A busy London street corner looking at Big Ben and the Palace of Westminster

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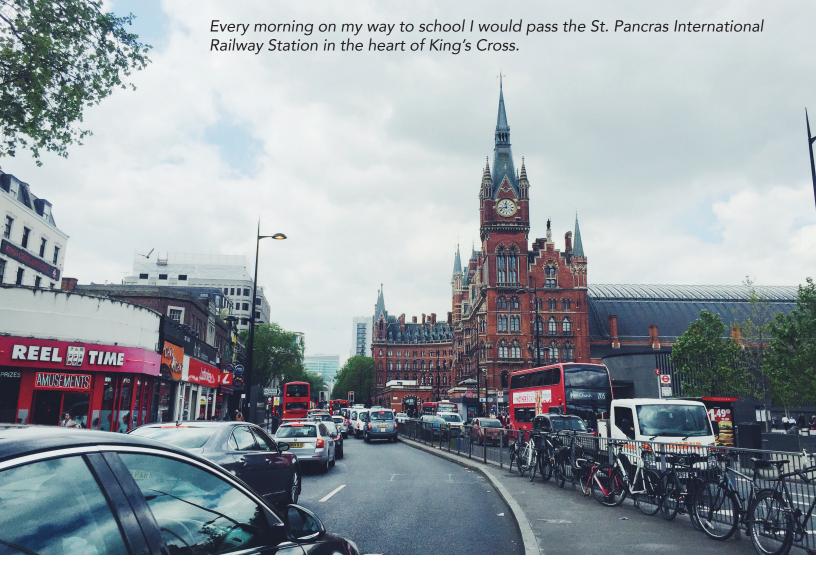
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College Degree Program: History Study Abroad Program: London



When I was 16 years old, my older brother traveled halfway across the world to study abroad. As I looked at his pictures and heard him share his fondest memories. I instantly became enamored with the whole idea of studying abroad. Six years later, I found myself standing in front of the terminal gates at the Dallas airport about to embark on my six-month study abroad journey to London. To my surprise, instead of being overwhelmingly excited, I was absolutely petrified about what awaited me across the pond. I walked away from my parents knowing that for the first time in my life I would no longer be five minutes away from them. Instead, I was going to be more than 4,000 miles from them. In that moment, as I stared up at the boarding sign, I realized that everything familiar to me was about to be gone.

I began questioning why I decided to leave everything I knew behind me to go live in a

foreign country where I knew absolutely no one. I held back the tears and anxiety that continued to creep up on me as I navigated my way through the Heathrow Airport to the London Underground. Instead of easing my way into independence I fully jumped, and for the first time in my life I was 100 percent on my own. I knew I had to decide how I wanted to spend my first day in London. I was either going to wallow in my uncertainty or revel in the fact that I was living out my wildest dreams. I like to think that my decision to pick the latter option was the moment that changed the course of my study abroad experience. Looking back at that first day, I cannot help but laugh at how overdramatic I was, but then again, everything I felt was more than justified.

It did not take me very long to fall in love with the whole experience. I never got tired of walking past beautiful historic sights such as King's

Cross Station or the British Library on my way to class every morning. I will forever miss the overwhelming happiness I felt every time I saw something I had read about in a book or learned about from one of my previous classes at the University of Oklahoma. I loved singing karaoke at the top of my lungs with all of my new friends every Wednesday night at the pub around the corner from my apartment. I memorized the map of the Underground to the point where I no longer got lost trying to get from Kings Cross to Oxford Street. I grew accustomed to catching flights at six in the morning so I could have just a little bit more time exploring other countries. I enjoyed dragging my suitcase down a cobblestone pathway, completely lost, searching for the hostel.

In those six months, I traveled to 12 different countries, 26 different cities and made 30 lifelong friends with whom I now keep in touch on a daily basis. Those moments, places and people have infinitely changed how I not only view myself, but also how I view the world around me. Through my study abroad experience, I slowly became the person I had always aspired to be: someone who smiled every morning, laughed every second of every day and never said no to any spontaneous adventure that came my way. For the first time in 22 years, I can honestly say that the second I decided to pursue my dreams, I gained more confidence than I imagined. All it took was a 4,000-mile step out of my comfort zone. So here's to London and my study abroad experience. Thanks for the memories that will forever be etched in my heart.

