LETTER FROM THE EDITORS

The mission of Carolina PASSPORT is to help link students to all of the international outlets in the UNC community. In addition to stories about undergraduate travel abroad, we are excited to include in this issue a story written by a Brazilian graduate student currently studying at UNC, and a piece on how a study abroad experience in Italy helped to create an international career for a Carolina alumna.

Although Carolina PASSPORT is here to help you connect with fellow world travelers through the stories contained within these pages, we don’t want it to stop there. In this issue we have included the email address of every author and fully encourage you to contact them if you are interested in finding out more about their experiences or how you can have one like it.

In keeping with our mission, we ask you to let PASSPORT be more than a magazine. Let it inspire you to plan and embark on your own journey. And whether it’s your first semester on campus or your last, remember that no matter where you go, your travels will always have a voice through Carolina PASSPORT.

From left to right:

Content Editor Mallory Plaks is a senior International Studies and Journalism major from Fort Lauderdale, Florida. She can be contacted at mplaks@email.unc.edu.

Managing Editor McKay Roozen is a first year International Studies and Political Science major from Lexington, Kentucky. She can be contacted at roozen@email.unc.edu.

Layout and Design Editor Leah Edwards is a senior Geography major from Baltimore, Maryland. She can be contacted at leahedw@email.unc.edu.

Layout and Design Editor Lindsey Stutzman is a senior Journalism and Mass Communication major from Asheville, N.C. She can be contacted at lstutz@email.unc.edu.

Carolina PASSPORT on the Web

Carolina PASSPORT is excited to announce its new Web site - featuring additional stories and pictures, as well as digital versions of this printed issue and several past issues. Check out global.unc.edu/carolinapassport

Questions? Comments? Carolina PASSPORT welcomes feedback and suggestions. If you are interested in submitting stories or photos, contact the editors at carolinapassport@gmail.com.
ALSO IN THIS ISSUE

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Traveling Heels
See where Carolina students have been in the past year and where you can go, too.
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Walking down the dirt road with my used soda bottles in hand, I cross over a rickety two-by-four bridge and enter into the market. “Muli Bwanji, my friend, how are you today?” I hear called out as I walk toward the woman who runs my favorite market stall. I give her my used soda bottles and pick up some bread, eggs and a package of my favorite lemon cookies for the weekend. While counting out my change and packaging what I bought, she always asks questions about my plans for the weekend, what new Malawian foods I have tried and what snow is like in America. I answer in great detail and even describe how it can get so cold peoples’ tongues can get stuck to metal poles. She laughs and gathers all her market friends to come hear the story again.
My market was a place where I could get everything I needed. There was a tailor who made me a skirt but also sold tomatoes, a cell phone booth to buy more minutes to call home, a fried potato stand, a roasted peanut stand, a banana stand and, on Mondays, a popular fish stand. It was not a fancy market, but rather a simple one with a few permanent booths and many makeshift stalls. My favorite part of the day was during lunch hours when a lean-to restaurant would open to serve food to the hospital staff. The menu was always the same: chicken, nsima and beans, but, somehow, eating the food never got old. The chickens you would eventually be eating clucked and scratched around your feet as you dined, but you never seemed to notice because you really felt at home. Not only was the cook also the waiter, but if you were short on money, it was okay—they knew you would eventually be back.

Malawi is called the “warm heart of Africa,” and the people at the market certainly lived up to that title. My market seemed like one big family that accepted me as one of its own. It not only allowed me to feel like a Malawian, but it became my escape from my circle of Americans. In other markets in Lilongwe, vendors always gave me azungu prices (the white-person prices) or bothered me to buy things from them, but at my market I was never given the more expensive price or pressured to buy anything. When people ask about my time in Lilongwe, Malawi, they expect to hear stories about the wonderful adventures that I went on, or if I saw Madonna with her newly adopted baby, but the place that stands out most vividly in my mind was my market. Toward the end of my summer, as I was telling my favorite market woman that I would be leaving the next day to return to America, she looked at me and said, “but we will see each other again, don’t worry.” As soon as she said that, I realized she was right: I will be back again.

While in the taxi on the way to the airport, we made a turn by the market and I stuck my head out the window to yell, “Tsalami bwino!” When she heard my voice, she stuck her head out of her stall to wave goodbye, but what I did not expect was that everyone else did too.

Back in America, I miss the sense of community that I felt in my market. I realized, however, that I have places all around me that are similar. Granted, places like the student union and the Pit don’t have dusty red dirt or tailors selling tomatoes, but they are places to meet new people and old friends. When you are studying abroad or traveling in an unfamiliar area, I encourage you to find your market because I definitely found mine.

Cameron Taylor is a junior Geography major from Wilmington, N.C. She received a grant from the UNC Institute for Global Health and Infectious Diseases to do research in Malawi. Cameron can be reached at taylorca@email.unc.edu.

Designed by Amanda Goldfarb
The cultural differences between the United States and China are large and abundant, but the one I find most striking is that the span of China’s history has not endowed her people with a firm sense of identity. One would think that with over 5,000 years of history, the Chinese people would know who they are. Americans, having been around for only 200 or so years, have managed to develop a clear definition of what it means to be American, with value placed on education and hard work, a government responsible to the people, hot dogs and ballgames. In contrast, China appears to be a hodgepodge of varying systems born from attempts to develop politically and economically over the past century. Additionally, the natural difficulties of communication during ancient times and the simple geographic vastness of the country have produced regional cultural differences far more substantial than those in the U.S.

Unlike the playgrounds and ball fields of the U.S., parks in Beijing belong to the elderly. When strolling through a Chinese public space, it is common to see older Beijingers practicing anything from Tai Chi, to swing dancing, to kite flying. In China I read Sun Shuyun’s “The Long March: The True History of Communist China’s Founding Myth,” an account of the Communist army’s retreat from Nationalist forces. I realized that the expressionless Chinese faces in the park were the same faces that saw China go through civil war, occupation by Japan and a complete economic transition within a single lifetime. For Americans, a people who have not seen foreign troops on their soil since 1812 and who have a historically stable economic system, it is difficult to understand the cultural confusion that must result from such rapid change. As Americans, we are brought up understanding the principles of the free market system. How strange it would be to have first experienced economic freedom at middle age.

I attribute most of the immediately visible differences I experienced in China to spatial and economic constraints resulting from their large population. One time on the Beijing subway, it was so jammed packed that we had to hold our book bags above our heads just to fit. No need to hold on - the bodies of your fellow passengers are there to sup-
port you. Since returning, I’ve developed a distaste for how squeamish Americans are about touching other passengers. Multiple times I’ve watched a “full” Chapel Hill bus pull away only to notice passengers standing with enough space between them for two more people. Such constraints also affect housing options for Chinese citizens. From the 10 weeks I spent in China and the six cities I visited, I can recall only one instance of seeing a house. China’s economic miracle does not mean that the Chinese are wealthy by American standards; it means that they are moving toward that standard at a historically unmatched pace but still have a lot of ground to make up.

During my trips on the subway, I also became familiar with the names of Beijing’s neighborhoods - Xizhimen, Chaoyangmen, Dongzhimen - which doubled as subway station names. It wasn’t until I read “Oracle Bones: A Journey Through Time in China” by Peter Hessler that I understood the sad meaning of what many of those neighborhoods had in common: their names ended in “men,” Chinese for door. Why are most of Beijing’s neighborhoods named for doors when no notable ones are present? The names are relics of Beijing’s past as a walled city. Much to my dismay, I learned that the wall was almost entirely destroyed during the Cultural Revolution. The fact that the stops on China’s modern subway are named after symbols from its history that have long been destroyed marks one of the contradictions that are the quintessence of today’s China. Even having experienced the culture for only two months, I felt great sadness for the loss of history that occurred at the hands of Chairman Mao.

Before going to China I had heard about the restrictiveness of the government. I had also read that the government was skilled at covering up its injustices for brief periods of time (for example, during the Olympics). I was curious to see just how well the Chinese government could maintain appearances during an event so open to the world. I know from news reports and independent reading that the reality of China’s government is one of oppression. However, the situation visible on the ground appeared to be quite different. I noticed considerably fewer examples of obvious oppression than I had expected to see. I never saw Chinese police actively dispersing protestors, nor was I ever challenged by police about my presence in the country. I also realized that, just like in the U.S., the laws are enforced by humans, which means that the levels of enforcement can vary greatly.

One salient misconception of mine was my expectation of China’s strict control over Christianity. I had heard that Christian churches required the presentation of a foreign passport at the entrance, but this was not the case for me. The church I attended did not require a passport for entry, and the congregation appeared to be made up mostly of Chinese citizens. The sermon covered the story of Daniel and the Lion’s Den, which had deeper meaning because the possibility of persecution in China was real. I also attended two Catholic masses for which there were no impediments to entry either. I’m still uncertain as to whether these experiences accurately represented the Christian condition in China or were simply ruses to convince me of China’s openness.

While levels of restriction were lower than expected, there were some examples of the Chinese government limiting our freedoms. For instance, the government cancelled our scheduled speech competition for fear of too many foreigners speaking freely in one place. Also, when we tried to sleep on the Great Wall, which is usually allowed, we were told to leave. Overall, I am hesitant to base my opinion solely on my limited experiences in the most modern of Chinese cities. I do believe, however, that China is at least slightly more open than I had anticipated.

China, as I experienced it, is a country that is controlled but not Orwell’s “1984,” aged but not defined and crowded but not unlivable.

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Jim Page is a junior Economics and Chinese major from Cary, N.C. He received the Phillips Ambassadors Scholarship to study abroad through the CET Summer in Beijing program. Jim can be contacted at jamespt@email.unc.edu.

Designed by Gwen Saunders
I am Romanian. I was born and raised in Romania until the age of 13 when I moved to North Carolina, where I’ve been ever since. Let’s just say the transition from an Eastern European, ex-communist nation to the great American South was not the smoothest thing I’ve ever done.

So, I decided to study abroad in Buenos Aires, Argentina. Before you ask yourself, ‘Doesn’t this chick have enough identity problems already? Why is she going to South America?’ let me tell you this: I am Latin. I’m not Hispanic, but I am Latin. “Latin” is defined by the Webster Dictionary as: 1. any dialect of the language of ancient Rome; 2. a person who is a member of those peoples whose languages derived from Latin. There you go. Go ahead, Google it.

The reason why South America is referred to as Latin America is because the continent was conquered by Latin countries – Spain and Portugal – which is why everybody from this region is classified as “Latin American,” both Latin and American. Don’t be fooled by the word Latino/a. According to Webster, this term is short for latinoamericano/a, and it is only used in the United States. The word Latino simply means “Latin” in Spanish, the most prevalent Romance language in the Americas, hence the adoption of this term in everyday use. If I were to describe myself in Spanish, I would say, “Soy Latina.” So would everybody from Portugal, France, Italy and Spain.

Perhaps this is why I chose to go to Buenos Aires, the most European city in South America.

Today’s Argentineans are descendants of mostly Spanish and Italian immigrants. As soon as I would tell somebody that I’m Romanian, I would get a joyful response along the lines of, “Oh, you’re more like us, and our languages are very similar!” This is why I felt at home in Buenos Aires. I felt understood.

I ate beef, traveled, visited all the museums, partied until the wee hours of the morning, took a tango course and went to a Boca game. I even went to McDonald’s once to get a dulce de leche sundae. But these are not the experiences that define Buenos Aires for me. When I think of Buenos Aires, I think of my two little host sisters’ pet turtles walking around the apartment. I remember how on my first day my host dad explained that pet turtles are very common in families because of a popular children’s song and film about la tortuga Manuelita. I can close my eyes and see myself rowing with my host dad or watching my host mom win her tennis match. When I open them, I can still hear the sound of my host sisters’ voices, singing and laughing in their room.

I remember the smell of my favorite café, Café Eliel. How I loved taking my sweet time sipping on café con leche while reading the news. I remember noticing for the first time how porteños (what Buenos Aires residents call themselves) don’t use menus in cafés. They already know what they want, and if they ever feel adventurous, they just ask the waiter what there is to eat.

I remember going to any kiosco and seeing a sign posted, “No hay monedas, por Dios!” which translates to, “For the love of God, we don’t have change.” There is a shortage of
coins in Buenos Aires, because the colectivos (buses) require exactly 90 centavos in change for every ride. A moneda worth one peso is often times worth more than a two-peso bill.

I don’t remember my professors ever being on time for class. In Argentina, everybody is late. It is actually rude to show up on time if you are invited to somebody’s house because the host will never be ready on time. It’s also rude if you don’t insist three times to bring a bottle of wine to the party, and if you don’t refuse three times before finally eating a second helping of food.

And to me, it all makes sense. We have these same customs in Romania. Privacy is a really foreign concept, just like it is in Argentina. Everybody is in everybody else’s business. Children live with their parents until they get married. The grandparents are close. School exams are usually oral and professors read all the grades aloud. The public school buildings are falling apart, and teachers go on strike once every few months. The politicians are shamelessly corrupt.

As I was talking to a porteño friend one day, he brought up a question that, ironically, I had never asked myself before: ‘Why do people from the United States say, ‘I’m an American,’ or ‘I’m from America’ as if they are the only ones? We’re all Americans on this continent. They have claimed the term as if any other country isn’t worthy or entitled to it.’ I defended the “Americans,” saying that there actually isn’t any other word that they can use to define themselves. There is no word in the English language to describe a person from the United States except for “American.” But in Spanish, there is: estadounidense.

Isn’t it ironic, this problem of terminology? Sometimes it makes it hard to be understood. Different cultures pick different words to label what is or isn’t, and your identity is relative to their perceptions. What difference does it make if I think I’m Latin when nobody else around me does? How does an Argentine feel in the United States, where all of a sudden he’s not “American”? These are the things that I find myself thinking about, long after coming back from Buenos Aires.
We huddled in a small group around the campfire as we began our first night camping in the Kenyan bush. Even with the light of the moon, it was darker than expected in this place, this land of such bloody history. And then we heard it.

Ooooooomph! OOOOoooomph!

Lions.

And not just any lions, Tsavo lions. They are the same lions that are the focus of the legend the natives call the “Ghost and the Darkness,” the same lions that have made this one of the most famous - or infamous - parks in Kenya. Man-eaters. They wanted to know who had invaded their territory and dared to make camp. We could hear the males calling to each other with their sonorous moans and roars. For two hours we listened to them get closer, and closer and closer.

By Jessica Heinz

What I Left Behind
Our Maasai guards - our *askaris* - estimated that the lions came within 100 meters of the camp, investigating our scent, assessing us. In the end, there was no need for force. The lions accepted us, but not entirely. For several nights we heard them moaning in the darkness, haunting our dreams. That was the best time of my life.

I came to Kenya to study wildlife management with the School of Field Studies, having been thrilled that there was a study abroad opportunity that so perfectly matched my life goals. Like many, I wanted to experience everything: see an elephant, dance with the Maasai, ride an ostrich. I now know my naïveté. Those ideas were not Kenya, those were themes at an amusement park. I did see an elephant, I did dance with the Maasai, and I did ride an ostrich, but those are not the memories I cherish from my semester in this dusty, Third World country.

The program was committed to wildlife conservation issues, but it brought another concern to light which I had not previously given much thought: the people who live side by side with the animals. I came to this program as a scientist and environmental enthusiast. I thought that humans had abused the wonders of nature and therefore must make amends to protect what little natural wonder was left, even if it was inconvenient. I didn’t yet realize the ignorance of this thought.

This place was not only the home of the wild animals, but also of the Maasai people who were trying to eke out a living in their traditional lifestyles. Some continued the tradition of pastoralism, and herds of cattle roamed far and wide. Others had turned to the more modern practice of farming, though it was difficult in the arid environment.

As part of the curriculum, we went out into the local community to interview the Maasai about conservation issues and the challenges stemming from their close proximity to national parks like Amboseli, one of the most popular national parks because of its large concentration of some of Kenya’s finest wildlife. Even though their lives were being threatened by wildlife, the Maasai still held their ancestral respect for nature and the animals’ inherent right to the land as well.
Many farmers had built straw shanties at the edge of their fields in which they slept every night, often at their own peril, so that they could scare off elephants and buffalo that might come in the night. They had nothing but acacia fences for defense, not even fuel for fire. Though the two-inch thick, nail-like acacia thorns did a number on my feet, they were no match for the tough hooves of the animals who lived nearby. I heard many accounts of pastoralists who heard lions and leopards come in the night and drag away their most prized steers.

Last year six people were killed while defending against elephants in Kimana, the small town near our campus. We, too, had our own close encounters with elephants when they decided the grass on the inside of our fence looked tastier than that on the outside. Let me tell you, that cedar fencepost snapped like a twig; it was a six-foot toothpick as far as the elephant was concerned.

Modernization in Kenya is forcing people and animals into closer proximity, causing increasing problems. In my short time there, I experienced the thin line between human space and wildlife. Is it fair that a tourist from halfway across the world can enjoy the view of an elephant at the expense of an African farmer who cannot defend himself or his crops from the elephant the tourist wants to protect? It is difficult to defend the conservation rights of lions to a woman whose husband has just been killed by one. The issue becomes more complicated because tourism in these national parks is a major source of income for the country. There is a very delicate balance between the wildly divergent needs of Kenya: the economic needs of ecotourism, the traditional needs of pastoralists and the natural needs of the wildlife. I realize that wildlife conservation must be managed in conjunction with both the wildlife itself and the needs of the people it affects. My knowledge of these complex issues and the plight of the people and wildlife now drive my passion in life.

Upon leaving we were briefed on "re-entry" back into American culture, reverse culture shock. Though I prepared myself to be dazed by the loud noises of traffic and the bright lights of civilization after the calm soothing savannah of Kenya, those were the easy parts of readjustment. It was what I left behind that made the transition difficult. Back home I share the name of one of my housemates, and to tell us apart I have been affectionately dubbed “Africa Jess.” But I realize that is a misnomer. Africa Jess is still in Kenya, still searching for animal tracks outside our camp, still buying sugar cane from the market and chatting with the locals, still falling asleep at night listening to a pack of hyenas whooping with excitement as they close in on a herd of zebra. But I don’t find my incomplete self in America a burden or handicap in any way. It has become a driving force. I have seen the needs of the environment and the people and I want, with all of my heart, to give back to the country that has taught me so much. I was at home in Kenya; I will go home again.

Jessica Heinz is a senior Biology major from Pittsboro, N.C. She received a scholarship from the School for Field Studies to study in Kenya. Jessica can be contacted at jheinz@email.unc.edu.

Designed by Leah Edwards
Krakow

By Elizabeth Komar

I made a date with the city the last weekend I was in Poland. After almost four wonderful months, Krakow and I needed a day to ourselves, apart from the flurry of dorm checkouts and goodbyes to friends.

I passed on the end-of-the-year parties that ran into early Sunday morning so I could rise early enough to finally meet the fog that settled so enticingly in the park across the street every morning. I didn’t quite make the sunrise, but the park, sprawling and charmingly ungroomed, was still covered in frost upon my arrival. I paused to chat with Copernicus’s bust along the path. He and I were old friends even before my arrival. Growing up with an ambiguous Polish heritage, I always made note of those seemingly few significant Polish figures in history, though now—after a semester among Poles unashamedly proud of their nation—I can name quite a few more. I was dreading my flight home, and Copernicus, another student of Jagiellonian University, in his granite contemplation, seemed to understand.

Ben, Center for European Studies’ always-witty British staff member, warned us during orientation that Krakow was a trap; after entering, it was impossible to leave. At the time, struggling to learn our first words of Polish through the haze of jet lag, we all nodded even though we didn’t really understand it. Now I do.

For what I crowned anti-Thanksgiving, I declared to my friends Sam and Monika that I had to try absinthe at our favorite smoky, candlelit kawiarnia, Alchemia. Clustered around a tiny table in the café, we met two American medical students and introduced ourselves. They asked Sam when we were heading back home, and he explained that he and I only had a couple of weeks left, and that Monika had another semester. “But she,” he added pointing to me, “she’ll be back.”

And he was right. The CES program itself was wonderful—a great way to explore Europe and learn about the European Union and Poland. Nevertheless, you should come for Krakow and stay for Krakow.

I don’t know what did me in: the fairytale beauty of Wawel Castle; the timeless, crowded bustle of the markets full of fresh kielbasy, cheese and eggs from the countryside; the morning walk to the little bakery for bread; the bohemian sensuality of cafes that line the winding, narrow streets of Kazimierz; or perhaps just the rhythm of life—that characteristically European deliberateness of savoring every hour.

During the first week I spent back in the U.S., in an act of supreme weakness, I pulled up the Krakow webcams to watch the sun rise on the city at 1:30 a.m. I stared for hours at the monks in their long brown robes walking to mass, the students hurrying to class and the little babcie, grandmothers, on their way to the bakery. I wanted to catch the next flight back.

I’m readjusting now, though it’s still odd to feel bricks rather than cobblestones underneath my feet. And when I close my eyes at night, I still see the streets of Krakow.

That Sunday I wandered down through the medieval Old Town, had a pot of tea at Alchemia, walked the deserted streets of Podgorze and finally strolled up the Wisła River, past Wawel, on my way home. The church bells suddenly broke out from all directions, ringing the call for mass across the river. I paused under the bridge to savor the collision of dozens of different chimes, all seemingly colliding in the air over the sparkling Wisła. I understood then why I’d fallen in love. It was this combination of faith, the children running around, the towering pride of Wawel and the eternal joy of life along this river.

Just then, I knew I’d be back. I’ve stopped mourning because eventually I will return. Whether it will be next year or years from now with my children, Krakow will always be waiting.

And so will I. 

Elizabeth Komar is a junior History and Peace, War and Defense major from Apex, N.C. She received the ACC Travel Stipend to study abroad at the Center for European Studies in Poland. Elizabeth can be contacted at kelizabe@email.unc.edu.

Designed by Lindsey Paytes
I am a singer. It makes sense, then, that the first thing I noticed when I arrived in Mexico was the music. It was everywhere. Whether walking, washing, studying or going out, I always heard music in some form or another. Before leaving to study abroad, I had no idea what Mexican music would be like. What did I, an American without any experience with Mexico, expect to hear? Mariachis? Reggaeton? Salsa? Mexican music does have components of each of these things, but it has a much fuller identity that I wasn’t aware of until I arrived.

I studied at the Universidad de las Américas Puebla (UDLAP), an elite private university in the middle of Cholula, a middle-class town. At the UDLAP I took a class called “The Music in Mexico” that focused on the history of Mexican classical music. We started, as survey classes in music history often start, with ancient music — in this case Mayan and Aztec. As we studied the instrumental and religious roots of the music, I learned that the idea of music as art is uniquely European— the traditional Mexican, Mayan and Aztec societies utilized music as a core part of social organization and religion. With the arrival of colonialism, indigenous and European cultures mixed, creating the musical identity Mexican culture has today.

I heard examples of this mixture all the time in Mexico. It was in the restaurant Café Enamorada, in the Independence Day parade, from the old man who sang songs from Veracruz with his harp, in the salsa club Mojito, from the trio in the town square, on TV with my host family (Mexican soap operas and the Mexican version of American Idol) and in Plaza Garibaldi in Mexico City, the home of so many mariachi and norteña bands. It was amazing to me that there could be music everywhere; I walked around half dancing most of the time. I fell in love with the music that I found around town squares, plazas and in hidden side streets. I learned much of what I know about Mexican culture from these street musicians. The rhythms of their drums, the hollow sounds of their flutes, the strums of their guitars and their singing voices will stay in my memory forever.

When my boyfriend came to visit me during my last week in Mexico, we went to Xochimilco, the Venice of Mexico City. In Xochimilco, a sort of gondolier took us through the canals built on former agricultural channels. We bought food from cooks floating along in boats, and riding through the canals we heard the songs of a mariachi band, a banda, a marimba and a trio. It was in this way that I said goodbye exactly as I should have to the country that had taught me so much — with the rich smell of mixiote, mole, rice and tortillas in the air, and music everywhere.
Soy cantante. Por eso, cuando llegué a México, la primera cosa que observé fue la omnipresencia de la música. Caminando, lavando, estudiando, paseando—no importa lo que estuviera haciendo, siempre escuchaba la música de una forma u otra. Antes de mi llegada a México, no conocía la música mexicana. Cuando nosotros los estadounidenses, que no tenemos mucha experiencia con nuestro país vecino, pensamos en la música mexicana, ¿Qué viene a nuestra imaginación? ¿Unos mariachis con guitarras y sombreros en disfraces jaliscienses? ¿Acaso reggaetón? ¿La salsa, aunque viene de otra región completamente diferente, aunque la tengas que buscar con esmero si la quieres bailar? La música mexicana quizás tiene un poco de cada uno de los aspectos mencionados, pero tiene una identidad más amplia que no conocía antes de mi viaje a este país.

Durante mi estadía en México estudié en la Universidad de las Américas Puebla, una universidad privada y elitista ubicada en Cholula, un pueblo de la clase media. Tomé un curso titulado ‘La Música en México’, este curso desarrollaba la historia de la música clásica mexicana. Comenzamos, como es usual en cursos de este tipo, con un estudio de la música prehispánica (específicamente, Maya y Azteca). Estudiamos sus raíces instrumentales y religiosas – aprendí que el concepto de un solista utilizando la música para su propia gloria y honor es de origen europeo. La esencia de la música mexicana tiene sus raíces en las culturas Maya y Azteca y el concepto tan arraigado en esas culturas de la unidad entre la música, la danza y las creencias espirituales, que le dan un tinte religioso. Con la llegada de los europeos, durante la época de la Colonia, se mezclaron las culturas indígena y europea. La interacción de estas dos culturas dio origen a la identidad musical que tiene hoy la cultura mexicana.

Durante mi estadía en este país, pude apreciar muchas veces ejemplos de esta mezcla cultural: en el restaurante Café Enamorado, en el desfile patriótico del día de la Independencia, el viejito que al caminar tocaba en su gran harpa acordes de canciones veracruzanas, en el club de salsa Mojito, el trío en los Portales del Zócalo, la televisión que veía con mi familia mexicana (las telenovelas y la Academia—el American Idol mexicano) y en la plaza Garibaldi del Distrito Federal, el lugar de tantos mariachis y bandas norteñas. Escuchando música en todas partes y por todas partes, no recuerdo ni un solo día durante mi estadía en este país que no haya sentido unas inmensas ganas de bailar o cantar. Esta música que se encuentra en los zócalos, las plazas y las calles es un tiento que no me abandonaría.

De estos músicos de la calle aprendí mucho de lo que conocí de la cultura mexicana. Los ritmos de sus tambores, el sonido de sus flautas, los rasgueos de sus guitarras y la melodía de sus voces se quedarían conmigo para siempre.

Mi novio fue de visita durante mi última semana en México. Aprovechamos y fuimos a Xochimilco, la Venecia del Distrito Federal. En Xochimilco un trajinero nos llevó por los canales, construidos sobre chinampas viejas. Compramos comida de unos cocineros, también en barquitos, y navegamos al son de mariachis, una banda, una marimba y un trío de cantantes. Así me despedí del país que me había enseñado tanto, exactamente como debía hacerlo – con el olor bien rico de mixiote, mole, arroz, tortillas y la música mexicana resonando por todos lados. 

Meredith Leigh McCoy is a junior Music and Anthropology major from Chapel Hill, N.C. She received the Joseph E. Pogue and National Merit scholarships to study abroad in Mexico. Meredith can be contacted at mlmccoy@email.unc.edu

Designed by Emily Yount

MEXICO
Population: 111.2 million
Capital: Mexico City
Language: Spanish
Accra is a city of contradiction. In this city, there are three beaches side by side. The first is the tourist beach filled with shops, restaurants and very persistent Ghanaian merchants selling DVDs or necklaces to their foreign customers. The other beach is the Ghanaian beach: no shops, no merchants, just lively soccer games and a massive landfill. The roads all over Accra are lined with open sewers that all lead to the “other beach,” opening first to an enormous landfill and then into the beach itself. Beside the landfill is the largest slum in the city. A wall separates this slum from the third beach—the president’s private residence, a former Danish slave castle turned Ghanaian White House. On the opposite side of the city is the National Parliament building. Looming behind Parliament is the unfinished office building the members started in the 1960s and haven’t touched since. Beside that is Independence Square, a monument of Ghanaian independence and freedom virtually closed to the general public every day of the year except Independence Day.

Here is where I found the only beggar I saw during my entire summer in the country. She was no more than seven years old, dressed in tattered clothes with dirt smeared on her face. She didn’t look Ghanaian though; she must have been from the Liberian refugee camp. I was in the back seat of a taxi cab driving around Accra when she came up to the window. As soon as she approached and gave us the universal gesture for money, the driver yelled at her in infuriated Twi to leave. My roommate and I gave her some money, and the driver’s fury turned to us. “You shouldn’t give them money,” he said. “If you want to eat, you have to work.” “Even the kids?” we asked. “Of course,” he said, “especially the kids.”

I find this mindset too often in my travels. Despite the altruistic individuals and organizations dedicated to helping others, I fear they are outnumbered by those possessing the “no work, no food” mentality. I spent most of my afternoons in Ghana working with a shelter for orphans and widows in a town called Ho. The
director, a sixty-five year old disabled widow and the most amazing woman I have ever met, told me that their compound doesn’t actually belong to them, but to a landlord. Since she could no longer make the rent payments, it was only a matter of time before they would be kicked out. In the meantime, a gracious donor had given them a plot of land where they could build their own home for the kids. But between concrete, rent payments and insubstantial income, money was tight all around. I got an e-mail a few weeks ago from the director that said they had finally been kicked off the land.

I always wondered why the government refused to lend a hand. My friend Agama, a native teacher at the elementary school where I worked in the mornings, explained it to me with an example. He said that by law, every school must teach their students how to use a computer. Our school didn’t have a computer. Even if it did, there wouldn’t be any place to plug it in since it didn’t have electricity either. Agama turned to me with a grin and asked if I wanted to see their computer mice. He told each student to go outside and find a rock the size of their fist. These, he explained, would be their computer mice. He looked at me again with a grin and asked if I wanted to see their computer. He turned to the blackboard—a piece of plywood painted black nailed to the stone wall—and drew a monitor and keyboard on it.

They dealt with these conditions every day they taught. This reminded me of the staunch contradictions in Accra and illustrated to me how they can persist throughout the country in homes, schools and orphanages. Here again I found the “no work, no food” mentality. School-children can’t work and orphans don’t have jobs, so they don’t get help.

How do we get rid of this mindset? I still grapple with this question. Suppose we lend a hand and give aid? Do we also set out to change hearts and minds? Do we give unconditional aid? Or do we say “no work, no aid”? If we choose this option, are we not perpetuating the very same mindset we are trying to combat?

I still don’t have an answer to these questions, but I’ve realized two things. First of all, we need to think more about children’s rights. Their survival depends on the survival of their adult counterparts. Therefore, we need to have a special interest in the kids. Children deserve the right to a childhood. They deserve to be taken care of, to get an education without having to work, to live worry-free as we did—a childhood that we so often take for granted.

And second, the only way to really understand the intricacies of these issues is to travel and experience them firsthand. I hope through these experiences that I have begun to understand, but I recognize how truly limited my understanding is. I hope our collective experiences in traveling and contemplating will work together to start finding some solutions.

Haseeb Fatmi is a senior International Studies and Political Science major from Raleigh, N.C. He received the UNC Summer Undergraduate Research Fellowship (SURF) to travel to Ghana. Haseeb can be contacted at haseeb@email.unc.edu.

Designed by Anna Carrington
I had made one of the most important decisions of my life: the decision to study abroad.

There were so many countries to choose from: Russia, England, Spain, Italy and more. All of them were mysterious and exotic. As I flipped through the study abroad program brochures, I tried to imagine myself in these places—but I could never shake the feeling that I was not courageous enough to live overseas. After all, I was comfortable in Chapel Hill. I had a boyfriend, a good job, classes I wanted to take and lots of close friends whom I knew I’d miss. I was at a crossroads. To paraphrase The Clash, should I stay or should I go?

During my sophomore year at UNC, I spent months contemplating this choice, and when the time came for me to make a decision, I decided to go. Months later, with some trepidation, I boarded a flight from Raleigh to Florence, Italy, with plans to study there during the fall semester of my junior year. There were so many things on my mind at the time, like whether I’d chosen the right program or selected the best place to live—but in the end, none of that mattered. What mattered was that I had made one of the most important decisions of my life: the decision to study abroad.

My semester in Florence was exhilarating and empty, empowering and deflating. I doubt there’s anyone who lives abroad, even for a short period of time, who doesn’t suffer from loneliness every now and then—but I don’t regret a single day living away from home. In fact, my time in Florence helped me discover more about myself, especially my strengths and weaknesses. It taught me to step out of my old routine and into exciting new adventures, which is a skill I value to this day.

The summer after my experience in Florence, I returned to Europe to spend three months working for the European Parliament. A professor from Lorenzo de Medici, the school where I had studied in Italy, had suggested I come to Brussels to work for an acquaintance of his who was an Italian member of the European Parliament. Once again, I struggled over the decision to leave the comfort of home, this time for an unstructured internship in Belgium. No pay, no one to meet me at the airport, no pre-arranged housing. What crazy person would sign up for this? Well…me. I was still feeling confident and...
self-reliant from my experience in Italy, and I jumped at the chance to do it again.

Clearly, I was hooked on the thrill of living and traveling abroad. After graduating from UNC, I made choices that I hoped would present more opportunities for travel, and I pursued additional education that led me to more professional international work. I returned to Italy to study and teach English, worked in Washington, D.C. at an international non-profit and ultimately attended law school. Throughout these years I never lost sight of my goal of living abroad again.

In late Sept. 2007, I was hired to work as Court Counsel for the Supreme Court of Palau. The position entailed acting as a legal advisor for the justices and staff of the Court on legal cases and court procedure. Luckily, the job duties were familiar since I’d worked for federal judges in the United States. What was unfamiliar, though, was the work itself—Palau is a young nation and still developing its judicial and legal systems. Despite all my previous experience, I was a fish out of water.

Most of my friends and family had never even heard of Palau—in fact, only avid scuba divers or “Survivor” fans (the show was filmed there for seasons 10 and 16) had a vague understanding of where I was headed. I can’t say I blame them, since maps rarely acknowledge the tiny cluster of islands located in the western part of the Pacific Ocean. Accepting the position caused more than a few eyebrows to be raised by friends and colleagues who had followed more “traditional” career paths.

My new home may have been an island paradise, but it did not take long to realize my work was cut out for me. Since Palau (an independent nation since 1994) does not have an extensive history of legal precedent or case law, many concepts taken for granted in the U.S. have yet to be fully established there. That means that things like the right to a speedy trial or the right to understand charges brought against you in a criminal matter are still being developed.

Since many of the issues raised in Palauan courts are ones that have never been confronted before, almost every case is precedent-setting. I found myself relying on guidelines established in international law and case law from the U.S. tempered by local Palauan tradition and custom when preparing my analysis and advice for the justices. Maybe that’s why my stepfather joked that I was the James Madison of Palau. Regardless, I look back on that experience as the chance of a lifetime. If I had listened to my inner voice—the one that insists I always take the safe route—I never would have had that amazing Palauan experience.

Years after graduating from UNC, I returned to Florence, this time with my husband in tow. We strolled down my favorite streets, lingered at my favorite cafes, and even visited the apartment I had once called home. Climbing the stairs to the roof of the apartment building, I assured my husband that the view would be worth it. I remember spending many evenings on that roof, taking in the intense life experience I was having at that time. Even in 2004, looking out over the rooftops of Florence, I realized the extent of the life-altering choice I made almost ten years ago: the choice to study abroad.

That experience has played an overwhelmingly significant role in helping me plot my way to a career that combines international work and travel. Now, no matter where I go, I always take a piece of Chapel Hill with me. Even in Palau, when headed out on a boat into the mythical Rock Islands, I often thought to myself that for me, the beautiful water of the Philippine Sea is not just blue—it’s Carolina blue.

Carmen Forrest Corbin graduated from UNC-Chapel Hill in 1998 with a major in International Studies. She is currently working as an Assistant United States Attorney in Tucson, Arizona. She continues to consider what her next excursion abroad will be. Carmen can be contacted at carmen_corbin@yahoo.com.

Designed by Gwen Saunders
Twelve doors—a literal representation of the social barriers that women continue to face in Dresden, Germany.

While performing ethnomusicological fieldwork in Dresden this past summer, studying how Muslim and Lutheran women use music in their negotiation between faith and society, I planned an hourly schedule every day, and when figuring in my organ-practice time, I was always reminded of the 12 doors.

Before I, or anyone else for that matter, gained access to the St. Peter’s Church in Dresden, I needed to go to the Pfarramt (the pastor’s house), pass through a heavy iron gate and obtain a key. This required correct timing to ensure that I did not interrupt any meals, come too early or arrive too late. Once there, the pastor, his wife or one of his seven children handed me a set of ancient gothic keys. This is when “Operation Organ” began. I crossed the busy road, avoiding trams coming both ways, and locked up my bike. Then I began unlocking—first the back iron gate, then the exterior kitchen door, then the accompanying interior door. Ten minutes later, barring any particularly sticky locks, I had unlocked 12 doors and was free in the organ chamber.

During my nine weeks and five days in Dresden, organ practice was only a small part of my fieldwork research of the role music played in women’s lives. I also attended music rehearsals, youth meetings, worship services and congregation events at the Lutheran church and became a regular attendee at the weekly meetings of the Muslim Women’s Club, a group for German-ethnic women who had converted to Islam. Throughout the summer, I frequently pondered the question, “What is it to be free?” As a college student conducting independent research, some may assume that I was free to do whatever I wanted, to act however I may have chosen, to unlock any door. By living and interacting in the community, however, I felt society giving me my roles. In the Lutheran realm, I adopted a docile composure, as reverence seemed to apply to all aspects of living. Within the Muslim community, I felt exploratory; the women welcomed questions.

Overall, I gained two new outlooks which were diametrically opposed yet oddly parallel. Within the Lutheran church, congregants hardly ever challenged tradition. Perceiving it as a male domain, women rarely visit the organ chamber. The Muslim community faced different obstacles. As the women I worked with were German-ethnic converts, their challenge was living out their newfound religion while not being locked out by society. Societal policies did not ease either the Lutheran or the Muslim women’s plight. Standardized cultural programs and sexual education policies conflicted with the women’s moral systems, prompting the question “How many doors should one unlock?” I am still freely searching for the answer to that question.

Emily Joy Rothchild is a senior Music major from Cedar Rapids, Iowa. She received the Class of 1938 Fellowship, Summer Undergraduate Research Fellowship (SURF), Center for Global Initiatives Undergraduate Research Award, James Henley Thompson and Evelyn Barnett Thompson Undergraduate Research Award and the honors thesis research award to travel to Germany. Emily Joy can be contacted at emilyjoy@email.unc.edu.

Designed by Emily Yount
I am no longer Sean McKeithan. I am Ngawang Jamtsho. I have been renamed.

My new name means “huge, never-ending lake, extending to eternity.” In my previous life I was a reindeer, and there is a chance that in my next life I will be a bird. That is, in my opinion, a rather unappealing transition to make. On the other hand, if I buy a statue of a fearsome protector god and exhibit unbridled kindness throughout the rest of my current stint on Earth, I should come back as a human, and maybe even a rich one.

It is my penultimate day in Thimpu, Bhutan’s capital. I am sitting on the floor in a small, dark room in Bhutan’s only sanctioned school of astrology, which is housed in a very holy monastery. I am listening to Dzongkha coming from the mouth of a small monk in crimson robes while Dhendup, my guide, translates. Dzongkha is Bhutan’s official national language, and I do not speak any of it. I am positive that the linguistic nuances of the monk’s predictions are, like so many things, lost in Dhendup’s translation. But he is my only key to this new wealth of information that I am now astonished I have been able to live without these twenty one years, so I take what I can get.
Today has been a big day.

As I leave the monastery with a new name and a head full of reflection, I cannot help but be struck by the strange beauty of this place and these people. On May 17, 2008, I set off with funding from the Phillips Ambassadors program to study the effects of globalization on the cultural identity of the Kingdom of Bhutan. I am one of four students completing independent research projects around Asia as a part of the “Where in the World Are We?” program. At this point, 24 days later on this sunny Thimpu day, I am struck by the realization that my trip is coming to a close. Over the last three weeks, I have travelled from Bhutan’s industrialized west to its very rural east and back again. I haven’t spent more than a few nights in the same bed, and I have never left the company of Dhendup and Buddha, my driver. The journey has been rough and rewarding, but Bhutan has started to feel a little like home.

“Where in the World Are We?” (WIT-WAW for short) is an experiential learning program through UNC study abroad that gives students the chance to run around the world researching globalization. I chose Bhutan as my site because, to me, there is no more intriguing place to ground an exploration of globalization. Bhutan is a stretch of world on which the forces of tradition and modernization have recently come together in confusing ways.

To date the country has no stoplights. Television and internet were illegal as recently as 1999. Bhutan’s transition to both a democracy and a tourist destination has been rapid — a result of the fourth king’s decision to simultaneously abdicate his throne and relax the country’s rigidly isolationist foreign policy. I wanted to know what change the outside world was imposing on the country. Almost all media treatment of Bhutan is as a mythic mountain paradise, the “Last Shangri La,” on the verge of cultural pollution from the encroaching West. Writers and intellectuals ask gravely if television is changing the country for the worse. I wanted to learn for myself whether their concerns are legitimate, or if they are simply misdirected by Western nostalgia for a quaint, simpler and mysterious way of life.

In my explorations, I find a bit of both. I find myself witnessing a country on the move, changing and evolving with the times, but maintaining what I have come to call its “essential Bhutaneseness.” The pace at which we travel heightens the intensity of the experience and allows me to meet so many kind people from so many diverse backgrounds, all so eager to praise their country, their King and his deft handling of these new and changing times. There is no doubt that Bhutan is changing, but I cannot be sure this change is unequivocally bad. I am no development scholar, but I cannot help but look around on my travels and think to myself that a life spent waking up each morning to stand bent over in a paddy, collecting rice by hand until there is no more sunlight, is a hard life. It is a dignified life, no doubt, but a hard life.

Many of the Bhutanese I speak to want change and welcome it readily. The change they observe is not the emergence of Chris Brown on the airwaves; this is just noise. Instead it is the emergence of power lines, hospitals and sanitation. When people take me into their homes and feed me, they ask questions of life in my country and give complex and nuanced accounts of what is happening in theirs.

I am consistently humbled and constantly contemplative. I question the merits of life in the American capitalist system for which so many Bhutanese seem to clamor, and compare my situation at home to that of the people I meet here. I no longer see a museum-worthy culture, tucked neatly and politely into the folds of the Himalaya. I start to see past the epic portrayal of the country’s fantastical past and precarious present, and start instead to see its people. These are people who want their children to be educated, people who
drink beers with their friends and people who delight in their heritage while adapting to the future. I start to see people like me, and I see myself, once again, walking back to the car that has been my most consistent home for the last three weeks. I see myself leaving Thimpu tomorrow, climbing a mountain with my reluctant guide to watch the rain fall over the Paro valley below, and then I see myself flying out of this place and these mountains with new friends and an even muddier view of the world than I had before I arrived.

And finally I see myself settling back into Chapel Hill, sitting down on my front porch, trying to put together the pieces of this experience because I am no longer Sean McKeithan. I am Ngawang Jamtsho, and I am a giant and never-ending lake that extends from this porch to the small, dark room where I learned that I was once a reindeer.

Sean McKeithan is a senior Communication Studies and Journalism major from Duck, N.C. He received the Phillips Ambassadors Scholarship to study abroad through the “Where in the World Are We?” program in Bhutan. Sean can be contacted at smckeith@gmail.com.

Designed by Lindsey Paytes

Right: A young boy and his home at the base of Ugyen Choling palace.

Below: A group of migrant workers from the nearby province of Lhuentse wait to be contracted for work.
The Magical Fortress of Tears and Laughter

By Jasmina Nogo

It’s the city that never forgets because its stories are all contained in the stone walls that have surrounded and protected it for centuries. It’s also a city that doesn’t sleep in the summer but becomes so desolate in the winter it’s as though life and everything that comes with it go into hibernation. In the winter one may think it’s inhabited only by ghosts — ghosts of years past, ghosts of tourists and ghosts of summers yet to come. Dubrovnik truly is a summer town.

I visited Dubrovnik for the first time as a child in the late 1980s. My parents took day trips to this small Adriatic coastal town in Croatia during our summer vacations at the beach. I chased pigeons in the Old Town’s main square and drank freshly squeezed orange juice in the town’s oldest café. As a child I had no idea what this place represented, no clue that its rich and long history still stood etched in the ancient stone walls that surround the Old Town to this day.

During the Middle Ages Dubrovnik, then called the Republic of Ragusa, was a powerful maritime force with a remarkable level of technological and intellectual development. In the 15th and 16th centuries it stood as a rival to Venice, and its independent statehood was strongly fortified by the sound walls that still remain.

I walked along these very walls on my visit to Dubrovnik this summer, and it was as though the ancient story of this fortified city oozed out of every crevice. The wall walk runs along the perimeter of the Old Town, and the view from above is indescribable. The crystal-line blue water crashes against the rocks hundreds of feet below, and the horizon seems infinite when you stare off into the distance. Sheltered by the walls is a perfectly glistening town. The stone is visibly worn by the millions of feet that walk on it every day. The burnt orange roofs of the old houses create a parade of colors known only to Dubrovnik. Every once in a while along the wall walk, you get a peek into a local’s private home and see their laundry hung to dry outside their window, flower pots on their balconies and little windows looking into their quaint rooftop rooms. Like in a fairy tale, an old woman sits knitting in a rocking chair beneath her orange tree atop her house, while little blonde, sun-kissed children play with marbles by her side. Hundreds of differ-

As the noise fades into the blackness of the night, the only word that comes to my mind is magic.

A view of the rocky Dubrovnik shoreline from the city’s walls, along which thousands of tourists walk every day.
As night falls, the city is illuminated while tourists mill.

ent languages are heard along the walls, and in all of these languages Dubrovnik’s history is recounted. The universal sound of laughter fills the air and evaporates into the everlasting blue sky.

But the story of Dubrovnik isn’t just one of laughter and maritime notoriety. In the early 1990s, Croatia’s ancient jewel town was bombed by Serbian artillery forces; many homes were destroyed, many lives taken and many tears shed. The strong walls, the conch shell of the city, proved indestructible even in the face of modern-day grenades and shells, but the precious and tender insides, the homes and the gardens, were burned to the ground. On Oct. 1, 1991, Serbia placed the ancient Republic of Ragusa under a siege of bombardment that lasted for seven months. The siege occurred during the early stages of the Yugoslav War, which destroyed the country as it once was. Serbian aggression against Croatia attempted to destroy what was historically indestructible and insurmountable. The city’s silent walls still stand today, but beneath their somber façade lie the stories of the ghosts that died during the siege.

It’s incredible to think that this city was once so deathly quiet that a cat could be heard crossing the Stradun, the Old Town’s main walkway. Today, during the summer months, the city is buzzing with people of all countries and of all colors speaking every language imaginable. After my walk around the walls, I descend with the setting sun into the cradled town where the heat from the day’s sun radiates off of the hot walls. The smell of grilled fish slinks around every corner and down every alley, inviting tourists to sit down for a true Mediterranean feast of octopus salad, grilled squid and sweet local red wine. The square where I finally settle to appease my insatiable hunger is lit as though by candlelight, and in the center is an old fountain around which a musician gently strums his guitar, singing Dalmatian love songs. All around me are outdoor tables at which sunburnt travelers rest their forever-walking legs and enjoy their last meal of the day with the crescent moon and every possible constellation above them illuminating the night sky.

After an all-satisfying seafood meal I take a night walk through the town’s small marina and along its dimly lit Riviera, listening to the music of the town slowly fade as I walk farther and farther away from it. The sounds of silverware clanking, wine glasses clinking, guitars strumming, kids laughing, voices chatting, laughter ringing and waves crashing give the Old Town a soundtrack of a perfect seaside orchestra, breathing life inside the silent walls. History continues to write itself as each summer comes and goes, and as each traveler snaps the shutter of a camera. As the noise fades into the blackness of the night, the only word that comes to my mind is magic.

Jasmina Nogo is a senior Journalism major from Durham, N.C. She received the Suzanne Bolch Creative Writing Award to travel to Croatia. Jasmina can be contacted at nogo@email.unc.edu.

The orange rooftops of Dubrovnik.

Designed by Anna Carrington
mullets mullets everywhere
and not a drop to drink
that wouldn’t stop your brain from thinking
of sleeping by the sink

a giant dorm room outside my window
in fact, it is the town
broken bottles and instant noodles
strewn upon the ground

in a place a day ahead
but stuck in 1984
I bet Orwell didn’t think
you’d wear those shorts outdoors

strange, of course, upon reflection
I don’t think I want to leave
the ol’ beauty here in imperfection
Dunedin made me love these things
but the bulk is just an inside joke
to those who haven’t come
like their toilets with two strengths of flush
it depends on what you've done

but I’ll tell you, you would roll your eyes
to another place so beautiful it’s annoying
that nobody you tell will understand
and that your camera is destroying

I couldn’t say what to expect
if your journey here begins
though every wrong turn is a right one
and you won’t leave as you went in

yet I do know that like the kiwi bird lays an egg
almost twice its size
any time you spend in Aotorea
will leave you pleasantly surprised

Charles Sheppa is from Chapel Hill, N.C. He graduated from Appalachian State University in Fall 2008 with a B.A. in Design. He studied abroad through the UNC Otago Program in New Zealand. He can be contacted at csheppa@gmail.com.

Designed by Lindsey Stutzman
August 1 (12 hours before departure to Dar es Salaam, Tanzania)

I think my journey to mental and physical fatigue began sometime around last Thursday. Thinking back on this past week, the only things that I can remember are recurring trips to Wal-Mart, printing/reading health forms and government documentation, writing down multiple lists and crossing off words on those lists. A part of me feels like I should be nervous about spending five months in a foreign country that is 6,000 miles from home, but I’m not. At least, not yet.

Two hours later: So remember how I said that I wasn’t nervous? Well, that is no longer the case. I have suddenly become more nauseous and emotional than I had hoped.

August 18 (Two and a half weeks)

It’s hard to reconcile my level of privilege with the surrounding community. More specifically, I’m having trouble figuring out to what extent I should exercise the status that has been given to me (American, financially stable, healthy, etc.) when many around me have so little. I think if I had come to Dar es Salaam and there weren’t a convenience store down the road, running water or toilets, I would have accepted the situation without grumble or hesitation. Now that I have been given the ability to choose what level of comfort I am to live in, things become much more difficult.

September 1 (One month)

I’ve officially been here for one month! Aside from the four hours of Swahili lessons in the morning, I’ve spent most of my days going to City Centre, visiting the market at Mwenge, reading a book or volunteering. I have to admit that until a few days ago I was beginning to feel homesick and frustrated. I missed the familiar and the people I love, and I felt like I wasn’t accomplishing any of the goals I set for myself before I arrived here. The main goal that I had set was to understand and become involved with the culture here in Tanzania. Up until recently, however, I’ve felt like a detached outsider looking in on Tanzania through a glass window. Fortunately, this week I was able to volunteer at an orphanage and to help teach woodcarvers the English language. I had a great time at the orphanage; in fact, I’m pretty sure I got more from the experience than the children. Despite the sketchy walk down a dark alley at saa 2 kamili usiku (8 p.m. at night… don’t worry, mom, we walk in groups) and the occasional lack of power, the whole experience was very rewarding and enlightening.

On a side note, I’ve never felt more patriotism for my country than I do right now in Tanzania. Here, America is looked at with respect and honor. When you say you are from America, Tanzanians usually light up and some even say, “We like America; America has been good to us.” True, Tanzania also has its qualms with U.S. politics, but, in general, people hold America in high esteem, which makes it a nice place to call my home.

September 30 (Two months)

This week is the first week of classes, which really means that classes won’t actually start for two more weeks. Today, I tried to go to three of my classes, only to find that none of the professors showed up, and in two of my classes, no students showed up either.

It’s strange being a mzungu wa Marekani (white person from America) here. Although university housing accommodations still have not been assigned and many students have nowhere to stay, I’m sitting in my double room with an empty bed beside me. The students are considering going on strike because the government cannot furnish all the
loans that have been promised, and I’m considering spending a couple hundred dollars to travel to Kenya before school really begins. It’s not fair…

October 7 (Two and a quarter months)
In a word, I would describe Tanzanians as happy. They may not always have much money, water or electricity, but they are almost always smiling and jovial. Here, a great deal of importance seems to be placed on caring for one another and enjoying the moment. When one of the other American students commented on this characteristic happiness of Tanzanians, our Tanzanian friend said, “Yes, Tanzanians are happy, but they are dying.” That’s a deeper issue that I’m still trying to understand.

October 23 (Two and three quarter months)
So I’ve officially survived my first two weeks of classes here at the University of Dar es Salaam and here are some things that I have learned: (1) Expect the unexpected. Here, things always change. For example, just this week, three weeks into the semester, a course was canceled. (2) Always carry a handkerchief. I’m not sure what the exact temperature is here… but it is HOT. This means that whenever you walk to your next class, or sit in a non-air-conditioned classroom with more than a hundred other students, you will sweat. (3) Live for the day. Inherently, I am a planner. I like to have my week outlined before it even begins, and I spend a lot of time focusing on the future. However, being here and sometimes wanting to go home makes me stop and realize that I am in Tanzania, and I will be here for another two months. I better appreciate the time I have right now because when all is said and done, it is this time here that I will greatly miss and cherish.

November 17 (Three and a half months)
With only four weeks of class left, being here is a frustrating experience. It seems like nothing is reliable. University began six weeks later than was originally scheduled. When school does start, neither students nor professors attend class for the first two weeks. Now, school has been cancelled indefinitely due to a strike occurring after only three weeks of legitimate classes. The university is working to ensure that teachers continue to teach for us international students. But I don’t want to overlook the fact that one of the best and most educational parts of being here is experiencing Tanzanian culture—seeing how Tanzanians study, learn and interact around campus. Oh well, I am sure there is a blessing somewhere in this that only time will reveal.

December 18 (Four and a half months)
In East Africa there is a strong sense of unity and openness. People embrace themselves and others for who they are. Most people seem to live life in an informal way that acknowledges the independent needs and realities of life, yet relies heavily on an interdependent, communal and connected society. I strongly admire this way of life.

I will forever try to be grateful for all that I have. Everything in life is a gift—friendship, food, opportunity, sanitary sewage systems. But it is a gift that takes time, effort and dedication. I don’t ever want to take that for granted.

Mallory Minter is a senior Public Policy Analysis and International Studies major from Fayetteville, N.C. She received the Michael L. and Matthew L. Boyatt Award to study abroad in Tanzania. Mallory can be contacted at mminter@email.unc.edu.

Designed by Emily Yount
I am a Brazilian Fulbrighter majoring in Speech and Hearing Sciences. I received this scholarship to pursue my doctoral studies at UNC-Chapel Hill after an exhausting and competitive process in my home country. When I realized that my dream of studying abroad would finally become true, I was extremely happy! But when I started to organize my life for the next four years, I got scared. How will it be? What will happen if I fail a course? Will I adapt to the cold? (Yes, I know here is not that cold - but compared with my home city, I’m an ice cream!)

Parts of the last six months of my life were even worse than I could imagine: bank accounts, English, state identification, Social Security number, more English, Blackboard, new address, bus routes, health insurance. Everything seemed to be so complicated! In addition to my three courses, I worked as a research assistant, audited a course and took part of an accent modification workshop. For the new international students with English as a second language, for the sake of your mental health, please don’t do this!

I was lucky because the professors in my department really helped me get through this adaptation time. I not only got a nice sofa, but also received writing tutoring sessions for free. My peers also were important – from rides and nice conversations to dinner invitations. These can sound so silly to some of you, but these important attitudes made me start to ease my fears because there are good people always – everywhere in this amazing world!

I am glad to be a witness of the important changes taking place in the U.S. right now. Barack Obama’s election made me recall the election of the Brazilian president seven years ago. Similar to Obama’s campaign, the motto of the Brazilian campaign was “The hope will overcome the fear.” Mister “Da Silva” – or President Lula as he is best known in Brazil – made millions of people thrilled with his historical victory. Obama did the same, not only with Americans, but also with the entire world, which has great expectations about a future where nations can share peace and friendship.

As a world citizen, I am having the chance to live outside of my box. I am glad to learn from my American colleagues about the difference of accents in different regions of the country (even though it’s almost the same for me!) I was excited for my first Halloween party on Franklin Street. I am happy to have had the chance to go ice skating, even though I fell when I tried to skate without holding my friend’s hand. One of my professors from my summer program in Boston cited a phrase when she saw the pictures of this adventure: “People don’t stop playing because they grow old. People grow old because they stop playing.” I’ve decided to play – that’s why I’m here. I want to improve my English skills and I want to be a good researcher in my field, and UNC is definitely helping me achieve these goals. I want to make more friends, and I am doing this. Isn’t it exciting to know that you have friends from different parts of the world? My experience here has given me this peculiar opportunity to meet people from Japan, Cameroon, Vietnam, Israel, Poland, different parts of...
the U.S. and also different parts of Brazil.

Living in the U.S. has been an opportunity for me to understand and work hard to make true the words of Senator J. William Fulbright:

“Fostering leadership, learning and empathy between cultures was and remains the purpose of the international scholarship program.”

During my trip to Boston and Puerto Rico during the holiday vacation, I could not forget the lyric “Yes, I’m going to Carolina in my mind,” and when I came back, I realized that I felt at home.

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Fernanda Queiros is a first year PhD candidate in Speech and Hearing Sciences from Salvador-Bahia, Brazil. She is studying at UNC as a Fulbright grantee. Fernanda can be contacted at nandaqueiros@gmail.com.

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The street where I grew up in Brazil.

El Yunque Rainforest in Puerto Rico.

My family.

A Fulbright scholars meeting.
A word to my fellow Americans,

By Carly Bennett

I hope all is well in the land of campaign promises and financial crises. We would be worried about a depression over here, but we’ve been siesta-ing. However, despite our great country’s problems, I want to take this opportunity to express my fondness for the American electoral system and America in general. The more people I talk to in Sevilla and the more places I travel, the more I realize how much I don’t know about the way other countries do things like elections, public education, obligatory civil service and the like. It had never occurred to me before that there could be so many substantial differences between countries or that those differences could affect people’s perceptions of themselves and other people so strongly. For example, I’ve realized that the thoughts I immediately have when I meet someone who has mortgaged out their house to travel around the world for a year don’t come from values I was born with, but from values that come as a product of being raised in America by parents with a conservative values system. I’m not trying to say whether I think financial decisions like that are good or bad ideas, but lately I feel more like my previous way of thinking might not be the right way and, moreover, that there might not always be a right or wrong way.

For example, when a man sitting next to me the other day realized I was American and started grilling me on how any government could oppose socialized medicine, I considered - and probably always consider - his point and the possibility that socialized medicine is “righter,” or at least as right, as our capitalist system. Instead of getting really defensive or combative, I explained to him the argument (or the argument as I see it) for the way medicine works in America. He might not have cared, but I definitely felt like I grew a little bit from the conversation, and that’s honestly what is most important to me.

But at the same time, I am trying not to become a complete cultural relativist. I don’t ever want to start justifying things like genocide or dreadlocks, but I think I’ve done a good job of becoming more tolerant without losing what I see as my most important values. Anyway, the point is that hearing so much about our country’s differences and becoming more willing to consider them not as superiorities has made me appreciate many of the social, political and economic doctrines particular to America that I do feel very strongly are “right.” So in other words, if I do happen to marry a beautiful Spaniard in the next month and a half, he will be moving back to America with me because I’m coming home.

So that’s what you get for agreeing to receive my weekly letters – a mouthful of amateur societal analysis when all you really wanted was to hear if I thought Barcelona was pretty. Sorry.

But Barcelona was pretty, and I had an amazing time there last weekend. I met up with my friend Lauren’s high school friend, Kelsi, whom I know from her visits to Carolina. She’s studying in Barcelona.

We spent three days seeing Gaudi buildings, beautiful parks and streets of the city. At night we hung out with her friends and some new friends we made. My hostel was a lot of fun too, even though I stayed in a room with 14 people and got exactly zero hours of quality sleep the whole three nights I was there. Incidentally, the kids I met while staying there played a big part in all of the stuff I said about America at the beginning of this letter. One kid told me that my parents had robbed me of the first half of my life by sending me to college. My responses for him were: first, why would I only live until 40?; secondly, get a hair cut. My tolerance for new ideas has limits. Anyway, the trip was a lot of fun.

This weekend I went to Granada with the whole UNC group. There’s not much to say about it except that the town was awesome. It’s the only place I’ve visited where I think I would have liked studying as much, or almost as much, as Sevilla. We saw the cathedral and the big castle there, which are basically the only two things to see, and it was such a nice change from feeling like I have a million monuments to visit in a single weekend. It was also very nice to spend time with people from my group whom I hadn’t seen much since classes started. After two weeks of A LOT of missing home, it was really perfect. Someone is very clearly watching out for me over here, so in case you were in any way worried about me—don’t be.

Please fill me in on things going on at home and anything else you know I’d be mad about if you didn’t tell me. Seriously, gossip magazines are sub-par over here, and I need some good reading material.

Love to you all,
Carly

Carly Bennett is a senior Journalism major from Atlanta, Georgia. She studied abroad through the UNC in Sevilla program. Carly can be contacted at cben@email.unc.edu.

Designed by Taner Ergin

Background: A Beach in Morocco.
A beach in Lagos, Portugal.
Avenida de la Constitución in Sevilla.

SPAIN
Population: 40.5 million
Capital: Madrid
Language: Spanish
Think you can’t afford an international experience? Think again.
Here are just some of the scholarships available at Carolina. Visit global.unc.edu for more information.

PROGRAM: Burch Fellows Program
DESCRIPTION: For students with self-designed off-campus experiences pursuing a passionate interest.
REQUIREMENTS: Full-time undergrads who have completed at least 1 but not more than 6 semesters at UNC. Must have 2 semesters at UNC after the Burch experience.
STIPEND: up to $6,000
DEADLINE: February 13
MORE INFO: www.burchfellows.unc.edu

PROGRAM: Class of 1938 Summer Study Abroad Fellowships
DESCRIPTION: For students who need support to pursue independent career or personal projects outside the U.S.
REQUIREMENTS: Sophomores, juniors or seniors planning on 5th year of coursework. Must be a U.S. citizen.
STIPEND: $4,000
DEADLINE: February 23
MORE INFO: oiss.unc.edu/services_programs/1938/

PROGRAM: C.V. Starr International Scholarship
DESCRIPTION: For students who have strong financial need to undertake an independent internationally-oriented experience during the summer.
REQUIREMENTS: Undergrad students eligible for Pell Grant with min. 2.8 GPA; grad students who are NOT U.S. citizens or Permanent Residents and have demonstrated financial need.
STIPEND: up to $5,000
DEADLINE: March 20
MORE INFO: cgi.unc.edu/funding/cv-starr-ugrad.html

PROGRAM: Frances L. Phillips Travel Scholarship
DESCRIPTION: For students with individual, self-designed/directed international travel experiences of 2 to 6 months.
REQUIREMENTS: Juniors/seniors in the College of Arts & Sciences with financial need. Must be a U.S. citizen and have attended high school in N.C.
STIPEND: up to $7,000
DEADLINE: October 15
MORE INFO: www.unc.edu/depts/travel/

PROGRAM: Mahatma Gandhi Fellowship
DESCRIPTION: For students to pursue independent summer projects that benefit South Asians.
REQUIREMENTS: Full-time undergrad or grad students.
STIPEND: up to $3,000
DEADLINE: February 27
MORE INFO: mfg.uncsangam.org/

PROGRAM: Study Abroad Office Scholarship Opportunities
DESCRIPTION: For students to participate in study abroad programs approved by the College of Arts & Sciences.
REQUIREMENTS: Full-time undergrad students accepted in a study abroad program. Specific requirements vary.
STIPEND: Varies
DEADLINE: Early Feb. for summer/fall programs; late Sept. for spring programs.
MORE INFO: studyabroad.unc.edu

PROGRAM: Summer Undergraduate Research Fellowships (SURF)
DESCRIPTION: For students to carry out research, mentored scholarship or creative performance projects during the summer.
REQUIREMENTS: Full-time undergrad students in good academic standing. Projects must last at least 9 weeks (min. 20 hrs/wk). Additional support for international projects provided by the Center for Global Initiatives.
STIPEND: min $3,000
DEADLINE: February 26
MORE INFO: www.unc.edu/depts/our/students/fellowship_supp/surf.html

PROGRAM: Phillips Ambassadors Program
DESCRIPTION: For students participating in summer or semester study abroad programs in Asia approved by the College of Arts & Sciences.
REQUIREMENTS: Students accepted to a UNC study abroad program in Asia with min 3.0 GPA. 25% of scholarships awarded to qualified business majors/minors. Students going to China and India receive additional consideration.
STIPEND: up to $7,500
DEADLINE: Early Feb. for summer/fall programs; late Sept. for spring programs.
MORE INFO: studyabroad.unc.edu/phillips

PROGRAM: CGI International Internship Awards
DESCRIPTION: For students who wish to implement a summer internationally-focused internship.
REQUIREMENTS: Sophomore, junior or senior students returning to UNC. Graduate students pursuing a master's degree.
STIPEND: up to $3,000
DEADLINE: March 20
MORE INFO: gi.unc.edu/funding/internship-award-ugrad.html

PROGRAM: Carolina Undergraduate Health Fellowships
DESCRIPTION: For undergraduates to create a self-designed health-related project anywhere in the world.
REQUIREMENTS: Full-time returning undergrad students. Projects must have a health-related focus. Preference for students with financial need.
STIPEND: up to $4,000
DEADLINE: March 20
MORE INFO: gi.unc.edu/funding/health-fellowship.html
TRAVELING HEELS

The Study Abroad Office at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill provides opportunities for students to travel all across the world. The map shows the diverse travel experiences of students. This does not include international programs offered by other departments.

Map colors correspond to the bar chart below.

BY THE NUMBERS
UNC students travel all across the globe. The numbers below reflect participation in the Summer 2008 Fall 2008 and Spring 2009 Study Abroad programs.
Summer and Fall 2008, Spring 2009

1,308 STUDENTS

57 COUNTRIES

SOURCE: Mark Nielsen, Assistant Director for Information Systems in the Study Abroad Office
The Bayon Temple at Angkor Wat in Siem Reap, Cambodia. Photo by Alia Khan.
Vietnam

Prior to my semester abroad in Vietnam, I, like many Americans, only equated Vietnam to one thing: the Vietnam War. The place that stirred up so much controversy, impacted so many lives and still triggers so many emotional stories would now be my home for almost four months courtesy of the Phillips Ambassadors Program.

All throughout my first year of college, I constantly pondered where in the world I could go that would allow me to immerse myself in some unfamiliar place, a place where I could learn from the locals but could still lead my normal life revolved around public service. Although I had been very involved in the APPLES Service Learning program at UNC, I never thought that it would be my outlet to my study abroad experience. APPLES was on the verge of finalizing a new global service learning program in Ho Chi Minh City and it seemed like the perfect opportunity for me. Before I knew it, I was staying up until the wee hours researching airfare, introductory Vietnamese and what, exactly, I was about to get myself into.

Fast forward to late August and I now found myself dazed and confused in the Tan Son Nhat airport in Ho Chi Minh City. It was 1 a.m., there was not a lick of English being spoken anywhere, and I genuinely contemplated if United offered a return flight right then and there. Feelings of intimidation and cluelessness easily characterized my first month, but in the end, it was this cluelessness that made my experience so rich and invaluable.

Before any UNC student sets off on an international voyage, they are advised by the Study Abroad office to not come into the experience with many preconceptions or assumptions about the destination. This is very wise because if you don’t heed this message, you set yourself up for disappointment and prevent yourself from truly appreciating all that this new culture has to offer. Prior to my trip to Vietnam, I never once attempted to speak Vietnamese, I could not tell you the names of five major cities, nor make a list of three major sights or figures I wanted to visit. My case may have been extreme, but it really helped me to take in every sight, smell, sound and interaction with fascination and admiration.

Academically, I took intensive beginning Vietnamese which was quite the hurdle, but allowed me to interact with the locals and make many Vietnamese friends. I also took courses in political science, anthropology and media studies that helped me to correlate my daily activities with a historical and social context.

Socially, Ho Chi Minh City offered me so many fascinating and exciting opportunities. I played on a semi-professional soccer team (GO SAIGON SAINTS!) comprised of all British and French expatriates, I took salsa lessons from Colombians working in the seafood industry and, most importantly, I interned at the Institute of International Education.
My internship was easily the best aspect of my study abroad experience. Not only did I get to volunteer my time in a meaningful way, I got to pursue my goals of international higher education in a tangible way. From college fairs to speaking at local high schools, my internship allowed me to see life as a young Vietnamese in a similar situation to my own.

Vietnam is an amazingly rich country full of history and culture and it is a shame that it still has such a poor stigma attached to it decades after the war. I can see, however, that a bridge is forming between the U.S. and Vietnam, and this inter-country relationship is certainly moving in a positive direction.

Cameron Wardell is a sophomore Communication Studies and Social Entrepreneurship major from Crownsville, MD. She received the Phillips Ambassadors Scholarship to participate in the APPLES Global Service Learning program in Vietnam.
“There are not more than a handful of people in the whole country doing work in sanitation and housing for the urban poor, even though there are a thousand NGOs in Pune,” Pratima Joshi, director of Shelter Associates.

Still, the organizations we met working to improve the conditions for the urban poor were too many to detail here. Almost everywhere we visited, we were surrounded by young Indian men and women constructing GIS maps of the slums. The technology captured and presented information on everything from home condition and the year of construction, to household income, to literacy levels, to health. These databases were built with data collected directly from the slum dwellers, often by the slum dwellers themselves. This drive to fully document and understand the slums enables much more effective work, and indicates a new commitment by the local government as well as the passion of these community leaders. NGOs often avoid slum work because of its political sensitivity and requirement of government collaboration, but it seems that the government in Pune now recognizes the importance of engaging those they have a mandate to assist. This new era is marked by such events as the arrival of CHF International. Funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, CHF has established a branch in Pune to work for three years on improving the livelihood of the urban poor. One initiative will assist the local government body in developing an effective method for slum resident participation in evaluating the success and appropriateness of their programs.

Navnath, a social worker associated with the non-profit and CHF partner MASHAL, introduced us to one such slum and the community representatives who had assisted in the surveying. These women were identified by MASHAL due to some previous involvement with the community and a level of education or experience that suited them to the task. They were also trained in social work. The woman invited us into her home and answered our questions while we sipped coconut water straight from the nut and her young children played underfoot. She was financially comfortable enough to be a housewife, but was participating in a Self Help Group – a type of microsavings enterprise common in India, but often seemed more like a way of building social capital versus the traditional kind. She had lived there for 25 years. I asked her what she thought was the biggest need in the slum. I wasn’t sure what type of response to expect, as the community seemed generally healthy and happy. Her home had beautiful furnishings and a modern television. Although Navnath was apologetic about the large number of pigs and cattle that sometimes blocked the narrow streets with their bulk and refuse, it didn't appear problematic.

“We need a safe highway crossing,” she said. The slum was bordered by a very busy road that residents had to cross to get to school and work. So far, it had been difficult to get the local government to pay attention to the matter; it was a under the jurisdiction of a different department from the one CHF and MASHAL dealt with. Government departments working in isolation seemed to be a common theme in India, but at least some departments were making a concerted effort to understand the actual needs and perspectives of the urban poor.
The principal of MASHAL, an experienced architect named Sharad Mahajan, was emphatic on this subject. Ask most slum dwellers what they want and they will not say a bigger or better house. They want education, health care, money to spend on religious holidays or special events such as weddings, money to start a business. The type of home the middle class deems desirable, or even crucial, is not typically high up on their list. Start by asking the slum dwellers what they value, involve them in the decision-making processes, and then you can truly start improving the slums. The history of slum redevelopment in India confirms this, marked by such mishaps as housing projects that were ultimately inferior to the neighborhoods they were supposed to replace and developments that were constructed without input from the residents.

In Sangli, a more rural town not far from Pune, resident involvement is not only a way to occupy and engage young men and women in the slums there, but, as Lata Shrikhande of Shelter Associates told us with some humor, the data gathered this way is often more accurate. The slum dwellers are more accountable to those who already know them personally. The resident involvement, like the microsavings groups promoted by the NGO, is a form of “social mobilization” and enables the success of Shelter Associates' primary goal of providing housing and sanitation. Many slums are without toilets, and Shelter Associates has tackled this issue in Sangli and Pune, implementing such innovations as biogas generators attached to communal toilet blocks, which also provide cooking gas. Such energy, both tangible and that generated by the enthusiasm and involvement of the community, could eventually be harnessed for new ground-breaking projects, such as a community enterprise invested in and managed by the community that utilizes the methane produced by the community toilets - currently one toilet block produces enough for 8 or 9 households, but is only utilized by the toilet block caretaker.

The first lesson when approaching slum improvement in India is to understand what a slum can or cannot be. Although a neighborhood may appear to be a slum, it is often not defined as one by the government. Slum is sometimes used to mean an impoverished area, but most often it simply means an illegal settlement. A built place, usually on the fringes of society or squeezed between uses - in the margins between industry and commerce - that was constructed without title to the land. Many slums in India have existed for generations with very permanent houses and streets. But even their residents yearn for the security of actual ownership of their homes. As we all know, the bonds of community and family and the human drive for survival are stronger than any constructs of the law. It is heartening that certain government bodies are learning how to acknowledge this.

Tamara Failor is a Master’s candidate in the Department of City and Regional Planning. She traveled to India with support from the Department for International Affairs and the Carolina Microfinance Initiative.
A Foggy View of London

My two 50-pound bags were packed. All of the necessary paperwork and forms of identification were in my possession. I had read and followed the pre-departure guidelines supplied by Boston University’s London Internship Program and knew exactly what to expect.

Or at least I thought I did.

When I first decided to study abroad in London, I figured it would be the least culturally shocking of all my international options. After all, its geographic proximity to the United States had to mean something, right? Furthermore, I wouldn’t have to worry about butchering a foreign language in my attempts to communicate. English is English. In my mind, London would simply be a more historical, scenic and, perhaps, polite version of an American city.

Wrong.

London is, in every sense of the word, international. From its people, to its food, to its many forms of entertainment, the city is host to endless cultural delights. Quickly, my “foggy” assumptions were erased, and to my surprise, this filled me not with dread, but with a budding sense of adventure.

Data from the U.K. Office for National Statistics show that nearly one-third of Londoners are from non-Caucasian ethnic groups, and more than 300 different languages are spoken throughout the city. Wandering through the streets of London’s many boroughs, I often played a mental game of “guess that language” as unfamiliar speech floated to my ears. It never got old.

When my family visited in the middle of the semester, one of their first observations was that so few of the people they met were actually native to England. This was also the case with my internship at an independent film production company. My supervisor was Irish, and one of her colleagues was Canadian. Many of the company’s completed films were co-productions with foreign nations such as Germany and Iceland, and employees of a company that shared our office space spoke Hebrew regularly. Of the professors who taught my classes, two were British, one was from New Zealand and the other was from the U.S.

I developed a second mental game of trying to discern native Londoners from those who were foreign-born. It became much easier as time went on and often kept me occupied during my commutes on the city’s underground public transportation, the Tube.

One of the best byproducts of London’s incredibly diverse population is the wide spectrum of dining options. On our first night, my roommates and I opted against the traditional fish and chips and went for Indian cuisine. I’d had Indian food before, but it had never tasted as good as it did in London. Throughout the duration of our time in London, we made a point of checking off all the foreign foods we intended to consume:
Chinese, Thai, French, Italian and more. Closer to Christmas, German markets began to appear all over the city. These festive events offered the opportunity to delve into German culture via food, music and random crafts (and beer, too). Of course, we had our fair share of pub food, as well. But I must say, the ultimate French delicacy—crepes—could not be topped.

Though London provides a multinational scene within its borders, it also serves as a convenient portal for traveling to other parts of the world. According to Airports Council International, Heathrow Airport is the busiest airport in the world by international passenger traffic. The Channel Tunnel, or “Chunnel,” provides another way to reach mainland Europe. The trip from London to Paris on the Chunnel takes just over two hours.

I was told by past participants in this program that it was essential to take advantage of London’s prime location for traveling elsewhere. I quickly booked trips with friends to Ireland and Spain, and also to other parts of Great Britain, including Wales and Scotland. All of these trips opened my eyes even more to cultures so different from my own. I could feel my perspectives shift and my confidence grow as I enthusiastically absorbed all that I could from my experiences. I constantly thought of how lucky I was to partake in such multicultural opportunities. On my flight home, surrounded by various ethnicities, I realized that I came to London expecting a comfortable, barely noticeable shift from American culture. Thankfully, it was everything but that.

Sarah Lowery is a junior Journalism and Mass Communication major from Hickory, N.C.