Authors: Becca Rosenthal ‘15, Maya Sandalow ‘15, Midori Ishizuka ‘15, Evan Soll ‘15, Kelly Chan ‘15, Jake Shimkus ‘15
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Life on Two Sides of the Jordan River

By Becca Rosenthal ‘15

SIT Jordan: Modernization & Social Change (Fall 2013); University of Haifa (Spring 2014)

I chose to spend my junior year in the Middle East, exploring the various narratives that surround the Israeli-Palestinian and Israeli-Arab conflicts. It was not my first time in the region. Raised as an American Jew, I spent six weeks in Israel in high school, and a year in Israel before starting college. I know Israel and its narrative well, and there’s something about the place that has always been special to me. A piece of me belongs to that land. However, as I spent more time getting to know the non-Jewish/Israeli narratives regarding Israel, I began asking questions.

As pro-Israel as I was, even I couldn’t ignore the reports I read in the news, heard about from friends, and saw in movies. Israel, this country that I had been head over heels in love with, was failing my expectations. It was failing me. I decided that in order to sort out my feelings, I needed to truly dive into the multiple narratives surrounding Israel’s existence and actions.

I spent a semester in Amman, Jordan, and then a semester in Haifa, Israel. What better way to analyze a complicated situation than to throw myself into it and think, feel, and learn about the situation around me? On September 1, 2013, I took off my Jewish star necklace, replaced it with a hamsa (an important symbol for both Jews and Muslims), and climbed aboard a plane to Jordan.

Although I am ashamed to say this, I have to admit that on that plane, surrounded by women wearing hijabs and men wearing kuffiyahs, I was nervous. Though these women and men were carrying babies, sadly, I felt anxious. I realized that I had been conditioned to be afraid of Arabs as a person that grew up in post-9/11 America. It was time for me to get over that.

A few days into the start of my homestay program, they told me that I would be living with a Palestinian family, and I was instantly confused—I had asked them to not place me with people that hate Jews. No Palestinians would want a Jewish student to live in their home, right? I really thought this. That expectation could not have been further from the truth. By the end of dinner on the first night, my host family knew that I was Jewish and that I had been to Israel. And it was no “broblem”—they could never say the letter “p.”
While in Jordan, I conducted a research project that investigated the Right of Return, one of the most complicated issues preventing a comprehensive peace agreement from being reached between Israeli and Palestinian governments. During interviews, I forgot everything the Israel advocacy community had taught me and I listened. I listened as people told me that the Holocaust was a conspiracy theory to get world sympathy on the side of the Jews. I listened as people told me that the Jews should just go back to Germany where they came from. And then I listened as people told me that they will not give up their Right of Return as long as Jews have the ability to go on programs like Birthright. I listened as people told me that they don’t want to see what their birth cities have become since being Judaized. I listened as people told me that they will never move out of refugee camps and turn their backs on Palestine, but they do not believe they will ever see their true home. And I listened as people told me that they will never give up on the Right of Return but would also not take it if it were offered to them. The nuances in peoples’ perspectives amazed me. It was time for me to go back to Israel and develop my own nuance.

As I transitioned from the fall semester to the spring, I was thinking about the fates of two men born in the year 1960. In February of 1960, my Jewish father was born in New York, and in March of the same year, my Jordanian-Muslim host father was born in Silwan, East Jerusalem. As a young child, my American dad’s family moved from New York to Phoenix. As a young child, my host dad’s family was forced to leave their home during the Six Day War, and they resettled in Amman. As a Jew, my American father can legally buy my host dad’s house, as East Jerusalem is controlled by Israel; as a Palestinian refugee, my host dad is not allowed to return and even see his childhood home. Like my father, I am Jewish, and therefore I have the right to visit, study, and even live in Israel/Palestine if I so choose. For now, I just choose to study there.

To say the least, when my plane touched down in Israel this January, I was feeling a lot of feelings. So much of what I wanted to do this school year was about understanding both narratives, but I didn’t realize how emotionally invested I would become in the Palestinian-Jordanian narrative or how emotionally difficult I would find it to return to Israel. Instead of seeing Israel through the rose-colored lens of my Zionist upbringing, I’m looking at Israel now through a pseudo-Arab lens. Israel is suddenly this place that represents pain, loss, anguish, unfairness, and struggle.
So, as I began my semester here, I thought my goal was simple: to sort out these feelings. I went from the airport to my extended family’s house in Ma’ale Adumim and of course, to make things more complicated, they live in a settlement. They’ve lived there for over 30 years, and as far as Israel (and my family) is concerned it’s not really a settlement—it’s a suburb of Jerusalem. They live there along with 40,000 other Israelis. Am I supposed to suddenly hate them because they live in a city where their government allows them to live?

On my first night in Israel, I wanted to post a Facebook status that simply said I’ve arrived in Israel. But I couldn’t get myself to do it. Where was I? Was I in Israel or was I in Palestine? I was over the green line. I posted and said I’d arrived safely—I didn’t say a country. The question of what country I am in did not end on that night. It has carried over with me all semester. I’ve sort of figured out where I am now: I am in Haifa.

As of 1948, Haifa is in the State of Israel. Therefore, Becca is in Israel.

Oh wait. My dorm is a suite, and I have three Druze suite-mates. The Druze religion is like the Jewish religion in that the religion and its people can exist and live in any state. They have Israeli passports, but they are Arab. If you ask them if they are Israeli, they say yes, but it’s complicated. If you ask if they are Palestinian, they say no, but it’s complicated. If you ask if they are Arab, they say sort of, but it’s complicated. My Druze suite-mates are in Israel.

Oh wait! I also have a Muslim suite-mate, named Miriam. She holds an Israeli passport and acknowledges that the State of Israel exists and is a reality here. But, when asked where she is from, she does not say Israel—she says the name of her village. I haven’t pressed her on it, but based on other Muslim students I’ve talked to here, I would guess she would say she is from Palestine. Miriam is in Palestine.

Oh wait! My friend Amir lives a few buildings over from me. He is a Muslim from Haifa who went to Jewish schools, not Arab schools. He considers himself a Palestinian, although he holds an Israeli Passport, and his Hebrew is better than his Arabic. He would say that right now, we are in Israel, but he wants it to be Palestine.

But, oh wait! My friend Assad lives with Amir. He is a Druze from Haifa who served in the Israeli Army. He considers himself a Palestinian Israeli, notices that he scares strangers by speaking Arabic on public buses, and would say that Haifa is in Israel.

And, oh wait! I haven’t talked to my Jordanian host family since being here, but if I were to see them, I guarantee they would ask me how I’m doing in Palestine. Yes, they would say, there is country that calls itself Israel—but the land is the land of Palestine.
What is the point of all of this? What have I learned spending my year abroad in the Middle East? I can’t say I know the answer to either of those questions yet. What I can say, though, is that being here for the year has allowed me to see the Arab-Israeli conflict from multiple perspectives and has given me a broader set of tools with which to ask new questions about this conflict and other complex situations.

Not only do my rose-colored lenses no longer exist, but also I cannot see any of the different viewpoints around me as entirely right or wrong. What I now see are human beings on all sides of the issues dealing with personal and communal trauma caused by a conflict that is larger than they are, a conflict that causes them to occasionally act in ways that are neither consistent with their idealistic views of the world or their own self interests.

With this year now under my belt, I believe more strongly than ever in the importance of the human connection that two people can have when they meet. People have an amazing capacity to set aside their preconceived notions and prejudices and interact together as only human beings can do. In my opinion, governments cannot make peace—only people can do that. I don’t know what this means for the future of the Israeli-Arab situation, but this experience has changed my outlook on it. I am stronger for having stepped outside of my comfort zone and critically questioned some of my own beliefs. I hope to continue challenging my identity and assumptions as I return to CMC to finish college and go on with my life.

“What I now see are human beings on all sides of the issues dealing with personal and communal trauma caused by a conflict that is larger than they are, a conflict that causes them to occasionally act in ways that are neither consistent with their idealistic views of the world or their own self interests.”
I chose the Middlebury program, which relies upon a strict language pact, because I have longed for years to be conversationally fluent in Spanish. I hope to be able to interact freely and professionally in both English and Spanish. Six weeks into my Middlebury program in Montevideo, I can’t seem to speak either language. The US exchange students at my university joke that as our Spanish improves our English seems to be deteriorating. I find myself at a loss for advanced structure when I sit down to write an application, and I constantly confuse “whose” and “who’s” or “know” and “no” when catching up with friends on Facebook. As a testament to my fluctuating brain, I chose to write this piece in Spanish and offer an awkward English translation.

“Pues, vos no podés jugar fútbol porque sos mujer.” Casi la primera frase que salió de la boca de mi padre uruguayo, después de mi llegada al país. No podía entender ni la gramática, el Río de la Plata usa el “voseo”, ni el contexto donde una mujer no puede hacer lo que quiera. Una de mis primeras observaciones del comportamiento de los uruguayos fue la transparencia. O sea, los ciudadanos dicen lo que observan y no esconden sus observaciones. Mi madre uruguaya contesta el teléfono con “hola flaca” o “hola gordita” dependiendo de la persona al otro lado. Todos los ciudadanos llaman a un politólogo famoso como “Sordo González”. Los características de las personas, si ellos desean o no, definan a cada persona como si fueran apodos alternativos.

De la vista de un extranjero, los dos países se quedan en extremos opuestos. Los uruguayos dicen los apodos “flaca”, “gorda”, y “Sordo González” con un sentido de cariño mientras que los estadounidenses a veces tienen una hipersensibilidad que puede esconder la expresión real. Al otro lado, a veces las llamadas tienen la habilidad de hacer daño. A mí me encanta jugar deportes, y cuando mi padre uruguayo expresa su opinión sobre el papel de una mujer, me ofende mucho que él no crea que yo tenga la habilidad ni la privilegia de jugar.

Con la distancia creada de un artículo, tengo la libertad de decir mis opiniones sobre esta diferencia entre las dos culturas. En la vida real, esta libertad es mucho más reservada. La vida de una extranjera es muy frágil. Entre pocos días, la extranjera naturalmente observa cosas en la cultura nueva que no existen en su propio país, y trata de respetar los costumbres y asimilarse la cultura nueva. Pero, a veces estos costumbres contradicen las creencias del extranjero. ¿Debe decir algo, mantener silencio, o fingir a cambiar? ¿Es mejor dar atención a las diferencias o tratar de actuar como si no las fueran?
“But, you can’t play soccer... you’re a girl.” This was almost the first phrase that came out of the mouth of my Uruguayan father upon my arrival to the country. I lacked the ability to understand the “voseo” structure, unique to Uruguay and Argentina, as well as the ability to understand a context in which a female does not have equal rights. One of the first observations of Uruguayan culture was the transparency. That is to say, the citizens say what they observe and do not hide their observations. My host mom answers the telephone with “hey skinny” or “hey fatty,” depending on the person on the other end. Everyone calls a famous political scientist “Deaf Gonzalez.” The characteristics of the people, whether they like it or not, define each person as if they were alternative nicknames.

From the viewpoint of a foreigner, the two countries lie on opposite extremes. Uruguayans use nicknames such as “fatty,” “skinny,” and “Deaf Gonzalez” with a sense of affection, while people in the states sometimes have a hypersensitivity that can hide true expression. On the other hand, sometimes these names have the ability to be hurtful. I love to play sports, and when my host father expresses his opinion about the role of a woman, it offends me that he does not believe I have the ability, nor the privilege, to play.

With the distance created by an article, I have the liberty to state my opinion about the differences between cultures. In real life, this liberty is much more reserved. The life of a foreigner is very fragile. Within a few days, a foreigner naturally observes things in the new culture that do not exist in his/her own country, and tries to respect the customs and assimilate to the new culture. That being said, at times these customs contradict the beliefs of the foreigner. Should he/he say something, stay silent, or pretend to change? Is it better to bring attention to the differences or try to act as if they do not exist?

“One of the first observations of Uruguayan culture was the transparency.”
A Personal Reflection to the Captain

By Midori Ishizuka ‘15

SEA Semester: Sustainability in Polynesian Island Cultures & Ecosystems

From our first introductions in Woods Hole, I realized that my personal motivations to participate in this program were different from the responses of my peers when we were asked, “Why did you decide to do SEA?” When applying, I had never before been interested in sailing, was not in love with the ocean, and did not want to study anything remotely related to marine biology or nautical science. I had only lived in big cities my entire life and my friends and family would never describe me as the “outdoorsy” type. Because of its unconventionality, I always thought a program like SEA Semester was something only the “coolest,” most adventurous people would partake in. I come from a very organized, non-spontaneous family; therefore, although I have always yearned for a venturesome experience, I never thought it reasonable, acceptable, or fitting to pursue one. SEA was the type of program I assumed I would never be able to do, so, of course, I wanted to apply.

While there are many things I love about myself, I have to admit that one of my greatest flaws is my lack of confidence; I often doubt my own admirable qualities or abilities. My life can be fraught with unnecessary anxieties that hold me back from embracing my strengths, fulfilling my goals, and pursuing my passions with fervor and perseverance. By participating in SEA, I felt that I was consciously making an effort to overcome my self-inhibiting tendencies. SEA semester gave me the chance to dive headfirst into the personal challenge of inexperience. First, I had no nautical or marine-related experience and did not fit the mold of what I felt was the typical SEA student. Also, while I had always found the ocean alluring, I was also slightly afraid of its immense power and vastness. I came into the program hoping that I would be able to create a loving relationship with something I once feared and that this accomplishment would instill in me a sense of achievement and independence that I want and need in order to grow as a person.

“SEA semester gave me the chance to dive headfirst into the personal challenge of inexperience.”

1 SEA Semester (not Semester at Sea!) began with a month of classes in Woods Hole, MA, before we headed to sea for six weeks. My specific SPICE program (Sustainability in Polynesian Island Cultures and Ecosystems) concluded with a final shore component in the Papeno’o Valley of Tahiti.
Today, at the completion of our sea component, I can say without hesitation that I have indeed been challenged. I’ve felt uncomfortable, anxious, nauseous, scared, and confused. I hate to admit that I still desire air-conditioning, clean sheets, and a non-navy-style shower. I did mind getting dirty because I fell in mud on a hike (unlike others, who could wade in mud all day), I hate cleaning the heads (toilets), and I still don’t understand the functions of the extra equipment we attach to the carousel. I’m petrified every time we are about to get underway after a port stop because I know I will feel sick in the future, and when I am sick, I become anxious because I feel like I can’t pull my weight during watch or complete assignments for class.

Yet, despite all the anxieties and difficulties, I am proud of myself, which to me is something new and meaningful. I embraced the mud, survived the lab practical (our big science exam), Cloroxed the **** out of those heads, and JWO-ed two watches without damaging anything or anyone. Furthermore, I now love my makeup-less face and admire my ability to befriend people from all the little “cliques” that formed on the ship. I also wear the “battle scars” I’ve acquired throughout the journey proudly, like the burn on my arm from my day in the galley (kitchen) as assistant steward (cook) and the scrape on my knee from the crazy hike in Nuku Hiva. Looking back, I know that I tried my best and I performed my duties with determination and strength. Acknowledging this has been a huge step for me.

My peers and mentors, who I can now call friends, have helped me exceed my personal expectations. So, why shouldn’t I be proud? I may not have loved every minute of this experience, but I love myself more because of it.

As a sort of epilogue, I’d like to add some thoughts about the program that I have been reflecting upon since I wrote my initial reflection a month ago. I cannot forget the beautiful sunsets, the spectacular stars, and the loving and generous local people we met on our port stops. Despite the challenges of sailing and living aboard the ship, there was much more to this program that I failed to recognize in my piece above, and I feel compelled to write this note to remind myself of what an amazing opportunity this truly was.

2 A navy-style shower is when you turn on the water for a few seconds, turn it off, soap down, and rinse for a few seconds (couple of minutes total). This was just part of the effort to conserve fresh water.

3 During port stops we went on many hikes some of which were very difficult and muddy! Usually they paid off with a spectacular waterfall at the end.

4 The machine we used for science deployments (hydrocasts) to collect water samples at varying depths.

5 I was notorious for seasickness! It was physically uncomfortable and also made me anxious about performing my duties on the ship. “Standing watch” takes about 10 hours and includes navigating, steering, sail handling, boat safety checks, and science lab.

6 “JWO” stands for Junior Watch Officer. As a JWO, a student will take over all responsibilities of the mate during watch and answer directly to the captain. Duties include all navigation and sail-related decisions, collision avoidance with vessels and foul weather, and safety of the ship and your shipmates.
It’s Finally HERE!

By Evan Soll ’15

CET Osaka, Japan: Intensive Japanese Language & Culture Studies

Since I was a kid, I have always been interested in Japan: its language, history, and culture. I’ve dreamed of being able to spend a lot of time here. Finally, here I am. While I love sharing my experience with my friends, I’m careful to say that I’ve discovered something about Japan.

These past few months have not been a series of “cultural discoveries,” which is the image that many people have of study abroad. So when I talk about Japan, I talk about what I learned about myself while living here in Osaka. Before starting my study abroad program, I had plenty of expectations. I thought I’d be living right in downtown Osaka. I thought I would easily be able to spend most of my time speaking Japanese with friends. I also expected to travel almost every weekend. As I expected, Osaka is a city that is fun, friendly, and booming with energy. Except I’m not living in that Osaka. I’m living in a very quiet city outside of Osaka called Suita.

After years of earnestly studying Japanese, while dreaming of the adventures I’d have, they weren’t what I’d expected. The students on my program choose to speak almost no Japanese outside of the classroom. My real environment ended up being isolated from the rest of the college, and then suddenly the college had a two-month vacation. Imagine being on CMC’s campus after exams, practically dead. I felt pretty disappointed. But still, I was determined to make my dream of having a wonderful time living here come true. And so, I adapted to my environment but did not let go of my goals, values, and reason for being here.

“As I expected, Osaka is a city that is fun, friendly, and booming with energy. Except I’m not living in that Osaka. I’m living in a very quiet city outside of Osaka called Suita.”
Every day I get up, read the Japanese newspaper, attend great Japanese and International Relations courses, hang with friends, and speak more and more Japanese with each passing day. If there aren’t many opportunities to speak Japanese in front of me, then I simply make those opportunities. As a result, I’ve never felt like any day was a missed opportunity.

One of the great charms of Japan is riding the phenomenal train system. Trains connect almost the entire country, making travel easy and fun. But as a study abroad student, I realized that there are just too many places to travel and absolutely no rush to try and go everywhere. My favorite trip was going to Tokyo to visit friends and see one of my favorite singers in concert. As soon as I arrived in Tokyo, I got to experience a record snowfall in Tokyo and get interviewed in Japanese by the TV news agency NHK. It was too cool. And then I went to the biggest concert venue I’d ever seen, Yokohama Arena, to see Misia. Misia is my favorite singer and I have to admit that I was in tears during her concert. I could not leave out that detail!

After living in Japan for several months, I am beginning to wonder…what have I learned? Questions like, “Well, what was it like there?” or “What are the people like?” or “Are they friendly?” seem to be silly questions, which don’t tell you almost anything. I have learned to dismiss as many cultural stereotypes as I can here. I have learned how to turn disappointment into opportunity. I’ve learned how to make sushi. 😊

Lots of people study abroad. It’s doesn’t make you better or any more culturally aware. More important than studying abroad, I feel, is to develop a strong sense of cultural sensitivity. Some people can travel, work, and study abroad but never develop that. Study abroad is expensive and it takes you away from Claremont. Do not feel pressured to go because it’s simply in style. If your passion just happens to take you to another country as it took me to Japan, go for it! But above all, don’t lose sight of your passion in the face of unforeseen or challenging circumstances.
Domestic Exchange: From Camp Claremont to Quaker Ethics

By Kelly Chan ‘15

Haverford College Exchange

Two and a half months into my semester at Haverford College, and I am still a regular recipient of many confused looks and questions about why I’m here. To be fair, my version of “study abroad” does not fit the usual definition. While students are usually off in locations like Costa Rica or London, I didn’t even need a passport to fly across the country. At the end of sophomore year, I decided that I wanted a change of pace, and doing a domestic exchange at Haverford seemed to fit the bill. As an international student from Singapore, it was different enough that I could get out of my comfort zone and also fulfill several of my major requirements relatively easily given that Haverford is also an American university.

Looking back now, I think that a part of me had the same reaction people did when they heard I was “studying abroad” on the East Coast. What was I doing here? I went into Haverford with the mindset that things couldn’t be that different, and I completely underestimated how leaving to do a semester in another school would be vastly dissimilar. For one, I was not prepared for the weather. Despite my mother’s constant badgering to buy thermal underwear and thicker coats, I reassured her that I would be fine and make do with layering my California weather-appropriate clothes with bro tanks. I managed to convince myself that this was working out fine despite the continually dropping negative degrees and the record number of snow days Haverford has seen in a decade.

Other things about Haverford’s culture threw me off initially. I had to readjust to “Haverford Time”, which meant that a class starting at 9:30 am would actually start at 9:40 am. Quaker ethics were embodied in their Honor Code of trust and mutual respect, which surprisingly permeated much of every day life. Midterms were often assigned as take-home and un-proctored, there are no RAs in the dorms, and there is a café on campus that is unstaffed – you make your drink and place the money you would pay into a jar. Little differences like these in school culture really stood out to me, and I found myself comparing them to Claremont’s culture and missing it a lot.
While there is merit to leaving the country to study abroad, I think that domestic exchanges are underrated in the sense that no one really thinks things will be that different. What no one tells you is that feelings of not fitting in, being in a unfamiliar school culture, forming friendships, and navigating a new environment are all things you’ll have to deal with without the luxury of having the excuse that you’re “not from around here.” Although I found myself surrounded by people who looked, spoke, and dressed like me, I appreciate that being in a new place forced me to get out of my comfort zone.

“Midterms were often assigned as take-home and un-proctored, there are no RAs in the dorms, and there is a café on campus that is unstaffed – how it works is that you make your drink, and place the money you would pay into a jar.”
Saying Yes! Or How to ‘Dive In’ Abroad!

By Jake Shimkus ‘15

Pitzer in Botswana (Fall 2013); DIS Copenhagen, Denmark (Spring 2014)

Sitting in the study abroad orientation before I left campus, I remember the instructors repeating over and over just how important it was to “dive in” and really “get engaged” with the life and culture of our host countries. When going abroad, everyone will tell you just how important immersion is: just how much fuller your experience will be when you take the time to connect with what’s going on around you. Leading up to the semester, you become incredibly excited to be in a new place, learn a new language, encounter another culture, and gain a whole new group of friends.

Suddenly, you’re there. You arrive in another country, stay in another person’s home, and go about life in another cultural context. Right from the start the adrenaline kicks in: you’re excited and engaged and everything is so incredibly new! But then... it stops. I remember sitting in my host family’s home in a small village in Botswana when the realization hit me: this was... boring. I had a routine: I woke up at 4:30 am to the sound of roosters and dogs, school started at 8:00 am, and after we finished up around 3:00 pm, I was home for an afternoon of chores, some studies, and bed by 7:00 pm or so. Despite living in a small village in rural Africa (about as far and distinct from home as possible), life had somehow become too familiar and “normal” to live up to my high expectations. Here I was, completely cut off from my friends and family, and for what? To do the dishes and attempt to learn a language that no one else had ever heard of? It becomes quite discouraging to say the least.

But then, I discovered something that would completely change my time in both Botswana and later in Denmark: the power of saying “yes.” You see, studying abroad doesn’t mean leaving Claremont to begin a jet-setting whirlwind adventure around the globe. It means picking yourself up and setting up life again in a new and different place. So many of us come into the study abroad experience with high hopes of small adventures and intriguing experiences. Yet these things don’t come to you on a silver platter. You have to seek them out in one way or another. And since “you’re not from around here,” it can seem almost impossible to find those unique opportunities. So the trick of it is to simply say “yes.” I know it sounds a little corny, but playing the Yes Man (or Woman) can literally turn a dull, rote day into one you’ll never forget. I am going to demonstrate what I mean.
One Sunday morning, my host mother woke me up and asked if I’d like to join her at a wedding that morning. I said, “Yes.” The result: I met a guy who decided that I needed to learn how to play the trumpet. I joined him and his band for the morning’s warm-up and got to “play” a bit for the wedding itself. Thereafter, I ended up taking trumpet lessons for a week in the middle of the African Savannah. This only happened because I said “yes” to getting up on a Sunday to go to a wedding.

While working at a local primary school for a few weeks, one of the teachers suggested that I try to teach the students a bit of basketball. I, of course, said, “Yes.” Now, I haven’t played basketball since I was these kids’ age, but with what memory I had of it, I spent each day after classes running drills with the kids. At the end of the three weeks there, they all referred to me as Coach Jakes. Any time I would see any of them in town, they’d come running over to say “dumela” (hello) and give me a big high-five. I connected with these kids simply because I had said “yes” to being a basketball coach.

“Do you want to get up for an early drive tomorrow?” was the question we were given the first night on the safari portion of our program. Exhausted as we were from the day before, we made up our minds to say “yes.” It didn’t take long to pay off. Early that next morning we spotted (no pun intended) one of the hardest to find creatures: the leopard. Thereafter, every time the staff asked if we wanted to get up early- it was a loud and unanimous “yes!”

In preparation for yet another wedding (weddings and funerals were the two big events of life in the village), my host mother would go to dance practice every other evening for a few hours. The second or third time she did so, I asked if I could come along. We got to spend a good three hours with a group of the local women learning the steps of a traditional dance set to modern Setswana music. Thereafter, my host mom and sister and I would stand out in front of our house on random evenings to “practice” our dance. Although I would beg to differ, they all seem to think I am an excellent Setswana dancer.
My host sister in the rural village of Manyana was a part of a band and choir at her church. They were a relatively well-known group and were traveling to Namibia one weekend to perform at several churches in the region. My family invited all of the students on my program along to see them off. Before then, we had not had a great opportunity to meet and get to know people our age in the village - most of them were off at school in the city. But after that evening, it was hard to not run into a new friend on the paths of Manyana. I had a village full of friends all because I said “yes” to seeing my sister off on her bus in the middle of the night.

During our program, we had the opportunity to see many different parts of the country, but I surprisingly had little time to spend in the northern region. While working on my final project for the term, someone offered that I should conduct some of my research in a small village in the north and gave me a contact in the area to stay with. By the time I arrived there, I was in love; the northern region of the country is probably the most beautiful place imaginable, and I honestly didn’t want to leave. I had found my new favorite spot all thanks to saying “yes” to a colleague’s suggestion.

Fast forward two months and a research trip to Kenya later, and I’m now studying abroad in Copenhagen, Denmark, with the DIS program. When it comes to contrasts, there aren’t many more extreme than the hot, wide-open, African Savannah and the bustling, frigid streets of Copenhagen in January. However, when it comes to making the most of things: the idea continued to be just the same - just say “yes.”

One rainy afternoon, a friend of mine called me up with a bit of a strange idea. “Let’s go visit Hamlet,” she said. Now, not being the most literary of individuals, I was a touch confused. That is until I remembered that Shakespeare’s famous tragedy was about none other than Hamlet, Prince of Denmark. And yes, the castle is real. In fact, the story of Hamlet originates from an old collection of stories from about a thousand years ago based right here in Denmark. Naturally, I had to say “yes.” After an hour on the train and a bit of walking in the rain, we had a fantastic tour of perhaps the most melancholy castle in Europe. Kronberg Slot is an enormous fortress, and between the crypts and the LEGO room, we had plenty to keep us entertained for the day.

“I discovered something that would completely change my time in both Botswana and later in Denmark: the power of saying ‘yes.’”
Before coming Claremont McKenna College, I had been an avid rower throughout my high school career. When one of the staff at DIS mentioned that there was a rowing club a 15 minute bike ride from campus, my ears perked up. She invited me to join her there the next week, and I immediately agreed. Since that day, I’ve been lucky enough to join Studenter Roklub, one of the largest and most renowned rowing clubs in Denmark. Joining a team like that has been one of the greatest ways to meet and interact with people I otherwise wouldn’t have the chance to. In the first week of April, with the bay no longer frozen and the winter winds calming down, we finally had our first chance to row on the water. It has been three years since I last got out on the water, and the feeling of rowing again was beyond exhilarating. Plus, I got the chance to do something I’d never done before: be a coxswain (the guy up front yelling at the other rowers), all because when I was asked I said “yes” to the opportunity.

Study abroad is not all about glamorous adventures and crazy memories. It’s about learning to live in another country. It’s about understanding how to have a daily routine and normal lifestyle in a place you don’t necessarily identify with. It’s about connecting with a place in a way that makes you comfortable going about your life as if you had lived there for years. Yet we all have that dream of making amazing memories and experiencing wild and crazy moments in a foreign country. When those experiences don’t materialize, it can become a little disheartening. But to every student headed abroad in the future, I’ll tell you this: the moment you start saying “yes” to even the most bizarre-seeming opportunities, you’ll begin to experience a place like never before.

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I would like to give a special thanks to the students who contributed to the *Globetrotter* publication. Their enthusiasm for sharing their study abroad experiences are a joy for the CMC community to read. I hope that their insight can be a source of encouragement for students thinking of studying abroad and a reminder of what a wonderful and challenging experience studying abroad can be.

_Kelsey K. Cherland_

OCS Peer Ambassador

Editor, *The CMC Globetrotter*