Thanksgiving abroad: What are you thankful for?

Kathryn English

Sitting in orientation on my second day in Granada, Spain, I thought it was slightly humorous when the psychotherapist, brought in to speak with us about culture shock, referred to studying abroad as “a fantastic time for therapy.” Why would going to therapy in a foreign country be considered so fantastic? I did not realize at that point the insight one gains’ being away from most everything that is familiar.

It is almost as if being abroad is a type of therapy in and of itself. Being removed physically from life in America also removes many psychological norms as well as barriers. With the turn of so many social conventions, our emotional processes also take a turn. This interchange has allowed me to evaluate my life in a way that would not have been conceivable without the new perspective I have been given during my time abroad.

In Granada I have been able to realize many things I am thankful for back home such as long showers, air-conditioning, and the dry West Texas heat without any of the humidity all too abundant in Granada. I have a new appreciation for the people in my life. I am thankful for my family, who attentively listens to all of my drawn-out stories (ever willing to laugh and cry along with me), who are now pros at online communication - expert Skype users trained in the art of sending love through a computer screen, and who lets me see my cats. I am thankful for my brother, who keeps me connected to the U.S. as we constantly share news articles and the latest funny videos. And I am thankful for my friends, who stay up into the ungodly hours of the night (or morning, rather) to catch up with me, wish me a good morning, and detail the shenanigans they have been up to.

Living in Spain I have not only been provided a reflection on the existing aspects of my life, of which I possess a renewed appreciation, but have been introduced to a plethora of new, wonderful things I have now become thankful for.

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IMPORTANT DATES:

November 12: Critical Language Scholarship application deadline
November 27: Thanksgiving
December 4: Dead Day
December 5-11: Finals week
December 12: Commencement/Graduation
December 25: Christmas
January 1: New Year

“The journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step”

-Lao Tzu-
Faculty-led Programs for 2015

The Office of Study Abroad is excited to announce six faculty-led programs for 2015. Faculty-led programs are short term programs where students go abroad accompanied by a WTAMU professor—or two—and a group of WTAMU students. These programs are a great choice for students if they are looking for a short-term experience, normally 2 to 4 weeks. Past faculty-led programs have taken Buffs to many different countries such as: England, Turkey, Spain, Austria, France, Germany, Switzerland, and India, just to name a few. Here is a little description of what each college is offering in 2015:

College of Education and Social Sciences: the COESS is offering two “Go Global” programs in May 2015, to Costa Rica and to Dominican Republic. The first option is available to Education students; they will have the opportunity to go to Costa Rica, immerse themselves in the Spanish language and culture, and learn how a second language is taught. Further topics ranging from immigration, bilingualism, children’s issues, and educational policies will also be discussed within the program. On the other hand, Social Work students can go to Dominican Republic. The program will focus on social welfare, policy and global health. Students will gain new perspectives on the impact of policies in a global context.

College of Agriculture, Science and Engineering: the Department of Engineering and Computer Science will be in Honduras during the May intersession, putting their engineering knowledge to practice. Students will have the opportunity to conduct evaluations of the land, river, jungles and other natural resources and even participate in the construction of a school building.

College of Business: an exciting program for various Business majors, where students will visit Denmark, Norway and Sweden. This program will give students the opportunity to compare and contrast the Scandinavian culture, business, and attitudes concerning design, entrepreneurship, and innovation to those in the U.S. While traveling Denmark, Norway and Sweden students will visit companies such as: Microsoft Development Center, IKEA Headquarters, Norwegian Airlines, and many more.

College of Fine Arts and Humanities: join the Department of Communication and visit Seoul, South Korea. Through the travel writing program, students will experience professional career development in a global market. Students will also visit places such as UNESCO World Heritage sites, significant Korean landmarks, and the Demilitarized Zone between the two Koreas.

Attebury Honors Program: the spring Honors Seminar will conclude in Ireland, where Honor students will have the opportunity visit cultural and historical places including: Abbey Theatre, National Museum and much more.

For more information about these programs, please visit: wtamu.edu/study-abroad-faculty-led-programs.aspx.
I was sitting in a train car on the Trans-Mongolian Railway in late May, about to begin a 32-hour train ride from Irkutsk, Russia to Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia. I had already been traveling nearly two weeks on a journey that began in Amarillo and included stops in the United Kingdom, Armenia, and Russia’s Siberia region.

As I was watching two of my bunk mates – total strangers – unpack their belongings for the trip, one of them pulled out a roll of toilet tissue and placed it on a shelf. “I don’t have any toilet paper,” I thought to myself. “What does he know that I don’t?”

Travelers ask themselves this question all of the time: What do they know that I don’t?

“A humbling component of travel is that it always raises more questions than it answers. As soon as I learn one thing, that experience or new piece of knowledge leads to four or five additional questions. I can’t possibly discover all of the things I want to know in the amount of time I have, no matter where I go.”

Sometimes, the question is expansive. We might seek to discover cultural practices, foods – even a friendly face at the neighborhood coffee house – that can give us a better understanding of life in this new (to us) place. What is a typical daily routine here? Why is this particular food culturally relevant? Where should I go that isn’t on the tourist map?

At other times, that question focuses on much more narrow circumstances. It’s almost four o’clock in the afternoon in Taipei, and there’s a large crowd gathering on the other side of the Buddhist temple. What’s going on over there? The line at a particular stall in Singapore’s Maxwell Food Centre is by far the longest one. What kind of food are they serving? A train is departing Siberia for Mongolia. Why did that guy pack toilet paper?

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On a train track somewhere in Siberia, I learned that my bunk mates were traveling back home to Mongolia. They spoke very little English, and I spoke no Mongolian, but based on their passport stamps, I learned they had traveled this route numerous times as they went back and forth to Russia for continuing education classes. They had experiential knowledge that I didn’t have.

I learned the answer to my toilet paper question soon enough. The bathrooms on the train car didn’t have any. And that, of course, led to a new set of questions.

Another humbling aspect of travel is the constant awareness that we are almost completely beyond our experiential knowledge. I don’t speak the local language. I have no idea where the closest grocery store is. How do I get back to my apartment from here?

Travel allows us to ask questions, both big and small, and then seek the answers to those questions. In that sense, it is akin to higher education.

Travel enables us to acquire knowledge through our experiences. It helps us challenge our assumptions and reexamine our core beliefs. It gives us a better understanding of our place in this world.
“Buffs Abroad” Photo Contest

We would like to thank all of the students who submitted photos for the 2014 Buffs Abroad photo contest! Our judges had a very difficult decision to make, but after much deliberation, we are proud to announce the winners for each category! Remember that first places will receive $50 in buff cash, and second and third places will get $25!

Category: Natural and Urban Landscape

1st Places (yes, there is a tie!): Casey Watson and Yesenia Rodriguez
2nd Place: Valeria Rodriguez
3rd Place: Kassie Mullins

A Family Homestead
By Casey Watson, Uganda

The End of the World for some, the Beginning for others
By Yesenia Rodriguez, Portugal

3 Peaks Island—A Korean Love Triangle
By Valeria Rodriguez, South Korea

Monteroso Mornings
By Kassie Mullins, Italy
Category: People, Culture and Society

1st Place: Alyssa McElroy
2nd Place: Marisela Teran
3rd Place: Madison Heston

Bubbles at Notre Dame
By Alyssa McElroy, France

Strong Warriors
By Marisela Teran, Costa Rica

Changing of the Guards
By Madison Heston, England
Category: Send me there

1st Place: Marisela Teran
2nd Place: Lucia Gandara
3rd Place: Casey Watson

Sanchiri
By Marisela Teran, Costa Rica

Beach = Peace
By Lucia Gandara, Costa Rica

Nile River Expedition
By Casey Watson, Uganda
Postcard project
Winner: Lucia Gandara

Unforgettable Moments in Costa Rica

My favorite memory and unforgettable one is the weekend we spent in El Yuè. El Yuè is an eco, agro farm outside of Limon, Costa Rica. They live almost totally out of the land and recycle everything. What made this stop my favorite is that we, the 14 students on this trip, spent the night in one big room. At first we were complaining and just not loving it. Soon we took it as a summer camp and made the best out of it. We got woken up one night by the screeching scream of one of our roommates. Apparently a bat grazed her nose and it scared her half to death. Then one night one other roommate woke us up because her bed was falling apart. The girls sleeping on cots on the floor had fun with that one. They were like, “See that’s why you should’ve slept on the floor!” Yes, this may not sound like the most fun in the world but it did sure make it memorable.

We also had the best views from our room. The vegetation, the colors, and even the sounds took my breath away. Everything is so green and bright. The bugs are even so much different than here. The vegetation and all the nature made me fall in love with Costa Rica. I’m glad I was able to get to know the culture and live like the Tico people do. I loved being part of a new family!

-Lucia Gandara

#buffsabroad Photo Contest

The finalists of the Instagram photo contest were displayed at the JBK on October 20th, where students had the opportunity to vote for their favorite photo!

Congratulations to the winner of this category, Yoselin Rueda.

Thanks again to all who participated and those who helped us with their votes!