How Buying Two Left Shoes Helped My Career

Whether you are in Rome staring up awe struck at the Colosseum, or enjoying tapas in Spain, you're probably not thinking about how your study abroad experience is going to benefit you in your career. Without even realizing it, the sightseeing, conversing with locals, and dining in quaint restaurants will help you develop skills and teach you lessons that will have a positive impact on your career.

Two years ago, I was a student studying abroad in China. I walked along the Great Wall of China and reveled in the beauty of the local temples; I enjoyed my time in China and thought very little about my future career. Fast forward a couple of years and I realize that many of skills I learned in China, I utilize every day in my current job as the Program Coordinator at the Eller College of Management, University of Arizona. Here is a short list of some of my favorite experiences in China and the lessons they taught me.

**Explaining to a shoe vendor that they sold you two left shoes is a great way to learn patience.**

During our trip to Beijing, I purchased a pair of shoes at the Silk Market. When I got back to the hotel and pulled the shoes out to wear that night, I realized that they had sold me two left shoes! The next day I took them back to the vendor and struggled to explain to the saleswoman my dilemma. After an hour of using crazy hand gestures to explain my story, I finally got one left shoe and one right shoe. The patience I learned, I use every day at my job. Whether I am planning an event where the keynote speaker is late or I'm helping a student map out their career path, the ability to stay calm in the face of an obstacle isn't just essential – it's valuable.

**When it rains, it pours self-confidence.**

In between classes, my roommate and I took a cab to grab a quick lunch. We were just heading down the street and we thought we knew where we were going; so, we made the tragic mistake of leaving our backpack with our cell phone in the classroom. We handed the restaurant’s business card to the cab driver and (whoosh!) we were on our way - or so we thought.

Instead, we ended up at a random hotel. It turns out the cab driver took us to the hotel that was advertised on the back of business card. We tried to explain to the clearly confused cab driver the misunderstanding. Unfortunately, we were left to navigate through the city, in the pouring rain, on our own. With a little bit of intuition and the help of some English-speaking locals, we eventually made it back!

The lesson: Navigating a foreign city in the rain gave me the self-confidence I needed to tackle more challenging obstacles at work.

**Living eight weeks in a hotel room with no closet or drawers teaches you the importance of adaptability and flexibility.**

Our hotel in China had absolutely no storage for clothes, toiletries, or study materials. We could not spend the next eight weeks with clothes and textbooks strewn all over the floor, so my roommate and I
solved the problem the American way, taking a trip to Wal-Mart to buy storage bins. We got some pretty strange looks as we juggled all of these bins on our mile-long trek back to the hotel. After some creative redecorating, we made our room livable. It wasn't perfect, but we managed. My current job requires me to plan a lot of events and there are always times when things do not go as expected. After living in China a short time, I learned just how a little clever ingenuity can make any situation work.

**Taking five classes and touring three cities in eight weeks is a crash course in time management.**

Balancing studying for tests, completing projects, and writing papers with exploring Beijing, Shanghai, and Nanjing quickly taught me how to manage my time. Every day the thought of discovering local restaurants, markets, and shops motivated me to get my homework done in a timely fashion. Much like my experience in China, my job is fast-paced and requires me to complete multiple tasks. After conquering my heavy workload in China, managing day-to-day tasks and long-term goals is a breeze.

**Watching the locals (and your friends) eat scorpions and seahorses makes you realize just how diverse the world is.**

One weekend, all of the students went out to browse the local street vendors. We found a row of food stands selling all kinds of strange foods, everything from seahorses on a stick to a variety of bugs and animal parts. This is just one of the many things I witnessed in China that made me realize I wasn't in “Kansas” anymore. My experience in China opened my eyes to just how diverse the world is. I feel I'm better prepared to collaborate with people from different backgrounds and experiences.

My advice to you: During your study abroad experience, go ahead, shop, dine, and enjoy the sites of the city! Some of your best study abroad memories will teach you the best skills and lessons for your future.

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