

My Mobility

Students from Ca' Foscari Recount their Learning Experiences Abroad

A letter from my future self

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Anamaria Girdescu shifts the perspective in this account of her mobility, so that the 'future self' looks back and gives advice to the girl about to leave on what she should expect from the experience.

Dear Ana,

I know you have many worries before leaving for Austria. You have packed your things, are ready to take off and actually do what you had been saying you would do. Going and living abroad, while studying what you're mostly interested into - it sounds wonderful, doesn't it?

You say you want to know how it was, and if it was worth it. First of all, let me tell you one thing. No matter how many stories you have heard about it, it is useless if you yourself have never done it. There are of course some elements which all students going abroad can relate to, but the fact is, each and every experience is unique and beautifully challenging. And that is a good thing, because could you imagine how boring it would be if everyone came back with the same story?

Where should I begin with my story... I could tell you a lot about how my courses went, what they were about, if I liked my town of destination, if I improved my linguistic knowledge and could do it all over again. I guess you are especially eager to know the answer to the last two questions. I can assure you that if you could hear my voice, you would notice it is thrilled with excitement and also a bit of nostalgia, as during the semester abroad I thoroughly enjoyed the sense of opportunities of self-improvement. I think you would be excited to know that you are going to have lots of fun making some new friends and discovering new places, new landscapes, new dishes and so on. You will have some trouble remembering your German, but that won't stop you from taking chances and bonding with some incredible locals. Most importantly, you will discover things about yourself you didn't know were there.

You will discover that brushing up on your German and writing papers in academic English is not impossible, that you enjoy waking up early in the morning, that you could eat steak with marmelade on it, and even ride a bike on the roads covered with snow in winter.

Well, that last one might not be such a good example, because once my bike slipped and I fell, but don't worry about it. Fortunately I wasn't hurt and managed to get up. I rode my bike a lot, which was not bad, since my town was not that big. In the evenings it was a bit more risky, but then I could always use the public transportation.

Generally, I liked the people. They were friendly, open to talk with you, most of them salute you on the street even if they don't know you personally. That was such a fun part- getting to know new people and see things from different perspectives. You will meet a girl who is very fun to be around, with a strong Styrian accent, shoulder-length brown hair, and a passion for feminist novels and exotic travels. You will make friends with her and other two girls who are into arts and preparing for the final exam of their degrees. Oh yes, they have a huge final exam at the end of their studies, for which they have to read and study a lot.

Overall, I enjoyed my courses. I chose seminars, because I wanted to experience new ways of teaching and learning. I read lots of novels in English and discovered some new authors. Well, they might not be that 'new', but to me they were. The best part about seminars is that you don't learn in the traditional way, with a teacher explaining the theories to the class, but you actually get to the bottom of some interesting dilemma in a personal paper that you have to hand in at the end. It is not easy, but it can be so enjoyable once you've found an interesting topic. It is important not to get down on yourself if you find it difficult. And you will. I had some trouble with some assignments, but remember that you can ask for help; your fellow students or teachers will be more than glad to help you. You just have to get involved and show interest in the subject.

I know you are curious about your linguistic knowledge. Has it improved? I hope so; one thing is for sure. My self-confidence in using languages has improved. As I made a fool of myself in many situations when I chose to speak in German, I lost the fear of making mistakes. It is so liberating when that happens! However, there is so much more that helps you connect than the language per se. I could make friends in Austria not because I could use my linguistic knowledge, but because I was willing to get to know other people and not afraid of making stupid mistakes or finding myself in awkward situations.

I won't tell you more, because I don't want to spoil the experience for you. Would you like to know, if it was worth it? Then, do not be afraid to leave for your semester abroad, and find the answer yourself.

Love,
Your future Self