Letter from the Editor

There’s no denying that spring is in the air at Carolina. The campus is coated in yellow dust, the Old Well azaleas are in full bloom, and the quad is filled with students hanging out on sunny days. This is when I love Carolina the most. And while I love Chapel Hill in springtime, many of our fellow students have fallen in love with cities and countries all over the world. Reading about their experiences in Europe and Asia and Central and South America gives us a picture of what they saw and ate and did, so that we too can fall in love. Their insights into the different cultures is fascinating, and their explorations into finding our place in the world is moving. Through this selection of stories, we hope that you will be spurred to a need to see the world and understand the diversity that it brings.

This semester as I graduate, I say goodbye to the Passport team and the wonderful family that they have become. Through my work with Passport, I have learned open-mindedness and independence and been encouraged to be curious about the world around me. As I take these lessons into my post-grad life, I encourage you to do the same, whether in Chapel Hill or wherever life might take you. We hope you enjoy this Spring 2016 edition of Carolina Passport.

Catherine Cheney
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Meet the Editors

From left to right:

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Hostel, ostello, el albergue, la hostal... another word for home while traveling abroad. Last summer I spent 60 days solo traveling between eleven hostels in Spain, Portugal and Italy experiencing some of the most underrated locations in foreign countries. When thinking of exciting places one is looking forward to experiencing in another country, one might think of all the famous museums to visit to see ageless works of art, or the famous parks and beaches to relax in or the street markets to taste foreign food. One doesn’t say, “I cannot wait to make memories in my hostel!”

But once you have lived in these convenient homes away from home, you learn your experience could not be the same without them. Young travelers from around the world flock to hostels to catch some Z’s in a cheap bed for the night, but end up with an experience that is priceless.

While spending time in these buildings, I felt quite easily as if the entire globe was sleeping upstairs, down the hall or on the bunk above me.

Opening the front door of the hostel was relieving, knowing I made it to my destination, but opening the door to my assigned “dorm room” was another thing entirely. What would be behind the door? Who would my roommates be for the week? What bed would I claim as my own?

The uneasiness of not knowing the basics of how I was to live soon faded away as I met some of the most interesting and globally aware people.

I met a guy from Singapore and a girl from Malaysia who told me about their move to London while in Madrid; Australians who told me about their first run in with a squirrel in Granada; Irish lads who laughed so hard while speaking I couldn’t understand a word of their English in Lisbon; and Dutch friends who were so baffled by the fact I have my own car that I drive everyday back home while in Milan.

Koreans in Madrid taught me their childhood games, some Egyptians and I ate Portuguese Piri Piri chicken in Lisbon and two Californians exploded the electrical socket and shut the power off in the hostel in Rome. Yes, I was experiencing the local cities I was currently traveling through during the day, but I was experiencing the entire world through soft morning chats and raucous
Even if I woke up to the smell of pan tostado and mango mermelada every morning in Spain, thinking my day would begin when I arrived at my first destination. My adventure had already begun when I sat down next to the stranger at the breakfast table. Small talk easily turned into traveling stories, which then transformed to dream sharing with someone whose home was thousands of miles away from mine.

That being said, living in hostels was not a complete fairy tale. However, some of the not-so-fun circumstances also made for great memories. The terrible WiFi, the patios for smoking and the bedbugs in Venice... I could definitely live without. Climbing four flights of rickety old stairs just to find out your key doesn’t open your assigned room and being told your reservation was cancelled after walking a mile from the bus stop in 108 degree weather are all part of the trials and tribulations of traveling.

After I returned stateside, I laughed about all my trying moments living with a hundred or so strangers and felt nostalgic pains for the joyous times I had while meeting international friends. I toppled over glasses of sangria with my Scottish friend in Madrid the night before I left the capital. I left bittersweet tears on the jumper of my Aussie friend while sitting on the Vaporetto dock in Venice waiting for the watertaxi to take me away from the floating city. I left parts of myself abroad with new friends and I even lost a few items in my dorm rooms, but I took a thousand more memories and relationships home with me that I never would have made without the magic of hostels.

Dana Rodriguez is a junior Art History and Psychology double major and Hispanic Studies minor from St. Louis, Missouri. She received The Burch Fellowship and travelled around Spain, Italy and Portugal.
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students at King’s College London get this beautiful week in the middle of the semester—right around the time UNC students leave for fall break—called Reading Week. I capitalize Reading Week for two reasons: one, it’s an official week of no class; and two, because it marks a turning point for some.

Reading Week was a moment in the grand scheme of my semester abroad when I was questioning a lot of things; things that I didn’t even know I’d be questioning at such a young age. It was a bit surreal to think that I was halfway through with being in a place I’d dreamed of being in since I was 11 years old. It’s one of those things that you know is going to happen, but you still expect it to just… not. Like graduating from high school. Getting married. Losing someone you love.

Reading Week can be a Big Deal for some. The majority of the people I met were off traveling around the European continent with their respective friends and family. But I decided to stay in London and continue doing what I was doing: hopping on and off buses, walking around until my feet felt like they were going to fall off and absorbing everything about a city so picturesque you’d only think it existed in an architect’s dreams.

The first Saturday of Reading Week, however, I found myself boarding a train to the southeast coast of England. I was getting antsy, you see. The walls of Cell 81B (the name I affectionately gave to my flat) were slowly starting to suffocate my self-professed creativity. So the night before, I booked a ticket for Dover via St. Pancras International Station.

Dover is a tiny little port city in Kent on the southeastern coast of the English mainland. The city’s pride and joy is the spectacular White Cliffs overlooking the ocean. When I told my friends I was going to see the cliffs, they looked at me in confusion. They had never heard of them before, which in turn took me by surprise. Surely they’d seen the pictures, right? The white standing cliffs with the beautiful light blue ocean crashing against their resilient form and the sky so close in color that the horizon blends into the sea? But no, they were clueless.

Written by Amina Khan
Designed by Megan Morris

Amina’s first vantage point on the cliffs. The wind was not strong here.
It took about an hour by train, and the views were beautiful; there was a moment when the train vanished in a tunnel but then reemerged into the cold, 9 a.m. morning to reveal a beautiful view of the seaside. It was one of those Very Beautiful Things in the Universe you can only really experience as a surprise; you never expect to be gifted with the serenity of the ocean, but then it appears and you’re stunned into silence.

Departing the station and finding the cliffs wasn’t easy. It was about a 2-mile walk from Dover Priory Station to the beginning of the incline, but there were marked pathways and a beautiful scenic stroll just along the shore. I felt like I was inside one of those sound machines — the ones with the cartoonish seagull squawks and the over-exaggerated ocean sounds. Nothing seemed real; and yet, I can still close my eyes and almost feel the salty spray of the sea as I stood just along the shoreline.

I made it up the cliffs with relative ease, albeit huffing and puffing as I climbed. But the views immediately made everything worth it. It’s like, every time you think you’ve found the best view, you can keep walking along the edge of the cliffs, and you’ll find an even more breathtaking spot. Everything is blanketed in waves of the greenest, freshest grass imaginable just up until you get to the edge of the cliff. The white rocks of the cliff faces are such a stark contrast to the grass that you’d think someone hand painted every inch of them. But the rocks give way to the stunning English Channel that goes on forever in most places; there’s a stretch of land just visible on the other side — that’s the French coastline.

I felt like I was on the Edge of the World.

Now, I must put a disclaimer here that I was by myself on this trip; that being said, I encourage more people to do things by themselves. While the company of another person is welcoming (comforting, even), being by yourself only encourages you to be more aware of your environment. All of your attention is on what surrounds you. When that’s the case, you can really see everything.

I stood on the cliffs for about two hours. This was my Big Deal, you see; this is what I came to experience. Most people look toward fast-paced adventure in tiny hostels in strange cities with strange people. It’s exhilarating for certain, but the spontaneity of backpacking has never appealed to me. I prefer sightseeing in solitude; I prefer the quiet sounds of my boots walking on gravel rather than a symphony of voices and dialects that are drowned out by exhaust pipes and beeping horns.

To me, an experience is not one until you arrive and find comfort in where you are. An experience happens to you; it shapes you, molds you into someone who knew something they once didn’t. It makes you impressionable—it makes you feel. It’s that Very Beautiful Thing in the Universe that you relive time and time again, never exhausting itself from your memory.

Before I left, I asked a stranger to take photos of me--for aesthetic reasons, of course—and then I had a delicious slice of apple cake and a cup of tea at the visitors’ center. Then I walked the two miles back to the station, got on my train and headed back to St. Pancras International in London.

“This was my Big Deal, you see; this is what I came to experience.”

Amina was crouching while taking this photo, balanced precariously against a rock. The wind almost knocked her phone out of her hand.

Amina Khan is a sophomore Exercise and Sports Science major from Burlington, North Carolina. She studied abroad in England with the King’s College London exchange program.
I am able to reveal and discuss all those precious moments I created throughout my time abroad with whomever wants to listen (or read), but in no way will I be able to capture the true experience I had while living abroad. Yes, you hear stories from everyone who has studied abroad about their favorite art galleries, favorite beach, favorite hike, favorite restaurant and favorite memory. All, which I do believe to be so real and pure and so special, but to me, it can only mean so much, especially to the person you’re telling it to. What I’ve realized from returning is that those who haven’t gone through a similar experience just cannot comprehend what I am gushing over to them. I’ve seen old friends come and pass in my life while I was away, but I also have had the chance to gain the most amazing and interesting new friends as well as strengthen some of my best friendships.

I want to try and portray, what is in my opinion, the most indescribable and unfathomable past five months, although I know I still won’t be able to achieve that lofty goal. Australia: to some, it’s just a word, just a country.
Australia: to me, it’s a word that brings back the most life-altering, exhilarating and emotional experience for which I will be forever grateful. It was a time in my life that I will cherish the most. Still, almost two months later, when someone asks how my “trip” was I just want to scoff at them in the most inoffensive way. To say, “my trip… well it wasn’t exactly a trip… I kind of, sort of, lived there for the last half of the year and made a life with the most perfect humans that I miss so dearly.” And sometimes I do say just that.

Australia: it’s a word that, when stated, consistently sends shivers down my now pale arms, spikes the blonde hairs on my neck and generates warm, salty tears in the corners of my eyes. Never have I once had something affect me to this extent that my time in Australia has.

Australia: it’s an intoxicating, ever endeavoring experience that leaves you wanting more, and more, and more of it until you’re finally left wallowing on your own, on the verge of a breakdown.

Australia, you’re my drug, my addiction that I never want to let go of.

To this day I still feel the warmth of you, Australia - the warmth from the hot sun burning bright through your depleted ozone layer. I still hear the comforting accents of the locals as I fall fast asleep at night and the dinosaur-esque squawks from your outrageous birds as I awake in the mornings.

You’re constantly on my mind, Australia. I yearn to be back in your frigid and dangerous waters, floating along with the abundance of jellies and rays.

Australia, every inch of you provides something new, something thrilling, something perfect.

Australia, I get lost just thinking about you.

Australia, you provided me with so many necessary life tools and skills. I now can fake your accents, spark up conversations with anyone and anything, and my mind is now open to exploring and attempting the strangest, most wonderful and most uncomfortable things I can think of. My outlook upon life has become so much more realistic, but realistic in the sense that I can do whatever I set my mind to if I am willing to go full force with it.

Australia, you have unintentionally changed my interests and enhanced those that I already have. I have experienced a truly different world - a world that most will never be able to experience, and I am beyond ecstatic and thankful for that time, but I am truly sad that not everyone can share that same beautiful enjoyment that I once did.

As I sit here trying to depict the true essence of my experience in Australia, I still am disappointed in the outcome.

The worst thing of all is that my time with you, Australia, now seems like a dream, a never-ending, heart-pounding, tear-jerking and unimaginable dream. A dream I feel as though I can never get back, and that truly breaks my heart.

Australia, I know I’ll be back for you one day, but for now I say, “Take it easy, Matey. I’ll be seeing you around.”

Kenzie Schmidt is a junior Communications major and Journalism - Public Relations minor from Wilmington, North Carolina. She studied abroad in Australia at the University of Sydney.

Australia
Population: 23.5 M
Capital: Canberra
Language: English

This shows 12 Apostles of Melbourne’s Great Ocean Road, which has now eroded down to only 8 apostles.
Speckled like freckles on a fresh face, the Sahara Desert supports hubs of shrubs that huddle together like tribes fending against the unforgiving terrain of the sand-filled expanse. One scorching day last summer, the Sahara also contained in its golden folds, a caravan of camels trekking a surprised and wonder-filled cluster of students to a Berber Oasis. Though the shuffled tracks in the sand and the excited voices of my crew escaped on the whimsical thrusts of the wind, my memories attached to these fingerprinted rolling dunes remain.

Brimming with tables and tents, our host’s horseshoe-shaped camp was large enough to allow for elbow room, but small enough that shared and personal spaces overlapped with blurry bounds. Beyond the wooden-post gate constructed around the rim of the camp stood a massive sand dune with an incline so steep it almost looked as though it was fighting to block out the sky. Soon, the dune was rushed with breathless students attempting to mount the top before the sun dipped below the horizon.

Powering up the first third of the dune exhausted the energy of most of my group, with progress teetering to a slow, aching trudge the closer one approached the crest of the dune. The biggest struggle faced when traversing up the dune was the depth to which our feet sank into the sand. With the stretch of our strides amounting to little more than an inch’s worth of headway, we were forced to rip footholds into the sand with our hands as we crawled up the dune with tightening muscles and harsh, heavy breaths.

The literal crawling, clawing and physical struggle endured to reach the summit of this most massive challenge was ever sweetened by the spiritual and emotional treasures found within the vastness of the beauty at the peak of the dune, no matter how ephemeral the stay. I missed the ma’asalaama of the sunset, but the light bleeding from the horizon colored the sky in warm and soft hues long enough for me to bathe in its beauty and awe at the wonder that is the natural gorgeousness of the Earth. Overwhelmed with the expanse of sandy terrain at every degree in my full turn, I experienced feeling small, yet like the many obscure communities scattered around the globe, I did not feel insignificant; I felt at peace and in sync with this beauty.

After the sun whispered its sweet, colorful goodbye, I strolled along the flat sands on one side of the camp with a smaller companionship. We stood far enough from camp...
that the artificial light could not fight to fade the beauty of the stars. Silently and motionlessly we gazed. I heard and felt the wind swooshing by, and the growth of goosebumps rising on my arms— not because of the slight chill in its tendrils, but because of the grand silence that accompanied its dull roars. Angling my head one way, I could hear the sound of the wind blowing by, but angling my head another way allowed me to experience a profound silence I have never before encountered.

We lay on our backs, peering into the dark, silent depths of the nighttime sky, sharing our thoughts. I shared with them a common description of the star-studded sky that I love most— as a black film stretched across Earth’s outer dome, randomly punctured at the will of some unknown being, the light from another time, another place, another system streaming through the holes and making me wonder who or what was behind this film that would soon dissolve as the rising sun bleached it away.

I became lost in my thoughts about earlier that day when we were driving through the most gorgeous mountains I have ever seen, and how overwhelmed I was with their beauty. The first leg of the trip, I saw from one side of my view the mountains cascading downwards towards tree-filled valleys and skinny rivers garnished by green bushes with beautiful pink flowers. On the other side, I saw rolling valleys lined with rows of light green trees speckled between what appeared to be hay piles, and further in the distance, more mountains in the range.

I was awed by the majesty of the landscape and the ability of the locals to make a home along these ridges and within the valleys. There were very few towns, and they were distantly located from one another. I remember passing one of these towns, thinking about the personal and communal dynamics of existing in a community that appears to be isolated to my city-accustomed eyes. I wondered how their average day looked, what aspirations they held, if they had been to this desert before, and what they may think about or learn from or teach the tourists who flock their homeland.

Gazing upon those beautiful mountains, I had forced myself to look beyond the beautiful sites I saw directly in front of me. Instead, I looked farther into the distance and soaked in the view of the mountains as one large entity comprised of individual forests and hills that coalesced to create a magnificent range. I felt a similar feeling laying in the complete silence, staring into the starry desert sky. Those quiet moments while travelling through the broad expanse of the mountains and lying in the dessert allowed me to reflect about the space I occupy and how my perception of my place in this world is altered when I imagine how diversely life is lived in this expansive world.

More broadly, travelling has allowed me to think a lot about how I want to interact in the world, and how I can improve my relations with people from different backgrounds. The closeness, the conversations and the challenges to my ‘normality of life’ left me feeling contemplatively hopeful and helped shed light on important questions I should and need to ask about the world in which we all live and share.

Alexis Strang is a junior Global Studies and Anthropology double major from Concord, North Carolina. She studied abroad in Fez, Morocco, and received the C.V. Starr Scholarship, the Michael and Matthew Boyatt Award and the Excel@Carolina Summer Study Abroad Fellowship.
Sitting in his wooden chair against one of the two walls of the hut in the center of his family’s traditional home, Tjokodorai gestured for me to sit at his feet. With my back to the 99-year-old medicine man and my eyes taking in the small audience of tourists and taxi drivers in front of me, I waited for the healing session to begin.

I felt Tjokodorai’s slender but sturdy fingers push deep into pressure points on my head. He made his way all around my face and the top of my head to my ear. I winced in pain when he pushed against one of the inner corners of my ear.

His fingers stopped where they were as he asked, “Pain?” to which I responded, “Lots of pain.” Tjokodorai got out of his chair and gestured for me to lay belly up on the straw mat on the floor. He kneeled down, asking me to relax my feet and legs. He took a dark wooden wand and carefully pushed its rounded tip into pressure points on the sides of my toes of my left foot. As Tjokodorai pressed against the inner right side of the second toe from my pinky toe, I felt a fiery pain.

I screamed, trying to force my foot out of his hand. He asked me, “Do you get stressed a lot?” to which I responded, “Quite a bit, yes.” He placed my foot gently on the ground, stood up, and kneeled down just close enough so that the others could not quite make out his words. He told me that I “think too much, and have lots of anxiety and stress. [I] need to stop thinking too much.”

He got up and stood tall at my feet so our bodies made an “L.” With his hands in prayer form, Tjokodorai closed his eyes for what felt like eternity. Finally, he opened them. For the next three minutes or so, he performed a series of grand hand gestures and movements in the air above me.

He then kneeled down near my waist and traced his wooden wand on my body in patterns that began at my face and ended at my feet. Tjokodorai kneeled near my left foot again, and began the ritual acupressure with his wand. He got to the inner right side of the second toe from my pinky toe and pressed hard. To my complete and utter amazement, I felt absolutely no pain.

The Indonesian flag looks over Mount Batur.

The view from the peak of Mount Batur.
On this pleasantly hot day in late May, I found myself at a traditional Balinese healer’s home on the other side of the world in the town of Ubud on a little island in the Indian Ocean known as Bali – because I was looking for more.

I was looking for a change in my world of rinse and repeat cycles; I was looking for an experience in which comfort and familiarity were entirely foreign; indeed, I was looking to be foreign.

My chase for the unknown led me to Bali, Indonesia – where I spent two months during the summer of 2015 as a Burch Fellow through the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

The time I spent in Bali was undoubtedly the greatest adventure I have ever had. I went into my journey with a melting pot of feelings and zero expectations, and returned home with more stories of awe-inspiring people and places, messy mistakes and situations and life-changing triumphs than I could have ever anticipated. Little did I know at the time that my healing experience with Tjokodorai would be the first of many fascinating adventures to come in the next two months.

I am forever grateful to Bali for welcoming me with open arms and engaging my heart’s desire for novelty. Not a day goes by that I do not yearn to return to the island that has stolen my heart. Do not forget me, Bali, ingatan saya – I will return home again soon.

Ankita Jain is a junior Psychology major from Gaithersburg, Maryland. She received The Burch Fellowship and studied abroad in Bali, Indonesia.
Photos from around the world: 📷

Kristin Tajlili – UK

Mikala Whitaker – Spain

Neha Kukreja – Cuba

Juliana Powell – Japan

Ally Levine – Spain

Sylvia Roper – Croatia
Peru

Decorations for a festival in Catacaos, just outside of Piura.

Children dressed for a festival in Catacaos, Peru.

Francisco playing tag.
Piura, Peru greeted me with a gust of hot, dry air and warm sand in my shoes. Pierre, the AIESEC internship representative, introduced himself with a heartfelt peck on the cheek and rescued me from the taxi drivers shouting to grab the attention of the only obvious tourist in the group of travelers. My blonde hair stood out like a sore thumb in Peru, a characteristic with consequences that were difficult to come to terms with. The initial culture shock was followed by feelings of nervousness. My eyes were in constant search of something ‘Peruvian’ to meet my preconceived expectations of the country. Peru did not meet my expectations, but it surpassed any hopes I had for that summer.

The purpose of my trip was to teach children in the national schools on the outskirts of town. My application required me to teach English, American culture and environmental science. With a backpack full of pencils stamped with the U.S. flag and school supplies galore, the experience was bound to be a success. What I had not anticipated, however, was that I would be the student.

Yamila greeted us with warm hugs every morning, José Luis playfully tapped us and whispered “dale” to start a game of tag, while Franco mischievously hid behind the door to scare us as we walked into the classroom. Fatima and Kiara shyly grinned from their seats, making it a challenge to earn their friendship. This was a typical morning at Ejidos Del Norte.

The children taught me to love without hesitation. They were fearless and brave, showing their personalities proudly. Marisol, who never liked to follow directions, surprised me by being the first to offer her favorite snack—papa a la huancaína. By the end of my trip I had gained 12 friends who were determined to see me again, even though the United States was an 8-hour plane ride away. It was truly a friendship without borders.

I traveled to Peru expecting to learn ancient Inca traditions, eat guinea pig and pet an alpaca. Although I knocked most of these tourist adventures off my bucket list, those expectations kept me constantly searching for Peru while I was in the country. In other words, my eyes were open to any resemblance of something from the history books, but I was missing everything right in front of me. These preconceived notions of what Peru was supposed to be blinded me. Piura, Peru, while far north of the traditional Inca ruins advertised in travel brochures, was full of culture. Every aspect of Piura, from my loving host family to the moto taxi drivers, to delicious ceviche and chicha morada, shared with me a facet of Peruvian culture.

The children in my class were a representation of what it means to be Peruvian— to love your country, be proud of who you are and celebrate what is sacred to you. I shared my culture and language with the children, but what they gave me was far more profound and worth much more than anything a foreigner could have taught them. As my Machu Picchu tour guide told my friends and me, “Do what is sacred to you.” Let the people and places do the teaching and every moment will supersede any anticipations a tourist could conjure.

Sarah Daniels is a senior Global Studies and Political Science double major from Edenton, North Carolina. She studied abroad in Peru with the AIESEC internship.
I’m listening to Bob Marley, on my way to a Damian Marley concert, in Italy.” That’s all I can think about as I look out the car window on a Roman summer day. I experience this moment of pure bliss and serenity one that you don’t get so often in life. My cousin, who’s sitting in the front seat, is about to ask me a question, but he suddenly stops when he notices that I’ve zoned out. I look like I’m in one of those music videos where the person is staring outside the window while some sad music is playing in the background, but trust me — it definitely wasn’t one of those moments. Here’s what was really going on in my head:

When I first told my family that I was going to study abroad in Italy, they all had the same question: “Why?” But let’s get some brief, historical background that could
explain what on earth would make them question why I would want to visit one of the most beautiful countries in the world.

When I was three years old, my family and I moved from Ethiopia to America. Ethiopia and Italy have had long historical ties since Italy tried to colonize Ethiopia in 1895 and again in 1935. Both attempts ultimately failed, but there are still lasting damages from the conflict.

Secondly, the majority of the Marley family members are Rastafarians, a religion that began in Jamaica during the 1930s. Rastafarians believe that Haile Selassie, the last emperor of Ethiopia, is the redeeming messiah. Selassie was also the emperor the second time Italy invaded Ethiopia. As Bob Marley became popular, so did the religion.

Because of Rastafari, Jamaica and Ethiopia have a unique and irreplaceable connection with one another. In 2005, the annual celebration of Bob Marley’s birthday was held outside of Jamaica for the first time. About half a million people gathered in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia’s capital, to celebrate what would have been the reggae’s singer’s 60th birthday. Now, the Rastafarian flag, which was the old Ethiopian flag, is seen everywhere you go during reggae concerts.

During this hour-long car ride to the concert, I kept thinking about how different Ethiopia’s relationship with Jamaica is in contrast to its relationship with Italy. I compared the love versus the hate and the pleasant memories versus ones of bloodshed.

Then, like perfect timing, Bob Marley’s song “One Love” comes on the stereo, and I think about his message of love and unity. I start to think about how these three countries are all connected to play a bigger part of my identity.

As I’m dancing and singing along to Damian Marley at the concert, I can’t help but notice how diverse the crowd is. There were Jamaicans, Ethiopians, Italians and people of other nationalities who came together because of their love of his music. We’re all completely immersed in the experience, smiling at each other as we sing along to the words, unaware of the history of our ancestors that led us to this very moment. We sing along to his last performance of “Could You Be Loved,” as our paths come full circle.

Meki Shewangizaw is a junior Media and Journalism major from Charlotte, North Carolina. She studied abroad with an IES Summer Internship to Rome, Italy.
This summer, I studied abroad in Valladolid, Mexico — a quaint, peaceful, colonial town in the heart of the Yucatán Peninsula. This is a place that I had always remembered fondly, as it is a common stopping point for tourists traveling from Cancún to Mérida. Yet, this time it was different. This time, I was there to study the Mayan language, allowing me entry into the more enigmatic place of Zací. Zací was the name given to this Mayan town before the Spaniards arrived, built colonial churches on top of Mayan pyramids and sought to eradicate the Mayan way of life.

Language is the building block of culture. It is composed of sounds: syllables and words that divide the world around us in distinct, recognizable parts that are then endowed with meaning and significance. The best way to immerse oneself in another Cosmo vision is to understand the language used in that place. In my case, my (limited) knowledge of Maya gave me access to a world previously inaccessible.

For example, as we walked through the marketplace one day, the vendors...
saw us American students and said “50% discount if you speak Spanish and free if you speak Maya!” To their surprise, we answered back “Kintaniko’on Maya T’aan [we speak Maya].” The vendor never expected such a response, but he seemed astonished and happy that tourists were working to understand the details of his culture. Speaking Maya in Zací always led to positive interactions within the community and constantly allowed us to gain insights that would have otherwise been impossible to obtain.

I actually spent my time outside of Zací in a small town called Xocen, where Erik and his Maya-speaking family welcomed me with open arms. It was here that I learned of the importance of corn: the many words used to describe it in Maya (ixi’im, nal, koob, sak tux, etc.) reveal how integral it was to the origin and sustenance of the Mayans. I was shown the Ceiba tree which marked the center of the town (and every Mayan community), and learned how the belly-button (or tuuch) is every person’s center. Instead of feeling something in their hearts, the Mayans feel through their tuuch, which is their own connection to life. One of my favorite words in Maya is the word for “ear lobe”: u le’ xikin literally means “ear leaf.” It exemplifies the Mayans’ authentic connection to the environment and their deep awareness of self and nature.

By the end of the trip, we all had mixed feelings: while we were exhausted from the intensive language courses and excited to go home to see friends and family, we all felt sad to part ways and to be so unsure of when we would be able to return to see our newly-made friends again — friends and relationships which had been built in a new language with its own inside jokes, emotions and visions of the world.

While the details of a future return to Zací were uncertain for most of us, one thing was certain for all of us: we had thrown ourselves wholeheartedly into a new language and culture, and we would leave Zací much better off than we had come — with a new face of place.

Molly Tun is a graduate student from Minneapolis, Minnesota, studying Spanish. She received the FLAS scholarship and studied abroad in Valladolid, Mexico, at the Tucatec Maya Summer Institute.
At first, I was apprehensive. The Spanish obsession with what just looked like simple ham wasn’t immediately appealing, and I had never quite seen anything like jamón ibérico — specialty ham from the Iberian Peninsula — before coming to Spain. But all the guidebooks, travel videos and people I had talked to before choosing to study abroad in Sevilla, Spain, told me that a plate of this cured ham is a top pick for the country and is extremely popular among tourists and Spaniards alike.

In a little corner tapas bar in the Santa Cruz barrio of Sevilla, famous for its narrow streets brimming with history, I sat down and ordered my first plate of jamón to share with friends. I watched as the old bartender positioned himself behind the jutting leg of ham raised on the bar-top by a traditional ham holder — a staple in any well-known tapas bar and even in Spanish homes. He raised the specialty knife and artfully began slicing off dark red squares of ham. It was clear he had been doing this for many years — he started slowly, but began picking up pace and just like that, a plate of lush, shimmering ham was brought to the table.
Little did I know, this inviting plate was about to trigger a change down to my core. But the first thing I noticed as I picked up a piece was how it felt like it melted on my tongue. My taste buds exploded with different flavors all at once. There was an undeniable salty component, no doubt from the years-long aging process. Iberian pigs were fed a special diet of acorns as they roamed free, and I felt like with every insatiable bite I could taste them prancing around Spanish fields. But as I finished a piece, a sweet aftertaste lingered. I immediately understood why Spanish ham is so revered — it is incredibly gastronomically rich and so unique to the country and its culture. My friends and I looked down and after what felt like seconds, the plate was empty.

I feel lucky to have tried my first slice of ham so early on in my semester abroad because after that first bite, I couldn’t get enough. I tried it on montaditos (bite-sized sandwiches) and paired it with Spanish wines and manchego cheese plates. But the beauty in jamón ibérico lies in its simplicity. The deep flavor generated from the ham’s rich fat content needs no other elevating element — not even olive oil. I lost count of how many plates of ham I splurged on, but all I know is that every single euro spent was well worth it.

The revered simplicity of what really just looked like a plate of ham got me thinking about Spanish food culture as a whole. There is no rush to get through a lunch order in Spain, or dinners alone right after work. Lunch is the biggest meal of the day and everyone comes home in the middle of work or school to be with family. Food is savored and shared with loved ones in Spain. Splitting a ración de jamón ibérico with friends and family is very typical, and they gather to appreciate each moment (and bite!). Simply put, the Spanish know how to enjoy every tapa they split or ración they share.

I feel grateful that this food culture rubbed off on me. Not only did I get to enjoy some of the best food in the world, but I also got to be a part of a Spanish family for a few months and curl up on the couch after a big lunch with my señora and watch our favorite afternoon telenovela together. Fresh produce, delicious baked treats with coffee in the morning and perfectly sliced jamón ibérico are some of the things I miss the most about Spain. I have learned to value the country’s beautiful and rich food culture even more because of the short time I got to spend in Sevilla.

Breanna Kerr is a senior Political Science and Spanish Literature double major from Raleigh, North Carolina. She studied abroad in Sevilla, Spain.
Galway

Written by Adriene Reavis
Designed by Elle Sommerville
There is something to be said for extending yourself beyond your comfort zone. For me, that was embarking on a nearly five-month study abroad experience that involved five random roommates and a whole lot of spontaneity. I am a planner, but taking that trans-Atlantic flight over to Ireland forever altered my perspective on what I could experience if I just allowed it to happen.

Fast forwarding to now, I still Skype regularly with my Galway roommates who are from all over North America, but in between my arrival in Ireland and now I experienced amazing places and fantastic people that remain vividly etched in my mind. I can still smell the famous doughnuts of the Saturday market in downtown Galway, I still hear the Irish jig music as I walked down the main street, and I can still see the crumbling medieval ruins that dot the Irish landscape, evoking the imagination to think of what life was like thousands of years ago.

The novelty and beauty of the area helped me settle into life in Galway as I found myself wandering around the city to explore, but I couldn’t help feeling like a college first-year all over again. I had to learn where on campus I could print and where the student union was located, but I also had to overcome my rather shy personality to make new friends. This was one of the hardest parts for me, but studying abroad gave me an advantage: it may have been my first semester, but it was also my last, and I had nothing to lose!

I had this amazing, once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, and I wanted to make the most of it. I joined the ladies’ soccer team to stay in shape but mostly to befriend Irish students. I began conversations in pubs that I ordinarily would have been too shy to start. One of the most interesting things that happened to me in my entire semester abroad occurred on an international students’ trip to Cork, Ireland. The Irish trip leaders took us to a local pub, where I just so happened to chat with several German girls who were also traveling. They were incredibly kind; we all became Facebook friends and they encouraged me to visit them in Germany because we got along so well. The emerging adventurer in me took them up on this offer; soon I had booked a plane ticket to Bremen, Germany, to visit one of my new friends! We traveled together in Germany and Prague for a week, and I learned so much about German culture and how it differed from the States. I stayed with her family and consumed an absurd amount of food as they continually offered me new things to taste.

To me, I was living in my own version of Eat, Pray, Love as I learned how to overcome both language and comfort zone barriers, and I loved it. I learned that I loved experiencing a new place; I was fascinated by the locals wherever I went and the stories they would tell when I would strike up a conversation with them. Towering cathedrals, cozy pubs and everything in between captivated me; I couldn’t get enough. And through all of the traveling that I did, I soon began to call Galway the home that I would come back to after a weekend away.

Worried that you can’t fit studying abroad into your schedule? Talk to your advisor, or go for a summer program. Scared of the unknown? Embrace all of the amazing things that could be possible.

Even if you have the slightest urge to live and study for a semester abroad, go. Step out of your comfort zone.

Adriene Reavis is a senior Exercise and Sports Science major from Denver, North Carolina. She studied abroad in Ireland with the NUI Galway-exchange program.
Photos from around the world: 📸

Adriene Reavis – Ireland

Anna Richardson – Australia
**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 5
**More Info:** www.burchfellows.unc.edu

**Class of 1938 Summer Study Abroad Fellowships:**
**Description:** For U.S. students interested in pursuing independent career or personal projects outside the United States. The number and amount of the fellowships are subject to approval by the 1938 Endowment Committee board members.
**Requirements:** Sophomores, juniors, or seniors planning on 5th year of coursework. Must be a U.S. citizen.
**Stipend:** $5,000
**Deadline:** February 2
**More Info:** isss.unc.edu/programs/class38

**Carolina Global Initiative Award:**
**Description:** For students to complete a global opportunity, ideally during the summer, in the United States or abroad.
**Requirements:** Full-time returning undergrad or grad students with financial need.
**Stipend:** $1,500 – $6,000
**Deadline:** March 18
**More Info:** cgi.unc.edu/awards/carolina-global

*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.
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 have attended high school in North Carolina.
Stipend: Up to $9,000
Deadline: October 15
More Info: studentaffairs.unc.edu/students/phillipstravel

Mahatma Gandhi Fellowship:
Description: For students to develop and implement civic engagement projects that employ innovative, sustainable approaches to complex social needs in one of the eight South Asian countries.
Requirements: Full-time returning undergrad or grad students.
Stipend: up to $3,000
Deadline: Early February
More Info: mgf.uncsangam.org

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 February for summer/fall programs; mid September for spring programs.
More Info: studyabroad.unc.edu

Summer Undergraduate Research Fellowships (SURF):
Description: For students to enhance their educational experience by engaging them in research opportunities. This program is administered through the Office of Undergraduate Research.
Requirements: Full-time undergrad students in good academic standing. Projects must last at least 9 weeks (minimum of 20 hours per week).
Stipend: Minimum $3,000
Deadline: February 25
More Info: our.unc.edu/students/funding-opportunities/surf

Robert E. Bryan Social Innovation Fellowships:
Description: For students who are interested in making a significant contribution locally, nationally, or internationally through the creation of an entrepreneurial project that addresses a community issue or need.
Requirements: Any returning, full-time undergraduates and teams are eligible to apply.
Stipend: Up to $1,500
Deadline: Mid October
More Info: cccps.unc.edu/awards-recognition/bryan-social-innovation-fellowships

Sonja Haynes Stone Center Undergraduate International Studies Fellowship:
Description: For students pursuing academic research or study in an international setting.
Requirements: Full-time second-term freshmen, sophomores, and juniors who are U.S. citizens or permanent residents. Preference for students with financial need from underrepresented groups and for programs in areas of the African Diaspora.
Stipend: Up to $2,500
Deadline: TBD (check website)
More Info: sonjahaynesstonectr.unc.edu/undergraduate-fellowships

Honors Thesis Research Grants:
Description: For students carrying out research for senior honors thesis projects.
Requirements: Undergraduates performing research for senior honors thesis. Students apply directly to their departmental Honors advisor.
Stipend: Up to $500
Deadline: Varies by department

Phillips Ambassadors Program:
Description: For students across all majors who are applying for a university-approved study abroad program in Asia.
Requirements: Students accepted to a UNC study abroad program in Asia with min 3.0 GPA. Additional consideration will be given to students who have not previously studied abroad in Asia.
Stipend: $5,000
Deadline: Early February for summer/fall programs; mid September for spring programs.
More Info: phillips.unc.edu

Office of Global Health Funding Opportunities:
Description: For undergraduates to pursue international, global health internships.
Requirements: Varies
Stipend: Varies
Deadline: Varies
More Info: sph.unc.edu/global-health/ggg-internships-and-funding
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 units.
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 units.

Source: Mark Nielsen, Information Systems Director, Study Abroad Office

For Year Long 2014, Fall 2014, Spring 2015, Summer 2015, SH Year 2015

1,279 Students • 56 Countries

BY THE NUMBERS

UNC students travel all across the globe. The numbers on the map reflect participation in the Year Long 2014, Fall 2014, Spring 2015, Summer 2015, and SH Year 2015 Study Abroad programs.

Over 100 students
30-100 students
10-29 students
Fewer than 10 students

Source: Mark Nielsen, Information Systems Director, Study Abroad Office