

The Claremont Globetrotter

Office of Off-Campus Study

More to “*Mai Pen Rai*” than Meets the Eye

By Ann Kam '11
CIEE Thailand (Spring 2010)

Three weeks ago, I arrived in Khon Kaen, Thailand ready to tackle the development and globalization issues that affect the region. But, before I could start this endeavor, I had to overcome uncomfortable language and cultural barriers.

“*Mai pen rai!*” This Thai phrase, which roughly translates into “never mind” or “it’s okay,” was one that I heard repeatedly during my weeklong homestay with an 11-year-old girl named, Some Oh.

Whenever I reached for the pile of dirty dishes, offered to pay the *song tao* (taxi) fare, or struggled to understand Thai, Some Oh and her parents would shower me with “*mai pen rai*,” smile, and then signal that they would take care of the problem. Initially, I perceived their behavior to be a gesture of kindness and I was appreciative. Not only were they a Thai family willing to host an American student, they were also a scavenger clan prepared to share the little food and tight living space they had with a stranger.* Despite their generosity, I would soon discover that there was more to “*mai pen rai*” than its accompanying smiles and compassion.

On the second night of my homestay, my host family attended a welcoming party thrown for the CIEE students. In the one-room school-house, my host mother and sister sat on either side of me while the monk recited a lengthy, good luck prayer. Dinner and refreshments followed.

However, when it came time to eat, I realized I was dining alone; my family had disappeared.

When I found my host parents, they were waiting by their motorcycle. They looked ready to leave.

“*Gin cao* (come eat!)” I said to them.

“Yes, *mai pen rai*, *mai pen rai*,” they assured me.

I returned to the room expecting them to follow. Five... ten... fifteen minutes passed and there was still no sign of my parents. I went outside again and encouraged them to come in, but this time it was apparent why they were reluctant to eat with everyone. As scavengers, my parents were very self-conscious about their social status. They did not want to stand out in a room with other parents who were businessmen and doc-



Ann with her host family in Khon Kaen.

tors. This time, their smiles and “*mai pen rai*” were a façade used to mask their apprehensions about socializing with those who were better off. At this point, it was obvious that “*mai pen rai*” did not mean that everything was okay.

After this incident, I realized that even though “*mai pen rai*” is loosely thrown around in Thai culture, it often means more than what the speakers’ suggest. It may denote that everything will be fine, but the phrase can also be loaded with other suppressed feelings. Now, whenever I hear “*mai pen rai*,” I stop and think twice about what is being said.

*In Thailand, a scavenger is an individual who makes his or her livelihood off collecting and selling the trash and recyclables of others.

Notes from the Editor:

When CMC students return from abroad, they bring back a wealth of lessons and experiences that ought to be shared. Those of us at the Office of Off-Campus Studies wanted to facilitate a way in which these stories can be shared with the broader CMC community.

We have started a newsletter so that students can tell their stories directly from their study abroad destinations. For this issue, we have collected a broad range of stories that address local politics, food culture, traveling, and beyond.

Ung-Sang Lee '10

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Krysten's host family relax as they wait for the sun to set.

Ramadan in Morocco

By Krysten Hartman '11
CIEE Rabat, Morocco (Fall 2009)

I arrived in Morocco last September hungry for a taste of a new culture, language and environment. For the first three weeks though, I remained just this—hungry—because the

“I talked with Muslims about their commitment to Ramadan, participated in the celebratory festival and even tried fasting myself for a few days.”

vast majority of the country was observing the Islamic holiday of Ramadan. During the month of Ramadan (the ninth month of the Islamic calendar), Muslims fast from sunrise to sunset, drinking no water and eating no food, and refrain from smoking or engaging in activities that are considered to be excessive. My arrival in Morocco happened to be during the second week of the month of Ramadan, giving me am-

ple time to observe the traditions and lifestyle associated with this holiday. I talked with Muslims about their commitment to Ramadan, participated in the celebratory festival and even tried fasting myself for a few days.

At first, I was frustrated that the beginning of my study abroad experience was marked by such a quiet month in Rabat, as most restaurants and shops were closed during the day and people often stayed at or worked from home. Not that this really mattered, as I was spending six hours a day in a classroom studying the Moroccan dialect of Arabic. But when my friends and I would take our lunch breaks, we found the city deserted and ate potato chips, ice cream or candy from the one corner hanoot that was open. A hanoot, in the simplest of terms, is a closet-sized convenience store stocking everything from telephone cards to cigarettes to fresh-squeezed orange juice. If any sort of fire code was in place, the hanoot would really only be able to allow one, at best two, customers in at a time—but alas there always seemed to be at least a dozen people squeezing their way from the front to the back and tossing dirhams to the

owner when he shouted out the price for the items (which he adjusted to his liking). After a few days of this pattern, combined with my sedentary lifestyle of studying Arabic in the classroom all day, my pants were getting a little too tight for comfort, which was aptly timed with my Moroccan family's challenge for me to try to fast with them. It was a dare. And it was on.

I woke up the first morning of my fast ready for battle. I had built up the reserves the night before, eating late into the night to make sure I had sustenance for the next day. I was distracted with classes for most of the day, but by mid-afternoon, I was beginning to hit a wall. Dehydration was sinking in quickly, and the hot, dry climate was making my yearning for a big class of ice-cold water even stronger. Somehow, I lasted a few more hours without caving and caught the last bus to make it home around 6pm, just as the sun was beginning to lower into the horizon. The minutes prior to the setting of the sun (which marks the time when everyone can break their fast for the day) are extremely frantic, as hungry drivers are rushing home for their evening meal, busses stop running and

Ramadan in Morocco

families scuttle to make sure the food is prepared for the Iftour meal. At home, I sat patiently next to my cousin, Dad and two younger sisters, who were, like I was, eyeing the harira (vegetable soup), shebakkia (honey and sesame twists), spooif (highly concentrated mix-

“I woke up the first morning of my fast ready for battle. I had built up the reserves the night before, eating late into the night to make sure I had sustenance for the next day.”

ture of fiber) and other delicacies that were practically screaming our names. At last, we heard the Imam make the call to prayer at sunset, so we began to eat. After the older men in my family had broken the fast by having a date, an egg or a small serving of some food, they would go to the Mosque for the evening prayer. Some men or women

will pray in their homes immediately after breaking the fast, while others would wait until eating this meal before going to pray.

After the Iftour meal, I watched some Moroccan soap operas with my family, which were to become our nightly ritual along with games of charades when I could not understand or express myself in Arabic, which was so often that I am now a renowned charades expert. For the rest of that night, we played cards, they helped me with my Arabic homework, and we talked and enjoyed each other’s company until about midnight when, lo and behold, another meal appeared. This meal, considered the official “dinner”, would typically be heavier than the Iftour meal, such as a chicken tagine, cous-cous or kefta. We would eat from a communal serving platter or bowl, using bread to serve ourselves, as opposed to utensils. After indulging in this second evening meal, and just when I thought I could not eat even one more morsel of food, my Mom brought out the most colorful selection of fresh fruits that I had ever seen. There were pomegranates, tangerines, apples, plums and bananas galore, so I con-

ceded to nibble on some while sipping my mint tea, figuring I would need sustenance for the day to come anyways.

I fasted for two more days, each of which was easier than the one before it. Even though I did not fast for the entire period, I did try to be more introspective during this time (and beyond it), as this is a main tenet of Ramadan. Muslims fast with the intention of purifying themselves and building a stronger relationship with God. In restricting themselves from eating and engaging in unnecessary or tainted behaviors, they are able to better focus on their commitment to God and being the best people they can be. Although I am not particularly religious, I appreciated experiencing this important holiday in Morocco and found the dedication of everyone around me to be especially moving.



A typical Iftour dinner.

Why South Africa?

By Casey Reck '11
CIEE Cape Town, South Africa (Fall 2009)

Sitting in LAX with my mom the day of my departure for South Africa I was having serious doubts. When asked if I was excited, I replied, "I'm kind of wishing I had not picked a place that is so unusual." My mom reminded me that I had decided on the University of Cape Town precisely because it is different. Once I landed in South Africa, I never again doubted my decision.

"Although whites are still wary of entering a township, I never experienced anything but warm treatment while in Philipi. The young children whom I coached in baseball were enthusiastic and playful with me. Even though I was one of five white people in the township, I never once felt unsafe."

Even though I had been to Africa before, I was unsure of what to expect. The fact that people kept reminding me the rape and AIDS statistics for South Africa did not help either. The standard response to where I chose to study abroad was, "Why South Africa?" Only now can I truly explain why I chose that amazing country.

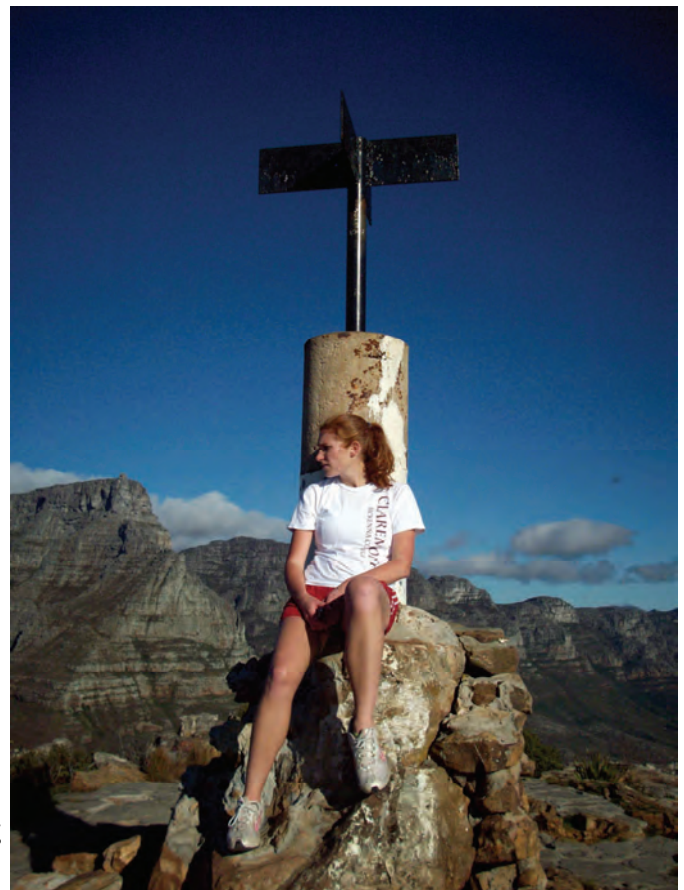
One incredible aspect of living in South Africa was my ability to learn about apartheid. Since apartheid only ended in the early 1990s, practically every South African I came in contact with had lived through it. To be able to hear first hand from a coloured family about forced removals, from a black housemate about being the first member of her family to go to college, and an Afrikaners girl about her parents reaction to her bringing home a coloured friend was extremely enlightening.

Besides being able to talk to

South Africans of all races about their experiences, I volunteered in an all black township on the Cape Flats. Although whites are still wary of entering a township, I never experienced anything but warm treatment while in Philipi. The young children whom I coached in baseball were enthusiastic and playful with me. Even though I was one of five white people in the township, I never once felt unsafe.

In addition to all the culture I was able to absorb while in Cape Town, I also took every opportunity to travel, doing activities I never dreamed I would have. Among some of my highlights are riding an ostrich, white shark cage diving, attending South African braais (bbqs), watching a jam-packed rugby match, doing the world's highest bungee jump, hiking Table Mountain, canoeing in the Okavango Delta, and white water rafting down the Zambezi River in class five rapids.

South Africa is a place where I was able to learn about and experience a life that many Americans either have no idea about or have misconceptions about. The friendships I made, the food I ate, Township Baseball, my classes, and the trips I took truly changed my perspective on South Africa. These experiences were not only fun, but have also influenced me as a person. I now feel more comfortable taking risks, more open to unusual opportunities, and more informed about South Africa. Going abroad not only changed my perspective on South Africa, but on other countries deemed unsafe or uncivilized as well.



On top of the Lion's Head in Cape Town.

So why South Africa? Because I could learn about a country I was unfamiliar with; I could live in a place still going through an incredible transformation; I could do activities most people will never have the opportunity to try; and because it was different. The very reason I was hesitant about leaving turned out to be the reason I, and everyone else in my program, fell in love with South Africa.

Breaking the Language Barrier

By Jenna Suttmeier '11
IES Madrid, Spain (Spring 2010)

As I boarded the plane to Spain, it just seemed like another plane ride to Claremont. That is, until fifteen hours, two meals, and a snack later, the pilot came over the loud speaker and started talking in Spanish. *Spanish*. And I realized I only understood about five words. *Uh-oh*. So off the plane I went to meet the program staff, my head filled with uncertainties and broken Spanish. Between the airport, the taxi, and the hotel, I may have said three words.

I had barely survived my first encounters, but the next was the most important one: meeting my host mom. I nervously said hello, aware that this was the woman I would be living with for the next four months. The long taxi ride with her was relatively silent and I had *no* idea what to talk about. It seemed everything I had ever learned was left at home—social skills and all. Once we arrived at our apartment, I quickly discovered that the Spanish talk very loud and fast, with an accent much different from American professors. As time passed, I started to relax a bit, and before I knew it, I had survived my first day.

The immersion continued. Little by little, I experienced more encounters. I quickly became a pro at ordering drinks and “tapas;” I was immediately thrown into the party scene of Madrid in an attempt to make friends and get to know the hundred and twenty other American students in the program.

Other issues came up, such as buying a cell phone. I felt confident in my ability to hold a conversation about some things, but realized that I did not have the vocabulary to properly buy a phone. However, after a few minutes of panic and long, drawn out explanations, trying to articulate in Spanish what would come so easily to me in English, the saleswoman got me exactly what I needed. I walked away slightly flustered, but satisfied.

I have been here almost two

months now, and over time, those random conversations have become much easier. I can now understand my host

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mom much better, and we have moderately intellectual conversations over lunch. The feeling of accomplishment after carrying out an in-depth conversation makes the mental effort completely worth it.

While I have improved quite a bit, I sometimes get frustrated at how much I have *not* improved. It is too easy to resort back to English when surrounded by Americans in my program. My roommate and I try to speak in Spanish to each other, but that takes a lot of patience at the end of the day. At

this rate, I don't see myself becoming near fluent by the end of the semester.

On the bright side, there are plenty of ways to further immerse myself with a little effort. I have signed up for an exchange program in which we are matched up with Spanish students wanting to learn English. We will meet for an hour or so a week, literally exchanging languages. Furthermore, I am enrolled in a class at the Spanish university in which I am forced to participate amongst native Spanish students. I also try to talk with my host mom as much as possible. Traveling and additional classes have lessened the frequency of these conversations, making the time we do have together all the more valuable.

My advice to future study abroad students is if you are going to a country to learn a language, strive to immerse yourself. Take advantage of every opportunity to speak the language, otherwise you will be kicking yourself when you go back to the States and you've improved more in English than you have in your foreign language.



A bird's-eye view of Madrid.

Whose Identity is it Anyway?

By Julia Gueron '11
Middlebury Bordeaux, France
(Academic Year 2009-2010)

It goes without saying that the U.S. has its fair share of critics in France. So it didn't surprise me that one day, an acquaintance of mine asked me what it feels like for me to always have to defend it. She had been picked in class by a professor seeking the opinion of someone from the United States to (unfairly) sum up the views of 308 million people for the umpteenth time today, and it was starting to bug her.

What makes this situation particular is that 1) she is Canadian, and 2), as a citizen of the U.S., I, have never

“Upon arrival in France, I found myself having a national identity crisis in a country having one of its own.”

been asked to speak for my country.

The tendency of some professors here to seek an opinion of someone from the United States and point to white females or males (some, as mentioned above, not even from the U.S.) as I pass under the radar was at first a bitter pill to swallow. In some ways, I understand. As a half-Japanese, half-Israeli American with a Catalan last name who doesn't have the image of the American flag tattooed on my forehead, my nationality may not be apparent. I realized how crystallized some foreigners' image of what Americans should look, talk and think like, was – and that I did not necessarily fit the criteria. As a result, studying abroad

allowed me to strengthen my national identity as a citizen of mixed race.

Upon arrival in France, I found myself having a national identity crisis in a country having one of its own. Last year, a series of debates on “national identity” and what it means to be French was launched by the government. With a series of political scandals, some saw the debates as a tool of distraction that unfairly target citizens and immigrants of Maghreb origin (The “burka ban” is still a sensitive issue here).

Personally, I question these series of debates. My experience here has made me realize that national identity is not something that can be discussed, agreed upon and stamped with a government seal, nor is it the same for everyone. It is shaped by years of experience, our friends, our family and, especially in this case, our travels. Living in the United States has made me see diversity as something intuitive, a part of my life, making my American experience different from yours. Especially after my time here studying abroad, I find it beautiful that we can celebrate these differences rather than looking to the government to organize debates to define one notion of who we are – something that I fear in the long run may lead to more division than unity.

These days, I often find myself thinking of a hot, humid summer day two years ago, when I accompanied my mother to her citizenship ceremony. As I looked into the crowd of people gathered to start the first day of the rest of their lives as Americans, I couldn't help but imagine the stories of each person in the room. They were a group of strangers with so much in common, gathered together at this golf resort in San Gabriel only to disperse afterwards, continuing to color the canvas of our country.



Definitely not French: Julia enjoys her time in Bordeaux.

Acquiring citizenship brought about rather subtle changes in my mother's character – she is the same beautiful, courageous woman she was the day before her ceremony. I, myself, will leave France more independent and intelligent, and hopefully with a better sense of fashion. My experience here was life-changing, but in the end, it will just be just one in a series that will continue to shape me as a student, a daughter, a friend... and as an American.

A Case for British Pub Culture

By Alice Lyons '11
Hertford College, Oxford, England
(Academic Year 2009-2010)

Traveling abroad always alerts me of the pervasiveness of American culture. The USA exports more than corn and steel: Above all, it exports a culture. Even in Oxford, a final bastion of Old Britain, Americanness makes

“One of the greatest things about pubs though, is that there is no obligation. You don’t have to buy a lot, and a single pint means you can claim a table (if one is available) and nurse it for as long as you like.”

itself known. Most of the movies here are out of Hollywood, McDonald’s is always crowded, and if you stand on the right corner you can see 4 Starbucks franchises, all with free coffee refills. Though I’m not complaining about all that, I would like to see a bit of the reverse... there are a few things that the US would do well to import from our Uncle England: heated towel racks, puff pastry pies, Crunchies, and above all, **the pub**.

Pubs are a staple in England, and in Oxford there are about ten different pub crawl paths you’ll never finish. But pubs, real pubs, are almost completely absent from American streets. Sure, you’ll see the odd Irish or novelty pub, but being a pub takes more than the name and wood paneling. “Pub” also connotes a tradition that pervades everything from the beer to the architecture of the real thing.

Pubs serve food and drinks, and they are good at both. The food is hearty, delicious (usually they have some of those puff pastry pies!) and well-priced. Good pubs have a wide selection of beers, often local and usu-

ally high quality. They also serve cider, another British innovation that really ought to make its way across the Pond. I’m not sure what exactly is in cider, but it tastes like $\frac{3}{4}$ apple juice, $\frac{1}{4}$ beer, and it is the perfect choice for those of us who still feel like we should be drinking out of a juice box.

And pubs, or at least the pubs in Oxford and London, are positively labyrinthine, and there is always more room in them than first appears. One staple Oxford pub, the Eagle and Child, (the old favorite of the “Inklings,” the intellectual gang to which C S Lewis and J R R Tolkien belonged), looks small from the outside. Even once you walk in, it is just a few tables wedged into window nooks, plus a room with a till and the bar. But once you get there, there is another hallway with a standing bar, then a room with a few tables, and keep going and you’ll be in the old converted backyard, now a warm and large indoor space that still has a glass greenhouse roof over the tables. Another Oxford classic, the Turf (where, legendarily, Bill Clinton “did not inhale” when studying as a Rhodes scholar), can only be accessed by wandering down a narrow alley wedged between colleges. Once there, you step through a low doorway into one of about four small pubbish rooms (the tautological adjective is really the only way to describe them), and there are two beer gardens where flannel-clad students huddle around wrought iron rubbish bins converted into miniature fireplaces. Even though I’ve spent quite a few evenings at the Turf, I’m still not sure I’ve seen all of it. I imagine there is a trapdoor in the floor somewhere leading to a secret wine cellar.

One of the greatest things about pubs though, is that there is no obligation. You don’t have to buy a lot, and a single pint means you can claim a table (if one is available) and nurse it for as long as you like. I’ve heard that pubs were originally places for people to crowd together and stay warm during



Some of the options available at the pub.

cold English winters (because it was too expensive to keep your house well-heated), and their function is still primarily social. Sure, they are a good place to grab a cheap bite or a good drink, but they really exist as a place to get together with friends and have a good conversation.

We don’t really have an equivalent in the States: Restaurants are for eating, bars are for drinking, and clubs are for... whatever clubs are for. But a place where you can just have a good bite, good beer, and great company? That function still belongs exclusively to the British pub.

More from the UK

By Katherine Wernet '11
Arcadia, University College London, England
(Spring 2010)

Not being one for foreign languages, I opted for the United Kingdom; the lazy man's abroad. It would suit me just fine. Sure, I might have to deal with the occasional spelling difference, but it would basically be America with charming quirks. My plan was to simply use English stereotypes from movies to get by. Hollywood had taught me plenty. Here, I would thrive!

Lesson 1: The English drive on the other side of the road

I figured this would be a difference that wouldn't affect me. I do not drive here, however, I do cross streets – and not well I might add. There's just no way to understand what these cars are doing. People are making turns all

over the place with no notice and it's anybody's guess who has the right of way. That's me walking into oncoming traffic. I'm the one gasping in horror as the bus hurtles toward me. The most insulting part of it all is that I appear to be the sole individual struggling with this. Every day I watch as other pedestrians safely cross. Some of them are even jay-walking.

Lesson 2: The food is bad

Kidney pies, bangers and mash, mushy peas – these are foods that do not appeal to me. Engaged in a never ending quest for edible snacks here, block after block proves disappointing as even formerly familiar sandwiches fall under the English curse. Best I can tell the English prefer their sustenance bland and expensive. While I hate to admit it, I may have frequented the Subway a few times.

Lesson 3: There's an accent

I would be lying if I claimed to have been unimpressed with the other passengers' inflection on the plane over. For the first few days I was a grinning fool, positively reveling in this foreign land's way of talking. "Could you repeat that?" I'd find myself asking my partners in conversation. I knew what they'd said, of course; I just wanted to drink it in once more. I have been trying to sneak in a few British sayings into my awkwardly American vernacular, but wind up looking the fool.

I might not have street smarts, a full stomach, or the knowledge of when to say "cheers" yet, but I am loving every moment of life in London. I am visiting places I have read about in books, living in the same neighborhood as Dickens and Darwin did before me. And, one of these days, it's not even going to rain.

This is Your Grandfather's Taillevent

By Trevor Felch '11
Sarah Lawrence College, Paris, France
(Spring 2010)

In the world of gastronomy, there are certain restaurant names that surpass merely being a name that represents luxury, exquisite haute cuisine, and peerless service. For those of us obsessed with the food world, it doesn't get any bigger than Taillevent. In fact, not only does Taillevent have its own Wikipedia page, but it is such an important culinary pilgrimage that the book [1000 Places To See Before You Die](#) has an entire section devoted to the restaurant. It's a different species, a different mindset since it is arguably the most famous restaurant of the 20th century.

However, we're now 10 years into the 21st century and Taillevent isn't. André Vrinat opened Taillevent in a former location in 1946 and the restaurant possessed 3 Michelin stars (the holy grail for any restaurant) between 1973 and 2007. It's not bad to have 2

Michelin stars, but for Taillevent, it was an insult. How could Taillevent, that magical venue of sheer perfection have a faux pas? The trouble continued with the death of Jean Claude Vrinat, the longtime owner and son of the founder. Now, the third generation is at the helm with Jean Claude's daughter Valerie in charge.

In the recent *New York Times* article on Taillevent and La Tour D'Argent, another famous Paris gastronomic institution, Valerie Vrinat was quoted as saying that Chef Solivérès is less "avant-garde" than many other Paris chefs because that's what her customers want. That is perfectly fine with me but then if a restaurant elects to go with the traditional approach, then the cuisine must be full of robust flavors that soothe the senses into a tranquil state. Much of the cuisine currently at Taillevent is far too conservative in both style, quantity, and worst of all, flavor. Not only is the menu not very exciting, but the food's taste is often a bit calm.

Risotto with a slight garlic taste proved dull when paired with equally unriveting frog legs. A St. Patrick's Day green sorrel sauce with sweetbreads did nothing to aid the perfectly cooked intestines. Those against haute cuisine restaurants always point to the dainty portions as reasons they are not worth the money. Well, Taillevent was the first of these gastronomic temples I've been to where I actually felt like the portions were indeed too diminutive. I understand the importance of savoring these ingredients but...there's a fine line. Deserts were up and down- a sublime chocolate and coffee tart but also a boring mille-feuille with a too plain vanilla cream in between crunchy puff pastry.

Let's give Taillevent another chance for perfection, but then again, a restaurant of its stature should be perfection every time for every diner. Sadly, as much as I was rooting for Taillevent, it was wonderful, but not perfection.

A Bogan Cruise on Lake Tinaroo

By Shanna Hoversten '11
Arcadia, James Cook University, Australia
(Fall 2009)

Australians are some of the friendliest people in the world. Incidentally, this was one of the primary reasons I chose to study abroad in Cairns, Australia (in addition to the fact that Cairns is the gateway city to the Great Barrier Reef and the Daintree rainforest) – but there was no way of my knowing, short of actually going, how extremely hospitable, talkative, and genuine the Aussies really are. Strike up a conversation with someone on the bus and they will invite you over to their beachside house that night for a ‘barbie’ (BBQ). Express some curiosity over the snorkel coming out of the engine on their ‘ute’ (utility vehicle) and they will beckon you to jump on the side so that they can drive the car, with you on it, through a croc infested river just so you can get an authentically Aussie experience. Wander off the tourist track into the rain forest and you may find a lonely cattle rancher who will let you camp on his land; he will even help you build a campfire and bring down a six-pack of XXXX (Queensland’s favorite beer). I ran into all of these things and so many more,

but my most memorable Aussie encounter by far was on Lake Tinaroo when a stranger took me and my group of friends out on his boat.

“Lake Tinaroo is located forty-five minutes Southwest of Cairns in the Atherton Tablelands, and is famed for the world-record sized Barramundi that are routinely caught there.”

Lake Tinaroo is located forty-five minutes Southwest of Cairns in the Atherton Tablelands, and is famed for the world-record sized Barramundi that are routinely caught there. We had decided to go there for what promised to be an exciting fishing trip, but after three hours without even a nibble we started packing up our gear. Just as we were about to leave, we ran into a local, and inevitably started talking. He got a big kick out of our fishing endeavor; apparently Barramundi don’t bite at all in the wintertime, as any local knows, explaining our lack of action and the fact that we were the only people fishing on the entire lake.

After mercilessly poking fun at us (Aussies are notorious for giving anyone and everyone a hard time), our new friend Lachlan offered to salvage our trip by taking us out on his boat for a cruise around the lake. For the next two hours he cruised us four foreigners around the lake as we drank wine, watched the sun set, and chatted about what it was like to grow up in the bogan-land (a bogan is an Australian redneck) of Tinaroo. I didn’t think the night could possibly get any better, but it did as we all watched the full moon actually rise over the dark water – it was one of the most magical things I have ever seen.

It was incredible to me that a perfect stranger would go out on such a limb to show us what his hometown was all about, and ultimately leave me with such an amazing memory. I got so much more than I expected out of my Australian experience just by making small talk with cattle ranchers, commercial fishermen, wild pig hunters, and sugar cane farmers than I ever would have just by meeting students. The Australians surprised me and intrigued me every day, and made me believe even more strongly that the people really do make the place.

1, 774

By Joycelyn Ho '11
Columbia, Tsinghua University, Beijing, China (Spring 2010)

On the screen is an image of a middle-aged woman lying naked on the ground with certain body parts strategically covered. From her swollen face and bruises, you can tell that she has been severely beaten. There is a tangible silence in the lecture hall, as if every one of the two hundred students who are watching has stopped breathing. The image changes to a camera from the sixties. It takes a picture. The camera dial rebounds with an audible click. We are shown footage of an old man whose face is etched with sorrow. He

stares right at us. He is here to tell a story.

The middle-aged woman in the video is Bian Zhongyun. She was the Vice Principal of a girls high school affiliated with Beijing Normal University. In 1966, Bian Zhongyun became the first of 1,774 victims of the Red Guards – Teenagers, mostly students, enacted his or her own version of the revolution. Students from her high school tortured her. She died of her injuries.

After her death, taunts and derogatory slogans were pasted on all the doors of her residence. She had four children at the point of her death.

The old man in the story is her

husband, Wang Jingyao. On the second day of her death he bought the camera and took the pictures of her dead body. He kept her blood stained clothes and the posters on the doors. They remained there for years. Wang preserved history when others sought to destroy it.

Every week in my Cultural Revolution class at Tsinghua University, we are shown a documentary after a lecture. Our professor lectures at a speed I can barely follow, but the documentaries shown after are always clear. History is subjective, and is only a distorted reflection of reality, but I have found, a barely distorted image, despite all types of censorship that exists here, a reflection of reality.



Courtney Dem '10 in Dharmasala, India (above) and Francesca Ioffreda '10 in Argentina (right).

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Moose Halpern '10 with a llama.