

Bucket List #1: Live in a foreign country for at least a year

During the summer of 2013, I studied abroad for two months in Dijon, France and Muenster, Germany with a group of 49 other Virginia Tech students. During weekdays, we had class and explored Dijon and Muenster. Our experiences in Dijon and Muenster were vastly different, mostly because in Dijon, we stayed in student dorms and in Muenster, most of us stayed with host families. On weekends, we visited other cities (Paris, Interlaken, Berlin, and Nice- just to name a few). Since we had such little time in these large cities and wanted to see as much as we could, weekends were always extremely packed.

During my weekend in Paris, I was on such a tight schedule to see the Louvre, Eiffel Tour, and other touristy landmarks that I didn't really get a chance to sit down and get to know Parisians and their culture. In Germany, I was lucky to be able to stay in a flat with two college students, allowing me to fully experience Muenster the way they do every day.

After class on some nights, a group of study abroad students and their hosts would stay out eating and drinking in the beer garden down the street or unwind at someone's flat. Other nights, we would sail or bike around Lake Aasee, grab bratwursts and fries, and play drinking games until sundown. When the fair was in town, we would pick out the biggest rides, go to every food stand — trying everything from chocolate-covered bananas to strawberry Nutella crepes, and grab drinks at the carousel bar.

One of my favorite memories from the entire trip was the night my hosts' had a few friends over for a casual potluck. We sat around, talking about random topics, eating delicious foods, laughing at YouTube videos, and most of all, enjoying each other's company. I had the privilege of getting to know people I otherwise wouldn't have ever been able to meet and getting to hear their stories. We didn't do anything remarkable or see anything remarkable like the Seven Wonders of the World, but it is a memory that has stayed with me the most and one that I will cherish forever. Simple memories like that can really impact you more than anything else because making deep human connections is one of the most meaningful things in the world.

One thing I learned from study abroad was that traveling isn't always about hitting all the big landmarks and going to places to check them off a list or be able to say that you've been there. It's about making real human connections and getting to know a place from the inside out, starting with the locals.

Since I've always lived in pretty much one area my entire life and grew up around people are pretty similar, I've always been highly interested in other cultures and how differently people live from me. It helps me keep an open mind and be able to see things from other perspectives. Living in a foreign country for a year would be the best way to fully immerse myself in another culture.