

STUDY ABROAD: A World of Benefits that Last a Lifetime

By Mira Temkin



Hilary Most hugging Paddington Bear, London
Photo courtesy of Hilary Most



Ari Temkin, Highland Park; Josh Phillips, Skokie in Amsterdam
Photo courtesy of Ari Temkin



Ari Temkin floating down the Seine River, Paris
Photo courtesy of Ari Temkin

Visiting historic spots in Charles Dickens' classic novels. Sketching famous works in the Louvre. Studying Renaissance art and architecture in Florence. These aren't just pipe dreams. For many students, this is an opportunity for a life-changing experience -- the beginning of their real education when spending a semester away on foreign soil.

While your children may still be just in elementary school, it's not too early to think about including study abroad in your education savings. The program may be an entire year, a semester, or even a summer or winter break. The im-

portant thing is that your students devote some part of their education away from their host university.

Overseas study is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity that goes far beyond academic learning. Students develop skills in intercultural communication and problem-solving. They learn to be more independent. In other words, they grow up. Rae Luskin of Deerfield, who sent her daughter to study in Italy said Alexis came back a different person. "She really blossomed. She had more confidence in her decision-making skills and it gave her the courage to move to New York after college. She couldn't have done this without first going abroad."

those years, 15 out of every 100 students had studied abroad, compared with 9 out of every 100 students in 1997-98. An Open Doors 2010 data on study abroad participation rates show 29 institutions that reported sending more than 70% of their students abroad at some point during their undergraduate careers.

The top five destinations for study abroad students in 2007-08 were the United Kingdom, Italy, Spain, France and Australia. These countries accounted for almost 50% of all U.S. students who went abroad that year. According to Open Doors 2010, the leading fields of study are the social sciences (21%) business (20%) and humanities (12%).

Colleges encourage study abroad

Indiana University considers overseas study an integral part of a student's education and encourages participation. IU recently initiated a blog program and selected 14 study abroad students who will share their experiences with the school. "Students will blog about their new location, sharing their cultural experiences, challenges, excursions and academic adventures through words, photos and video," said Kathleen Sideli, Associate Vice President for Overseas Study.

At Clemson University in South Carolina, students are required to engage with locals in their host countries. In trying to understand people different from themselves, students come equipped with cameras and notepads to investigate social issues, cultural artifacts and business practices. Constancio Nakuma, Associate Dean of Humanities said, "With the mirror on the other culture, you begin to see yourself for who you are. You begin to see yourself in the wider world."

Hilary Most of Houston, Texas studied at Regent's College in London with classmates from across the globe. "The discussions were fascinating and it certainly gave me a new perspective on how the U.S. is perceived in other countries."

More students packing their bags

Statistics from the U.S. Department of Education Services demonstrate the number of U.S. students who study abroad has grown steadily over the past 20 years, increasing from 62,300 students in 1987-88 to 262,400 students in 2007-08. In

Heading to more non-traditional destinations

While European countries have always been the most popular sites, recent studies show that some students are opting for "the road less traveled" to destinations like South America, China, Guatemala and Ghana. The State University of New York system, for example, offers a variety of options, from archaeological digs in Turkey to biological research in Tanzania. These unique destinations offer a great way to learn a new language and usually cost less.





Camel riding in Israel
Photo courtesy of Hilary Most



On top of Mount Masada, Israel
Photo courtesy of Ari Temkin



Ari Temkin, Caving in Jerusalem, Israel
Photo courtesy of Ari Temkin

Volunteering, interning or teaching

There are many other types of student enrichment programs available. At the University of Edinburgh, an internship pairs students with members of Parliament, along with studying British and Scottish politics/government and Scottish culture.

Internships in Sydney, Australia combine academic credit while working side-by-side with Australian professionals in the arts, business and communications. The Consortium for Overseas Teaching (COST) sends college seniors overseas to fulfill their student teaching requirements in places like Costa Rica, Ecuador, Japan, Mexico and South Africa.

Study abroad gives students' language skills a tremendous boost. Kalee Gould of Highland Park sent her daughter to study in Santiago, Chile. "Lissa lived with a family and all of her classes were in Spanish. Needless to say, this greatly enhanced her fluency."

And speaking of costs...

If students go through their own college, fees will be about the same as current tuition rates. And, scholarship money and loans may still be available. But programs through a study abroad company or another university could cost less. Typically, other expenses include airfare, room and board (usually less), insurance, travel costs and spending money.

Welcome to the multi-cultural workplace

Companies are seeking college graduates who have an international perspective, which could include foreign language skills,

cultural awareness and an ability to communicate effectively with those from different countries and cultures.

Study abroad will widen your student's perspective on the world and make him or her a more well-rounded individual. "International experience is almost always a plus," says Sarah Delaney, a Houston recruiter for BP Amoco. "It indicates an added appreciation for cultural diversity and unique problem-solving methods."

In addition, international firms increasingly send new employees abroad in the first few years of employment. Students who gain that experience through study abroad will be ready for these opportunities.

Business schools also recognize the need to prepare their graduates for the global economy and have developed exchange programs in international marketing, information technology and management. In scientific research, universities are cutting across boundaries to share their findings and their expertise.

And just to demonstrate how multi-cultural the world is becoming, a Lake Forest School District will be offering a Mandarin immersion program for incoming kindergarteners this fall.

Parents and Students Attest to the Values

"Learning to think on her feet was by far the greatest value my daughter learned while spending a semester in Florence, Italy," said Sheri Offenbach of Highland Park. Living in a place with minimal luxuries, Robin learned to plan, travel and use alternative resources. It gave her a better understanding of

people and cultures. I'm glad she was able to have this experience, and even luckier we were able to visit and have her be our tour guide."

"Studying at the University of Hamburg (Germany), I was exposed to a variety of experiences," said Jeff Gubitzi, Executive Director of the Knoxville Jewish Alliance in Tennessee. "From attending classes taught in my second language to international travel, it was an experience of a lifetime. I was confronted by Communist regimes at each Eastern Europe border, as my friends and I sat in traffic waiting for a Soviet tank convoy to clear the streets of Prague. Visiting European cities that I had only read about to Holocaust memorials and former haunts of my Jewish ancestors, the experience was bigger than life. I am who I am today because of my year abroad. Because of my experiences, it was very important that my children have the same. My son spent a semester in Jerusalem in high school, one daughter studied in Prague, and our youngest daughter studied in Israel during both high school and college."

Kalee Gould also sent her son, Richard to Beijing, China. "He became immersed in Chinese culture. While classes were conducted in English, he also studied Mandarin. His program also required students to participate in an internship as part of their semester. So he interned at the Chamber of Commerce, giving him great insight into how businesses operate. How people live, what they do... the whole experience provided him with a view of life he would never have had before."

While college may seem very far off now, study abroad may just be the most important component of your student's education.

Author's note: Our son, Ari, studied Art & Architecture in Florence. When we came to visit, he showed us around and told us about all the Famous Florentine statues that lined the streets. He could identify all the works in the museums -- it was like having our own personal tour guide. He even impressed us with his ability to bargain in the marketplace -- in Italian!

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