, being able to join WACappella, painting Easter eggs in the Egg, portraits in the Goose Nest, watching movies in Smith Hall, eating popcorn, facing snow storms that made me have second thoughts about leaving my country and its beautiful sun. All these memories are part of a beautiful story that is etched in my heart.

I lived so many adventures, ranging from the night trips to 7/11 to get some pizza at 4 am because we were hungry, to such activities on campus like water games, the snow day in spring, and late night talks watching the stars behind the hills. Speaking of the hills, one cannot forget the crazy May Day! I had the chance to experience the George Washington Birthday Ball, which, to me, was the most American thing in the world. I felt like I had a role in a movie! Getting asked to attend the dance by someone who is very dear to me, we were able to go on another WAC adventure together. Taking a trip to the mall to buy my dress and getting my nails done, I got ready to dance the night away during this evening filled with magic. I felt like Cinderella, who had my shot at a ball and a prince. Even though the clock struck midnight and my fairytale lasted only 5 months, there is absolutely nothing about WAC that I would change. I loved being able to play the piano, study in the library with friends, or even being outside on sunny days. The Global Education Office also made sure we took many trips to places like NYC, Williamsburg, Baltimore, Philly, and DC. I had an amazing roommate for the first time in my life and we had fun partying in Kent Crossing too. I think that every step through WAC created a separate, individual memory in my heart that I still replay constantly.

WAC captured my heart, and helped me grow as a person, filling me with so many emotions that will last a lifetime! I am blessed to have been able to meet with so many wonderful people, and have so many unforgettable experiences. I don’t know if I’m allowed to say thank you in this reflection but if there’s a chance, I’d like to thank WAC for making my life so amazing while I was there.
SO LONG, SEE YOU TOMORROW

“For my part, I travel not to go anywhere, but to go. I travel for travel’s sake. The great affair is to move.”

– Robert Louis Stevenson
My plant died on my last full day in Milan. It's like he knew I was getting ready to leave. His name was Federico and I got him during the first week of my semester abroad. Back in February when I bought him for one euro, he was just a leaf in some dirt, but over the months in Milan he grew and I grew with him.

**FEB. 2**

I started my semester abroad with an air of confidence. I bragged to myself that if I can handle a summer in Africa, a few months in Italy would be a piece of cake. Then within five days of moving into my apartment, I had my iPhone stolen or maybe I just dropped it – either way I was careless and way too confident for my own good.

**MARCH 1**

I lost all of my photos, my only camera, my method of navigation, an alarm clock, currency converter, and snap chat. My phone was my rock during all my other trips and now I was in panic mode. What I thought would destroy me, instead gave me a burst of resilience. It took me months, until I got a new iPhone, to realize but looking back this was step one in how I grew during my time abroad. Everyone who comes from being abroad notes the life-changing ability that five months in a foreign country does to someone. I’m no exception, but it’s too easy to say in retrospect that living in Milan was simply life-changing because it was so much more than that.

By March I was growing, alongside my faithful sidekick Federico, into a person I liked a lot more than the one I was before I arrived in Italy. I stopped caring about the little things and I could pack my entire life into a backpack with a moment’s notice. I was more flexible, adventurous, and happy. Traveling had a lot to do with that – I had just gotten home from my first weekend trip outside of Italy to Belgium – but I’d really account it more to the feeling of coming back from Belgium. That was the first time I truly felt like I was going home. When the wheels scraped the tarmac of Milan’s airport, I cried. I was so overwhelmed with how happy I felt that I couldn’t hold back the tears. Every trip after this one was met with the same emotion minus the tears (at least not every time).

**APRIL 5**

By this point I had already learned so much about myself – namely that no matter where I am or who I’m with, I can create a home for myself. Home was Milan, but I discovered a new, yet somewhat innate ability to fall easily in love with new places. April 3 marked the beginning of Spring Break for me, which meant my first solo trip. I set off to Prague, carrying everything I needed for three days on my back and came back with a newfound love of being alone. Don’t get me wrong – I absolutely love the second family I made in Milan and still text them everyday,
but learning how to be alone was a huge moment of growth for me. I love to talk and I love for people to listen, but Prague marked the point in my personal growth when I learned that sometimes I can be my own company.

MAY 3

No matter how much traveling I did up until this point my roots were in Milan – that’s where my support system and my loyal plant were. Learning to be content alone was a turning point in the semester for me and prepared me for a month alone to cap off my time in Europe, but almost just as important was the realization that no matter how confident I felt in myself, I still needed a support system.

I realized this while lying in a queen-sized bed with six of my friends, stuck indoors during a thunderstorm, without WiFi, popcorn reading Amy Poehler’s book and making up stories of our own, in the coastal Cinque Terre region of Italy. This trip taught me that yes, I can do it alone, but it is a lot more fun with friends. Plus, who else was going to water my plant when I was away? Being stuck indoors for two days forced us to get closer than we ever had before. We had to get creative with our time and despite seeing very little of Cinque Terre itself, this trip goes down in the books as one of my favorites. Not only did this teach me the necessity of a support system, but also to not sweat the small stuff like when the weather is less than desirable.

JUNE 1

I think part of the reason I focused so much on my plant throughout the semester was because it was a constant. A lot changed for me throughout the semester. I grew as a person and my surroundings were continually changing. Federico grew too, but he was always there, sitting on the window-sill of my living room at Via Giotto 24. He knew that I couldn’t say goodbye to any of it, so he made sure I didn’t have to. At 6:20 a.m. my roommates and I stood on our balcony, with a wine bottle being passed around between us, and had no words to say. Many tears and hugs later we still had yet to say goodbye and we never did.

Written by: 
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