

Maximizing Your Study Abroad Experience

Studying abroad is an investment in yourself. You will have the opportunity to go outside your comfort zone, explore new places and learn about another culture. To help you on this journey, we have asked past study abroad students to share their knowledge on how to make this experience even better.

1. Do your research before you go.

During my study abroad program, we had the opportunity to visit different museums. I wish I would have known which ones so I could investigate those that we were not planning on attending. I could have visited them during my own time and planned my excursions out properly. – Alan Gonzalez, Winter, Italy

Come up with your own lists of activities to do in your host city. It will come in handy during your spare time. This should include things not already planned within your program. Definitely, have a backup plan, because you will never know if something is being renovated or if you will need reservations. – Deyanira Gomez, Summer, Argentina/France

2. Live the experience.

This experience will be filled with some of the best times of your life and you will feel like you are not even on planet earth. I had the best time of my life – met new friends and have great bonds what will last forever. Be sure to engage with your host city; observe the architecture, visit museums, and eat the food. I fell in love with the museums that I visited, especially with the Vatican. Remember, you never know when you are going to go back. – Alan Gonzalez, Winter, Italy

Go the markets! You will come across so many things that you normally do not see in America. Bonus tip, you may find inexpensive items there that can be used as souvenirs. Do not forget to attempt to bargain. Try new foods, you never know what you might end up liking. Get to know the city you are visiting by exploring it during your free time. Lastly, make new friends. Not only with foreign students, but also with those within your program. They could potentially become lifelong friends. – Briana Escobar, Winter, China

One thing I regret not doing during my study abroad program is exploring. I participated in all the programmed excursions but did not go out beyond that. I was so tired that I preferred to sleep instead of experiencing the city's attractions and nightlife. Explore,

explore, explore. Go out, meet new people, engage in conversation and learn something new. – Alyssa Robles, Winter, Argentina

3. Do not be afraid of being uncomfortable.

Learning the language was a funny experience. I am fluent in English and Spanish and although Italian sounds like Spanish, I encountered some times when I had to use gestures. These gestures helped me ask locals for directions or food suggestions. This feeling of 'now knowing' did not stop me from walking the streets of my city each day. There will always be a new challenge for you, live in the moment. – Alan Gonzalez, Winter, Italy

Any study abroad program is a great way to get out of your comfort zone. You have the opportunity to visit new cities and use different types of transportation (plane, boat, bus, taxi, train). Most importantly, a language barrier is something everyone should experience at least once in their life. Ordering food was always a challenging, but you should never be afraid to ask for help. – Briana Escobar, Winter, China

4. Let go of expectations.

I knew beforehand that I was going to be able to start the New Year by climbing the Great Wall of China. This was going to be an experience that I would never forget. I thought it was going to be an easy walk to the top. I was wrong! I was tired and could not believe that I (at the time) had only made it half way there. I kept going, my whole group did. Once I made it to the top, the view was breathtaking. Another thing to remember is that the weather is not going to be great all the time. Even if it is cold or drizzling, do not let it stop you from having fun. – Briana Escobar, Winter, China

Make the most of your time while studying abroad. Enjoy the outdoors and look at a world that is different from yours. Do your best to not get in your head about everything. You are in an entirely different place from where you live; things are not going to be the same. Sometimes you will not understand what people are saying and they may not understand what you are saying. No one will have the same experience that you did. Appreciate those differences. – Deyanira Gomez, Summer, Argentina/France