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DESTINATION
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Study abroad is a celebration of the idea that we are all more alike than we are different. Now more than ever it's a message that needs to be heard.

For me, like most American youth, study abroad was only the second time I left the country and the first time I was living alone in a foreign place. It broke down my barriers and erased my preconceptions. I was exposed to new experiences, flavors, styles, sounds, but most importantly, new ideas. It was six months of sensory expansion and it enriched my life in ways that no classroom in America could.

Students from nearly every continent co-existed in a little bubble we called the Railway Campus (a railroad station-turned dormitory). Everyone had a zest for life and cultural exchange. We had one common purpose: to learn from each other and have a ton of fun along the way. Learning from each other happened organically over dinners that turned in to debates, or language lessons that turned into jam sessions. We laughed together, danced together. Cried immense tears on our final day of the program. I returned home to my very homogenous Jesuit university in Maryland a completely changed person.

Finances were always a challenge growing up in my single-family home but it never deterred me from studying abroad. Through a combination of scholarships and financial aid I ended up at Loyola College in Maryland, where many of the study abroad programs were no additional cost beyond the tuition I was already paying. Essentially, I could spend the same amount to be in Baltimore, Florence, Spain or Auckland. The choice was obvious.

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One of the added bonuses of studying abroad is the bonds and friendships that you form. They will last a lifetime. Next week I will meet four of my New Zealand study abroad buddies for our monthly dinner in New York City. We will reminisce, share stories and plot the details of our 20th reunion in New Zealand.

Study abroad was one of the best decisions I ever made and completely changed the trajectory of my life. Take the risk, broaden your horizons and you will be rewarded handsomely.

Courtney Scott is a leading on-air travel expert, filmmaker, blogger, TV host and DJ, who has appeared on the Today Show, CNN and ABC News. In the male-dominated filmmaking industry, it is her mission to inspire other female travelers to explore the world through a filmmaker's lens.



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