Images and Reflections of Study Abroad

Passage 2009
China
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To many students at Kalamazoo College, study abroad is seen as the keystone to their “K” plan. Study abroad opens our minds to new perspectives and new ways to experience what is around us. For some students, study abroad is one of the first chances a young adult has to realize that there are things about him or herself that he or she can never fully explain or understand. Those events that we experience, both good and bad, have a lasting impact upon us.

Whether we realize it immediately after our time abroad or 10 years down the road, study abroad continues to influence and shape us.

In this year’s edition of the Passage, we focused on the importance of reflection. While our experiences may be captured in a photograph or poem, we continue to think and live out these changes for the rest of our lives. Study abroad is not just a few months during our time at “K”, it is a transformative experience that will continue to mold us for the rest of our lives.

Our best,

Alison Trump, Editor-in-Chief
Peter Rausse, Photo Editor
Thom Nelson, Layout Editor
Becca Fealk, Copy Editor
England
I didn’t expect to find Neil Young in Germany. But there he appeared, as the Bergkirchweih cleared out for the night. My friends and I were finishing our last Masses, having just sung Robbie Williams like true Europeans at a German beer festival. And then this guy vaulted over the railing separating the road leading to the beer cellars of the Berg from the narrow picnic tables, rickety from years of drunken people clambering up to jump around and sing. He had apparently heard us speaking English and in his state of…friendliness wanted to communicate. We tried out our German, which at that point was relatively decent (or at least it seemed to be…this was after a couple hours at the Berg). The conversation wound its way from Munich to car companies to a discussion of the authenticity of our dirndls. Suddenly the guy, whose name I never did quite catch, asked if we wanted to hear a song. And, in my experience, there’s only one good answer to that question.

We all folded our arms and waited expectantly, assuming that we were about to hear yet one more entertaining drinking song, full of good spirit and obviously German.

“I’ve been to Hollywood, I’ve been to Schweinfurt, I crossed the ocean for a heart of gold”

This was not German, in origin or language. Now, naturally the lyrics were a bit altered, but Schweinfurt is more likely to have been visited than Redwood for your typical young German from Munich. And having grown up listening to Neil all the time, I immediately recognized it and called the guy out on his changes. He shrugged it off and finally heeded the calls of his friends, who were heading back to their car.

I had been in Germany for almost nine months at that point. I listened to my American music in my room and heard it in stores, sang in English at the beer festivals and bars, and yet was still thrown when this random guy serenaded us with a song from my childhood, something so intrinsically connected to home that I was genuinely startled to hear it in this distinctly non-home-like environment. I mean, I was surrounded by a throng of people, most singing and shouting to each other and slowly making their way back to the beer cellars to get their deposit back on their Krugs. But in the middle of all the craziness, all the activity, I felt more comfortable and at home than I had thought I ever would. Sure, Neil reminded me of home, but home didn’t mean Northville, or even the United States. It had finally happened, without me even really noticing: Erlangen was where I belonged, at least at that point. It was home.
Imagine: A street jam packed with thirty year old Peugeots and Hyundais, painted black and white, masquerading as our commonly-recognized “taxi”. The sight of one of these taxis is quite jarring. They’re nothing like the familiar New York yellow cabs, or the Blue (call-when-you’re-too-drunk-to-walk-home) City cabs. For starters, they are in a much more significant state of disrepair - often with dented sides, windows stuck half down, and fenders that have seen their fair share of benders. (The vast majority of other cars on the street share this aged, dilapidated quality.) Sometimes at night, if you’re lucky, you can catch a bumpin cab with some sweet LEDs, blaring the latest Egyptian pop songs from beat-up, bass-less speakers. Aside from their rustically different appearance, driving in one of these things is like driving in another dimension. All elements of time and space are suspended. Back in the States, we drive huge, hulking SUVs, etc, and keep the exteriors of our cars pristine. Here, since the appearance of the cars is not such a concern, neither is space.

So, forget everything you know about driving, it doesn’t apply. Speed limits, at least posted ones, are nowhere to be found, or observed. Horns are employed regularly, as a means of flagging down passengers, plowing a path, simply saying hi to another cabby, or as a musical addition to the radio. (This happened once. It was pretty amusing, but also one of the scarier taxi rides I’ve been on.) And those little dotted lines that separate “lanes”... forget that. Contrary to popular belief, those lines actually indicate another driving lane altogether. Two lanes become three, three lanes become five, and before you know it, you’re speeding down a seven-lane highway, originally meant to be four. I’d like to consider myself a pretty good driver (laugh if you will) but I could never do what these guys do. Constantly weaving in and out of five to seven unofficial lanes of traffic, these dudes have NO fear.

What’s even more impressive are the scooters/mopeds. Virtually everything in this town can be delivered, and it's done by means of boxes strapped to the back of scooters. Those third, fifth, and seventh lanes I was talking about multiply yet again for these crazy little scooter men. There is absolutely no such thing as a “lane” to them. They drive between everyone, cross sidewalk meridians, and go faster than everyone. Talk about a high-risk job. I hope those delivery guys get a raise every time they make it back alive.

It took me almost a month to learn how to cross the street.
Costa Rica

Walking Home in San Jose
Joslyn Westphal

I cringe, sitting in a torn seat
on the crowded bus
with the words
Costa Rica no se vende
scratched into the leather
and take a deep gasp for fresh air
after I finally push my way off
two stops after my street.
Walking in the dark,
the sour smell of
rotting pineapple cores and week-old cartons of milk
as the never-ending rain washes them down the street,
I pass the security guard
asleep at his post,
one hand on the rifle in his lap.
I pause at a house,
a fortress of coffee-colored metal and faded cement,
heavy bars on each window
that somehow don’t hinder
the worst intruders:
the ruthless mosquitoes
that leave me itching with the fear of dengue,
ants that will overtake a single crumb in seconds,
and the occasional iguana,
who will smile at the screams
when he surprises me in the shower.
The cockroaches scatter
as the metal door finally opens,
then closes,
shutting out the sounds
of taxi horns, and stray dogs,
the neighbor singing in her kitchen,
and reggaetón pulsing from a house down the street.
In my bedroom I spot the message printed on the bedspread—
Happy You I Wishes You—
and laugh at the friendly reminder that
I don’t belong here.
London isn’t friendly. The city is hard, cold, and bitter, but I loved it. It’s filled with page after page of slate faces and harsh pavement. Bleak, crass, Dickensonian perfection.

The day we arrived in London, we ate Mexican food from a restaurant across the street from Goldsmith’s. Later, it was Indian takeaway. Sometimes Shwarma. It took me a long time to like English food—all those beans—and yet we ate English breakfasts for the novelty, and ordered our tea with milk and sugar.

London isn’t friendly, but it is real and raw, and holds thousands in its breast. London was my companion, a guide for six months. The rumble of the Tube and the wheezing breath of roaring buses were the only sounds to accompany me as I traveled countless streets, counting off London’s many arms on my own fingers.

In Madrid I went to an Irish pub and ordered a full English breakfast. Suddenly those beans on toast, those two sausages, that little black blood pudding, were so comforting. It was the worst English breakfast I’ve ever had, but I ate with relish, before wandering back out onto the streets of Spain.

I learned the serenade of London: the whispers of the empty streets at night, followed by the quiet anxiety of morning traffic, the growling, gurgling song of the Thames as it slithered murky and ghastly alongside me like a constant pet. The cacophonous clamor of cameras and pigeons, flocking, swarming, teeming with life and pressure around gates and stores and ponds, the hissing whirlpool of meshing bodies entangled into one, living, hectic mass at Oxford circus.

In London we all missed Taco Bell, and when my father picked me up at O’Hare in March, he met me with a hug and a burrito. Their idea of “Tex-Mex” is all wrong overseas. So instead I cooked with my flatmates, and learned to make Kimchi fried rice from my Korean neighbor while I showed her how to roll out pizza dough in our cramped kitchen.
I threw myself in, lost myself to the sounds and feelings of the city, so alive with bitter disdain and tender compassion, so beautiful in the monochromatic image of history, life, and love. I loved the city. It carried me deep into its womb, lulling me to sleep with its many voices, pulled me along until I surfaced, disoriented, gasping for breath. But the city was always there to greet me. Born from the city's depths every day, greeted with a coarse, damp and foggy kiss, I never managed to orient myself. I remained suspended in time, in space, in the city itself, while the rhythms and heartbeat of the pavement reminded me where I was. The city was more vibrant than the people: to me they were accessories, adding color and movement to the grey canvas that rose with the sun every day. But the true character, the true meaning was in London itself.

I grew to understand the feelings, the sounds, the signals the city shared with me. The cold, invigorating blast of air before the Tube rushed past and the dizzying dive into the throng at Camden, all busy and black, woke me, shocked me into being each day. The breathless, constant stream of screams and yells amongst the gritty traffic followed me, a cloud, a reminder. I grew into the city the way the city held me, shot down roots amongst the parks, feelers into the deep, broken pavement of clicking heels and brawls.

Allie and I had this thing for cheesecake while we were in London. We ate too many cheesecakes to count, gorged ourselves on them in a way you can't do at home, and then walked them around the city in our bellies, day after day. Chocolate cheesecake was our favorite, with that orange label from Sainsbury's. It's funny how attached we were to that cheesecake; it just doesn't taste right on this side of the pond. So we ate, and giggled, and ate more, over maps of London and bus fares and Oyster cards. Bite by bite we worked our way across the whole city.

London was my friend, but I never understood the city. It was too big, too sprawling, too old to ever know. I could have wandered the streets for month after month, and each face would offer different ways of looking at the ancient edifices, the dirty alleys, and the spitting, spouting busses that swerved along the streets. London, with all its glory and contradictions, taught me more than anyone I met, or anything I did. In the end, it was only London.
Ecuador
¡Cuidado animales!

Los humanos son peligrosos.
Dear Mom and Dad,

I know I’ve been keeping up regular correspondence, but I thought I’d send an email anyway. Mostly because of something I saw on the bus home today.

I’ll never understand the buses. They really are one of the most unique Ecuadorian experiences. From the moment you arrive, you’re being ushered onto a bus by a man yelling the bus’ destination. Everything is very quick, and you have to just hop right on and get a seat. Then right away the vendors swoop in. People get on at various stops to sell everything from toothbrushes to DVDs, to an array of other things. One of our favorites is the guy who sells these little cough-drop like candies. He gets on every day yelling, “Seis por diez! Seis caramelitos mentolados por diez centavitos!” None of us actually know what they are.

The bus takes this beautiful route to school, one that Mom would absolutely hate, but that I find fantastic. Some mornings as we go down into the valley, you can’t tell the difference between the clouds and the mountains or volcanoes lying in the distance. Right before we get to Cumbayá we pass two of my favorite things. First, we go by this place where men are out every morning carving stone. Big blocks of stone slowly transform into a lion, or a pillar, or a bird bath. Honestly, it always seems so cool to me. Here they are on this cliff-type thing overlooking a beautiful valley, and they’re creating art. It seems so…I don’t know how to describe it. It’s like looking at two different things at once. Here I am on the freeway, in a bus, and I look out my window and see cars and trucks driving by, then there on the side of the road is a beautiful river-carved canyon and these men, doing such physically tiring, organic, and artful work. It’s so beautiful.

The river-carved canyon is my second favorite part of my trip. That’s the part you’d hate, Mom, because the bus crosses a bridge, very high up. You can see it better on the way back to Quito, but it’s absolutely breathtaking. It’s very deep down, and you can see fast moving water moving down the path it has been carving for centuries. It’s beautiful. It just looks so incredible.

And so that’s usually how I get to school each day, although today was a bit different. So I got on the bus, (“A Quito! Quito! Suba! Suba!”) and ended up sitting next to an old woman who forced me to take the inside seat. “Well hey, better than standing,” I thought. I was pretty tired, and the bus was overcrowded, so I wasn’t paying much attention.

We were stopped at one of the many bus stops and suddenly I hear it near by—clucking. I swing my head to look, but I can’t find its source. Then one of the other American students on the bus who goes to the university shouted to her friends, “Oh my God! That guy has a LIVE CHICKEN!” This guy had literally got on the bus with a live chicken in his arms! I almost died. It was possibly the most amazingly, joyous thing I’d ever seen. A real live chicken, riding the bus with me! Two Ecuadorian guys quickly surrounded this guy and started taunting the chicken, so I didn’t see it for long, but it was absolutely incredible. A chicken! On the bus! Ha!

So anyway, that’s my story. I thought you guys might find this interesting, and since you’re my only truly captive audience (you’ll stick with me even if I’m writing about chewing gum, right?), I thought I’d blab to you about it.

I love you both. I hope everything is going well at home. Give me an update when you can!

Love,

Chrissy
Hungary
Thailand

Bells at the Temple of Phra Nakhon

Leah Altermatt

Italy

Paris from Eiffel Tower

Ian Litwack
Kalamazoo, USA
I am Unapologetically African
Karanja Kinyua Rufus

I am un-apologetically African,
Yes this place is such a great and beautiful place to be;
Yes the food at the café is a buffet;
I get to choose whether to eat pizza, pasta, chicken, French, Italian or Mexican cuisines;
Luxuries that I only get once or twice in a semester back at home;
Yes my room has wireless internet connection, a book rack, chest drawers, a room-fixed phone and a private bathroom; stuff that when I tell my friends back home about; they just get so amazed;
But I choose to remember where I am from;
It is easy for one to come here and forget the most important thing: I am Kenyan, I am African
I am un-apologetically African

I am here for a while, I keep telling myself; I pray you my heart, fail me not;
That I should indulge in the thoughts of thinking nimefika; (That’s the Kenyan way of saying I have it all figured out) I mean I am in the U-S of A;
I pray you my hands that laziness should not find a safe haven in you;
Great was the day I carried our Kenyan flag during convocation ceremony;
Proud I felt, yet scared at the same time; Many eyes looked at me; as if I carried the whole nation of Kenya; all the good, bad and ugly of our beloved Kenya;
As I go about my days here at K, I pray; Oh Lord; establish me in your favor;
Having to be in a new place bequeaths one with great expectations and fear; but I pledge to till my books; for my future and for those that love me, inspire me and look up to me;

Many things are different here; from the weather-the biting cold that chews on my Kenyan-tired bones, the food-many of which I just eat and don’t even care to know the names, the people-oh the warmth, the smiles, the simple “Nice to meet you” talk, the secret nodding and recognition as we pass each other, the joy that comes to my heart to know that I am in a foreign land yet I feel so accepted and welcomed;

But alas! How at times I miss the simplicity of our life;
I miss my favorite CMB (Chapati Mbili Beans) at our campus café; here I have all sorts of variety;
If I want milk I must choose from a list, skimmed milk, 2% milk; If I want sugar, I must choose if I want beetroot sugar, sugarless sugar or something else;
I miss the chance to not hurry from one class to another, or from one activity to another and not being on time for everything; I miss being late for my class by 15 minutes and yet when I arrive; I am early because my Professor is late too; all in the excuse of there was a traffic jam; or the notion that for me as a student I think, that my prof will be obviously late, and for him or her, the students will be obviously late;

I am unapologetically African
January 2008 Koh Trang Thailand

At twenty-one I had never flown in a plane, never seen an ocean and never been to another country save Canada. Six months ago I boarded my first plane which led to another plane and then another for a total of 36 hours of travel time, after which I landed in Thailand, my first country abroad.

It was there off the west coast of Thailand that I saw, smelt, tasted, touched the ocean for the very first time in my life and fell in love with it.

It’s dark. The only light around comes from the stars up above and the bonfire further down the shore. Warm water laps at my ankles as I stand at the edge of the sea looking up into the night sky. I take a deep breathe and stay still, taking a moment to feel the swish and pull of the seawater at my feet. The tide is on its way out. I open my eyes and take a step forward following the retreating water. As I move I shuffle my feet gently kicking up the sand in order to scare away any stingrays that might be resting in the warm shallow water. All of a sudden there is a burst of sparkles at my feet. The sparks glimmer softly glowing bright blue in the dark water.
They glimmer intensely for a moment and then softly fade back into darkness and I find myself staring at blank, pitch-black, glassy water. I swish my feet again and the shimmering points appear again, showering outward from where I am standing. I am in awe. I jump up and down now more vigorously; the glow radiating out in all directions expanding further than I can reach. I squeal in excitement as if I am a three year old uncovering some amazing secret for the very first time, and in essence I am. I hear soft laughter from the direction of the bonfire as everyone else hears my reaction to seeing bioluminescence for the first time. I take another step and then another, faster and faster, closer and closer. With each movement points of light scatter through darkness around me. Its like I am walking on stars. I begin to splash up and down jumping, leaping, twirling as I dance through the warm water. Uninhibited I tilt my head back and laugh filled with true joy and wonder. There are stars above me, stars below me, nothing but me in-between.
My feet hit the pavement, sound out of sync with my breathing as I sprint to catch the number 11 bus. Red backpacks and yellow hats come around the corner, elementary students beneath them. One of the boys points in awe of his giant shadow cast on the white-washed wall.

Around the corner, the same, hunched, old woman says good morning to me. My host mother told me the elderly were curved like a bow because they worked in the rice paddies. She is watering the small stretch of plants in her patch of front yard. Sunlight catches the droplets of water and I run straight through the rainbow mist, tasting it on my lips.

At the bus stop, I recognize the same people: the young woman with stiletto heels; the boy with the yellow headphones; the old man with a crooked cane. The bus pulls up and we climb in. It’s not crowded, not body upon body of Japanese people.

I sit in the back and plug into my headphones, knowing no one would speak—just like every morning. I wonder if any of them know I’m not Japanese, just an Asian impersonator from the States. A little girl steps onto the bus at the next stop, saying to her mother, “Ittekimasu!” (I will go and come back).

I think I said something similar a month and a half ago to my family in Michigan. I don’t know what I meant, if I was ready to do either then. We turn a corner and I sway into the window, looking out to see the city of Nagoya in Seven Elevens, teenage girls in school uniforms, 100 Yen stores, bowing businessmen and Starbucks. One slice of street in this city could be home and another, a place I’ve never known. Nagoya looks nothing like Kalamazoo. I seem to miss home the most on the bus.

After ten men in black suits, four girls in tiny skirts and knee-highs, seven middle aged women with designer purses, and three wrinkled women holding grocery bags, we come to Hara station—the last stop. As I step outside, rain starts to fall and, I know, the color of the clouds match the cement in the subway beneath us. Movement, the kind that runs on rails, will take me through platforms of waiting people. The subways are
veins, lead to many hearts of the city.

Three flights of stairs lead us into the ground. I hear the train coming and people begin to run—high heels clicking, cell phone charms jingling. The whimsical music for the blue line plays, and I feel the approaching train vibrate in the arches of my feet. The noise rolls up to my chest, then higher, and the vast rumble swallows up the music in my ears. The headlight in the tunnel’s darkness grows brighter and races towards us, then, past us in a blur of faces, cool wind fluttering a man’s gray tie. I seem to make eye contact with each person in the speeding train—with countless strangers in a rushing instant.

It is packed, but more people surge for the opening doors. I step back, as others move forward. Less than thirty seconds and the doors slide shut. Someone’s sleeve is caught between the jaws of their entrance/exit. The train starts ahead, slowly, then, accelerates faster and vanishes in hollow shadow. I am alone on this side of the station, but across from me, on the opposite platform, a woman stands with her gaze low.

I wait for the 9:13 train, knowing it to be less crowded; knowing cart three is probably almost empty. The subway map is behind me, but I have it in memory. If I took the purple line, I’d ride in a circle under Nagoya. But I ride the Tsurumai line, a blue zigzag through the purple loop. I could go from one end to the other, back and forth through the same places with different passengers. I could go and come back as many times as I wanted.

The music plays over the other platform, and seconds later the train glides in. A few minutes later the music echoes over us. More people have come to wait with me and the train flies past, a bright streak of vacant windows. I wonder if I’ll be the only gaijin onboard. The doors slide open, and I walk in, going to the other side. An old woman looks at me from the other platform. I wonder if she knows I’m only visiting. I see the doors shut in the reflection of the window and we start moving. I look back at the woman, but the train races ahead and soon the black wall of the tunnel is all I see.
As the day approached, I knew I wanted to be the one to kill the pig. My thought process was, “I eat meat, the blood is already on my hands.” I had never killed anything before, at least by most standards. I killed mosquitoes, ants, fish—even hit a deer with my truck—but never actually killed something I could really empathize with.

However, when the day arrived, I was determined.

The morning was devoted to learning about pigs and their relationship to Thai culture. We learned how to care for a pig, how to feed a pig, the economics of raising a pig, and the cultural significance of pigs in Lahu, Palong, and Karen cultures. As the Lahu man shared his tribe’s method for killing a pig, all I could think about was how, exactly, were we going to kill the pig? What part of the skull is Pi Ong going to club? For how long will the pig struggle after I insert the blade? Are the village children going to watch?

As we approached the site where the pig was to be slaughtered, I noticed Pi Apat shaving limbs from a large, heavy tree branch, soon to be used as a club for knocking the pig unconscious. Nearby, Pi Manat was building a fire under a rusty trashcan full of water, later used to boil the flesh. The villagers and students were getting into their roles. And while all of this was happening, there in the middle of everything, was the pig—two legs tied to the sides of a small wire cage, not yet entirely aware of what was about to happen.

As my friends and I gathered around, taking everything in, it was obvious that we were emotionally invested. A few of us stepped forward and, with some nervous energy, thanked the pig—khop khun krup!. Meanwhile, I was asking Pi Apat for last minute clarifications. Where should I place my hands? What is the best way to hold the knife? To make sure, I practiced gripping the knife with Pi Apat. We would insert the knife together to make sure the pig is killed in a humane way.

After everything was prepared, Pi Ong and Pi Apat opened the cage and pulled the pig out by its hind legs. With legs tied, it hobbled to the side of the thatch hut, next to where the children were playing on the hay bails. Then it backed up a couple of steps, aware of Pi Ong, raising the club high above its head, aiming somewhere near the center of its forehead. As Pi Ong held the club cocked in the air, three things happened: our adrenaline spiked; each villager took on a new sense of poise; and at the last minute, just before the club bluntly bashed into its skull, the pig gave a look of full recognition.

The sound of a heavy branch hitting a pig’s skull is like a dull machete cracking open a coconut. Like a fire alarm, it called everyone to action. Immediately several people, including a few students, scrambled to hold the pig to the ground.
Pi Apat dropped to his knees near the front of the pig. I quickly followed suit behind him. As he searched for the spot, directly between the ribs, I reached around his side, to grab the hilt of the knife. As I reached, I realized my hand was shaking. I tried not to think about it, but then looked over and noticed that Apat’s hand was shaking too.

The killing happens too quickly to process. Once the blade was aligned with the heart, just between the ribs, we thrusted it straight in. As the warm blood pumped out of the incision, a tin bowl was placed underneath by one of the village women, to save the blood. Everyone continued to hold down the pig as it screamed and convulsed with each subtle movement of the blade. Oddly enough, the villagers and students, all laying their upper bodies on the pig, looked like paramedics holding someone down for a quick surgery; their demeanor was sincere, even caring. Eventually the pig died. As one student lifted his hands from the pig, he looked at me and said, “Did you feel that?” adding a squint for apprehension, “I think I felt the life leave its body.”

After the pig dies, the first stage is over. The process begins to slow down. We dragged the corpse up to the community kitchen, where it was cleaned and sorted. As we laid the pig down by the kitchen, it seemed one step closer to becoming meat. Yet, it still had legs, and a head (always a give-away). But, the process was beginning to feel less emotionally charged. It felt like we were about to begin a dissection in science class, slightly disturbing, but more detached. As we were doing this, I sliced open the rib cage. As I was doing this, I accidentally hit the intestine and felt a sort of deflation as some bile trickled out — “it’s OK,” said Pi Alap as he pointed to the spot, “nit noi,” only a little.

After a great deal of work, the meat was ready to cook. The process finally begins to feel culinary as the first juicy piece of meat is lifted from the grill—*chim mai*? Pig tongue, nose, and liver were the main samples. My first sample was a piece of nose. It was so bitter I almost spit it out. I chased the nose with something else, just to get the taste out, but to my dismay, every piece had the death smell, the same smell I connected to the killing process, the boiled skin, the charred hair, the bile.

Starting to get nauseous, I left the kitchen. On the way out, I grabbed a lime from the shelf and cut it open with my knife (the one I just scrubbed clean of pig hair still connected to flesh) and chomped off a piece of dry lime, hoping the death smell would go away. I walked back to the bunkhouse to change my clothes and take a shower. As I looked down at my shirt, I realized I had taken off my raincoat at some point, and splattered across the right side of my chest—one small drop of blood. I quickly took off the rest of my clothes, dropped them on top of the washing machine, and grabbed my shower bag. When I reached the bathroom, I jumped in the shower, and turned on the hot, steamy water.
On a trip to Kobe and Himeji, my friends Shuntaro and Leslie and I stopped at a hidden rural village to bathe at Arima Onsen, a famous hot spring renowned for its age and rejuvenating properties. Fortified with iron and salt, the naturally heated water is profoundly transformational, but it isn’t meant for *gaijin* like Leslie and me.

We went at twilight, and though the front quarters of the spa were dimly lit, the polished oak beams shone so brightly that it felt like a calm and lazy midday inside, all except for the tea shop across from the desk which was furnished in a traditional style, dull wood and tatami with lacquer only on black cups, absorbing light and creating a darkly luminous gravitational field, a lacquerware black hole.

Leslie and I were an opposite spectacle—tall and pale with meat on our bones. Heads turned when we entered. A child asked us *nanjin?*, “What-ese are you?” It was fine for me: my Japanese was good enough that I could defuse exclusiveness with something close to normal conversation. Likewise, I could answer the question “Do you have any tattoos?, “ asked to keep out foreigners and gangsters. Shuntaro and I got through the line and shuffled toward the locker rooms while Leslie went through the process. We forgot that she wasn’t semi-fluent and couldn’t make out the receptionist’s condescendingly formal grammar, instead answering “yes” to everything. When they got to tattoos and Leslie hesitated, teetering on the edge of a wrong “yes” that would have gotten her kicked out, Shuntaro snapped around with a snarl. “What rudeness,” he shouted in the kind of voice I’d only heard in Kurosawa films, “You didn’t ask me those questions!” With cowardice and indignation, they let Leslie through.

Two days before my friends Neil and Jens left Japan, we went to an inn on the coast of Lake Biwa. It was a thirteen-floor complex with luxury rooms, shops, and conference centers, all in a hybrid style: traditional rooms with contemporary hallways. The bath was on the top floor. Three *gaijin* together can be imposing, but fortunately there were only two or three other bathers who just ignored us. We washed our bodies and hair with horse oil products, a fad in 2007, and soaked while watching the Biwa from the floor-to-ceiling window.

We got more looks in the locker room afterward, combing our hair and beards, comparing fat with one another. The Japanese rarely have two descendants of the Danish among them, and while neither of us was grotesquely fat, we noted unique similarities in our belly shapes and chest hair related to our shared cultural heritage.

On the first floor, we bought milk, a common after-bath drink, and perused a pottery shop before attracting the attention of group of drunken elderly Japanese having a party. It was a club of watercolor painters and they forced us on stage, dressing Neil as a geisha before forcing Jens and I into samurai gear, pitting us against one another for the right to his maidenhood. After humiliating us, they kicked us out of the party without offering us so much as a piece of sushi or a glass of beer.
I spent a month living with an old, eccentric Japanese communist, Tehara. The man was not accepted among Japanese society, but he always hung out with either international college students from continental Asia (who couldn’t tell him to get lost) or the academic elite. Through him, I met professors and intellectuals of all types, ranging in political views and disciplines. Tehara embodied the Great Japanese Contradiction, at once disillusioned by the Japanese one-party political system and the collective-oriented culture, but contrarily fascinated by things like Kabuki and Japanese dance, often taking me to festivals and displays.

This affinity led us to an onsen in Nagahama with an outdoor garden bath. We went in October, and sitting naked on the rocks with my feet in the steaming water, watching the leaves change in the near-freezing weather, I felt very calm. Eventually a man sat down opposite from me. His arms, legs, and genitals were covered in tattoos of flowers and dragons. He had the skin-folds of the middle-aged covering the faded images and making them hard to immediately decipher, and it took me a moment to realize the man was a yakuza. Embarrassed, I slid down into the tub.

“You’re handsome,” he said. I told him I needed to work out a little more, but thanks. He told me I should do a few crunches, and then he asked me if I had a girlfriend.

“Does she want this?” he shouted, jumping out of the bath and showing me the particulars of his body. I must have flinched, because in high-pitched English he said, “Oh, I’m so scared!”

Then he said, “Your beard is nice. You look like Paul McCartney.” To be honest, since I grew my beard I was waiting for someone to say that, so I said thank you and relaxed back into the tub.
Spain
La Balladora,
El Guitarista,
La Cantante
Aaron Coleman

3 artists
seemingly old friends
bound together by much more
than shared laughs and memories.

She rises.
her soul fiery red with passion
swells to the surface
flooding maroon tones flush her cheeks,
swell her neck,
spread out across her chest,
frustrate and clench her hands.
depth charges explode shocking her black dress
fluttering wildly above the floor
He’s holding, holding his guitar as a newborn child gently, firmly with love assured equally through affection and security. His chin nestled in the curve of the guitar’s chest, feeling where to place his fingers, obvious he’s no longer playing. He’s holding on trying to find it. It is the guitar cradling him.

La Cantante’s eyes are alive. They scan outward at an infinite peripheral as they stare inward along the same mystic rhythm as the two others...

wamp-wam-wamp CLACK!

Her feet electrify! “stomping” does not encapsulate.

La Cantante’s hands clap without knowing a beat they are the rhythm she and her hands yearn for it, in it as much as they live for it, in it.

We watch. but, they are too far away to feel our eyes. our visions too sedated, cannot truly see.

La Bailadora looks me in my eyes, almost laughs at me -

wamp-wam-wamp CLACK!
Evan Anderson, Chiang Mai, Thailand
"Study abroad was one of the best experiences of my life."

Michael Antonishen, Budapest, Hungary
"My time abroad can only accurately be described using one word: Legendary."

Evan Arthur, Beijing, China
"With one foot in an ancient culture and another in cosmopolitanism, it is the most diverse and contrasted country in the world; my goal of seven months was to gain a proper perspective of it all."

Leah Blazek, Chiang Mai, Thailand
"My amazing experience in Thailand resulted in the beautiful conundrum that I now have two families, and wherever I go I will always be homesick for the family and home on the other side of the globe."

Alyson Chun, Cairo, Egypt
"My study abroad experience was hot, smelly, and dirty, but so far the best experience of my life."

Aaron Coleman, Cáceres, Spain
"While living in Cáceres and traveling throughout Europe and Morocco, the relationships birthed through that experience continue to have a lasting and eye-opening impact on me, both as a person and a poet."

Elizabeth Colvin, St. Augustine, Trinidad
"Studying abroad in Trinidad was a wonderful time in my life that I would recommend to anyone."

Justine Dolorfino, London, England
"In between classes I took advantage of being in London in the following ways: walking on every bridge that crossed the Thames, becoming intimately familiar with the insides of EasyJet planes on trips around Europe, and learning how to fake a passable accent."

Katie Ellis, Quito, Ecuador
"Study abroad taught me first and foremost how to be both fearless and attentive with each journey: you never know what will happen next."

Becca Fealk, San Jose, Costa Rica
For Becca, Costa Rica was “Pura vida...”

Andrew Girrell, Valparaíso, Chile
"Que se entienda, te pido, puerto mío, que yo tengo derecho a escribirte lo bueno y lo malvado...”
~Neruda

Catherine Herzog, London, England
Catherine studied in London, England, and spent every hour walking around the city, going to museums and markets, and eating out.

Dan Hulbert, Quito, Ecuador
"Chévere"
Keely Joy Houghton, Nagoya, Japan
“Studying abroad was not only about the enjoyment of being in another culture, but a time to understand myself in reference to that culture—to understand what it means to be a foreigner.”

Nicholas Kelly, Erlangen, Germany

Sarah Manley, Erlangen, Germany
“My study abroad experience? Amazing. I loved the bakeries on every corner, the beer, being able to ride my bike everywhere, and the feeling of complete independence.”

Heather Myers, Athens, Greece

Eric Michaelsen, Hikone, Japan
Eric has “nothing but sad, sweet nostalgia for days spent in hot springs and culturally unique craft breweries.”

Thom Nelson, Quito, Ecuador
“Study abroad, above all, allowed me not only to know a new place and culture but to re-examine the place and culture in which I have grown up and that I call my own.”

Leslie Petrovich, Be’er-Sheva, Israel
“I chose Israel because I love sand and stray cats.”

Karanja Kinyua Rufus, Kalamazoo, USA
“My study abroad experience has been awesome and life transforming, I have had the opportunity to interact with so many new people and discover new talents that I did not know about myself.”

Rochelle LaMacchio, Beijing, China
“If for one reason only I am glad I went to Beijing for the people I met and have come to love.”

Ian Littell, Rome, Italy

Erin Streyle, Nairobi, Kenya
“The six months I spent in Kenya were filled with the most chaotic, unpredictable, challenging yet wonderfully amazing experiences which I will remember the rest of my life.”

Elayna Snyder, Kolkata, India
“Living in India I felt free to explore and express myself without the confines of a culture I understood.”

Peter Rausse, Quito, Ecuador
“You cannot skip my class to get your censo, it is the rules of the Kalamazoo College.”

Dorothy Trippel, Strasbourg, France

Joseph Warner, Chiang Mai, Thailand
“My study abroad was all about food.”

Karl Wasmuth, Bonn, Germany
“The opportunity to travel, study and make new friends while abroad is something I shall forever cherish.”

Joslyn Westphal, San Jose, Costa Rica
“I spent six months exploring the whole country, traveling everywhere from gorgeous beaches to active volcanoes, only to find that the things I miss most about Costa Rica are the friendly people, the laid-back lifestyle, and ability to feel comfortable in a culture so different from my own.”

Christine Widmayer, Quito, Ecuador
“My study abroad experience was an intense but glorious six months spent immersed in the vibrancy of Ecuadorian culture, learning about myself and drinking jugos.”
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Passage is a Kalamazoo College publication which contains writing and photography by students who have participated in the study abroad experience. The magazine circulates to students and their parents, alumni, friends of the college, prospective students and members of the Kalamazoo College community. Students are invited to submit stories, poetry, photography and artwork for consideration.

Front Cover Photo: Elayna Snyder Dali Chandipur India

Inside Front Cover Photo: Evan Arthur Lanterns Overlooking a River China

Title Page Photo: Erin Streyle Piper Kurtz and Rachel Tepfer on the Game Drive in Maasi Mara Kenya

Back Cover photo: Thom Nelson Marketplates Ecuador

Inside Back Cover Photo: Andrew Girrell El Campo del Desierto Chile