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Study Abroad - Prague Classic Summer

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My Experiences in Prague

Studying abroad in Prague has been one of the most amazing experiences of my life. Before I decided to come to college in the United States instead of staying in my home country, The Netherlands, for college, I did not realize that studying abroad was something that existed. When I found out about that opportunity, however, I immediately knew that would be something for me since I have always been an advocate for seeing the world and learning about new cultures. I convinced my best friend to apply for the Prague study abroad program with me this year after we had been to all of the study abroad fairs together dreaming of this opportunity. When we both got into the Prague program, we were exhilarated. Therefore, my roommate helped me get to this experience since I may have been more reluctant to do it if I did not have someone to do it with and my parents helped me by being so supportive and trusting of me going to a different country semi-alone for 6 weeks. All of this helped me get to Prague and I am so fortunate for that since it was such a great experience for me to have at this time in my life. In this essay I will reflect on my experiences studying abroad in Prague.

My study abroad experience in Prague had many memorable moments. My most memorable moments definitely included all the amazing people that I met, the classes that I took, and the Czech culture that I got to know and love. To start out, I met some great new people on the trip that I did a lot of activities with such as exploring the beautiful city of Prague, trying new cuisine, taking cooking classes, going to operas and

other events, and much more. All of these experiences would never have been as amazing if it wasn't with these people. I especially enjoyed exploring Prague by just walking aimlessly and discovering new places without navigation. I also loved visiting a small town a few hours from Prague, which was called Cesky Krumlov. Visiting this town was also such a great bonding experience with people on the trip and it was so different from Prague, which made it even more fun to explore. Another very memorable moment was going to multiple observatories with my Astronomy class. This was so amazing since it really sparked my interest in Astronomy and potentially helped me figure out what I want to specialize in for my future career. I also loved the Czech cooking classes I got from my Food and Society class. Something that was also memorable was getting to know Czech culture. I have had a lot of experience traveling and I am originally from Europe, so I did not expect to be so surprised by The Czech Republic, but I was. Czech culture is much different than other European countries and with the amount of time I spent in Prague and the amount of typical Czech activities I participated in, I fully emerged in the culture which helped me completely understand and love it.

My study abroad experience in Prague had a lot of very memorable moments, but of course it also came with its challenges. For example, finding a good school and travel balance was difficult at first. I wanted to go exploring and travel to different countries every weekend like everybody else. However, when I realized I had chosen classes that required more attention, I had to create a new plan to have time for school as well. Because of this, I did not get to travel to as many countries during my time in Prague, but luckily I had planned more travels for after Prague. The only other challenge I had was missing my family, friends, and boyfriend back home. Luckily my

best friend was on the trip with me, but not seeing my family and boyfriend for 10 weeks (since I also spent a month traveling afterward) was very difficult. Luckily facetime made this much easier. Even with these challenges, the good definitely outweighs the bad and I loved my time in Prague.

Like I mentioned earlier, going to Prague was such an amazing experience since it helped me get to know the Czech culture so much better. I was already used to Europe since I am from The Netherlands and I have traveled to many European countries before, but The Czech Republic was definitely something different. When I arrived in Prague, I was immediately shocked by how I couldn't even understand or read a little bit of Czech. In grocery stores and everywhere else everything was in Czech, so it was very difficult to get around at first. Usually in other European countries, I am able to sort of read the language since it is always somewhat similar to Dutch, which I am fluent in, or French and German, which I also know. Also the different currency took a long time to get used to and the fact that Prague was so full of tourists, did not have any bikers like in other European countries, and completely depended on trams was very shocking. I also took a multitude of Czech cooking classes while I was there and tried Czech cuisine which was so interesting and delicious. I also got to learn about Czech cuisine in my Food and Society class which helped a lot with getting to know the culture. The teacher also informed us of typical aspects of Czech culture such as Czechs being very private and quiet, Czechs always answering the question "How are you?" completely honestly, being quiet on trams and standing up for the elderly on trams, ice hockey being a big deal, eating carp on Christmas eve, whipping women on Easter, and much more. It was very noticeable that The Czech Republic only escaped

communism about 20 years ago, since it sometimes seemed that it was a bit “behind” other European countries. The Czech Republic definitely seemed more eastern to me than western and since I had never been to an Eastern European country before, this was very interesting and new for me. All of these experiences in The Czech Republic helped me understand my Dutch culture more since it opened my eyes to the fact that not all European countries and people are that similar. I absolutely loved getting to know Czech people in this way and living in Prague for 6 weeks definitely helped me to completely emerge in this culture, which was so educational.

My weeks abroad in Prague also helped me develop more personal skills and helped me get to know myself even better. I was already quite independent before coming to Prague, but being in Prague helped me become even more independent by going to stores alone, riding trams alone, exploring alone, navigating an unknown language, and much more. I think this really helped me grow as a person by helping me know that I am able to figure things out by myself, which ultimately helped grow my self-confidence. This experience has also opened my eyes even more to different cultures which has made me much more informed about people from all over the world. I also really enjoyed seeing how other people on this trip dealt with being abroad for the first time. Most people on this trip had never been outside of The United States before, so it was so interesting to see how Americans reacted to being in Europe for the first time and seeing them become more independent as well. Being in Prague and taking classes there also was very helpful in becoming more social and working in teams. Since the classes were smaller, you had to participate more, which generally would scare me, but I eventually got used to it and actually enjoyed it. I hope that now I will be

much better at that in the future. This will ultimately be very important for getting a job in the future and excelling at my future career. Overall, this trip was very beneficial in growing my independent, self-confident, and social skills which will be very useful for my future endeavors.

My assumptions of studying abroad in Prague were very similar to how Prague ended up being. I knew that it would be so much fun meeting new people, exploring the city and other places, learning the Czech culture, and taking interesting classes there. This all turned out to be true. I absolutely loved my time in Prague and I will definitely recommend studying abroad to everyone now since it was such a great learning experience. I wouldn't want to change anything about my time spent in Prague. It was perfect in every way and I cannot wait to continue to relive these memories through pictures and reminiscing forever now.