

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



1 [CONFIDENCE]
KELSEY MAYS

College Degree Program: History
Study Abroad Program: London

Every morning on my way to school I would pass the St. Pancras International Railway Station in the heart of King's Cross.



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.



The Tower Bridge