The Art of Studying Abroad
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Even before coming to Kansas State University I have dreamed of spending time in another country. Once finding out that my school would do all they could to help me get there and give me college credit for going, the decision became much easier. Everyone’s decision and background once engaged with the thought of studying abroad will be much different but I can give you insight as to the process I went through.

During the initial stages, you will need to decide where you want to go. Many places immediately popped into my head: Australia, New Zealand, Canada, and many different European locations. To get a more realistic grip on myself, I began to look at prices for each location and the companies that offered these trips. KSU offers simple student exchange programs however, I decided to prepare for my trip with a company called CCIS. Their semester program in Prague, Czech Republic was one of the most affordable excursions I could find—and for me this was extremely important. As of recently, the Czech Republic has yet to switch their currency to the Euro like most European Union nations thus making the exchange rate favorable to the U.S. dollar. Exchange rates will prove to be one of the most important factors when studying abroad, not only when selecting where you plan to study but where you travel while abroad as well. Prague is also termed ‘the Paris of the East.’ It is a city with a tremendous amount of intellectual history and charm.

Another aspect of your trip will be where you will reside within the city or town of your choosing. A couple other schools in Prague that KSU sends students to have on campus dorms. The school I chose to attend was a smaller inner city school that did not offer housing. The program I choose had a connection through a local landlord for a
group of flats in a quiet section of the city. I decided this would be the easiest option for me however I know of other students that found places on Craigslist.com. Depending on the regional culture that you will be surrounded in, many amenities may or may not be included in your housing unit. An item I really wish I had during my stay in Prague was a microwave. However simple this may sound, it initially posed problems for me. I had to adapt to the cooking life, something I had very little knowledge of. I probably could have found a relatively cheap microwave in a store, but deciding to learn how to cook and prepare meals on my own became very enjoyable. Some of the best times on your trip will be exploring local cuisine with fellow students. The first day in Prague, my roommates asked me to go out and find something to eat. Because I had not yet found a close grocery store, this gave me a great opportunity to explore nearby restaurants. How to wash your clothing might be a problem you are not regularly faced with here at home. The apartment I lived in had a maid that cleaned everyday. I had the option of having the maid do my laundry for a fee, and I did this a few times. Once I realized I was paying twenty to twenty five dollars a week to have my laundry done, I decided to search for nearby Laundromets. This could also be an issue for you therefore I suggest you find out how you will clean your clothes before you leave the U.S.

Whether you like it or not, you are there to study and enrich your education. The school that I chose to study at was a small foreign diplomacy and liberal arts establishment. This was a perfect fit for me as I pursue a degree in political science and pre-law. It was extremely important for me to discuss with my advisor here at KSU which classes to take so that I could count on them filling requirements upon my return to Kansas. I filled my schedule with classes that I thought would interest me and had a
personal touch to the atmosphere I was in. I took a Czech language course at KSU and then decided to take another once in Prague. This was probably the most beneficial class I could have taken. Not only was I learning a new language, but I was actively engaged in the language in culture every day. It is hard to learn a new language when you are not forced to use it. Although I am not exactly fluent yet in Czech, I was able to give and receive directions from locals and order my meals and understand the transportation systems much easier than my fellow classmates. By taking classes dealing with foreign governments, I was able to interact with students from all over the globe coming from drastically different perspectives. This was important for me and gave a better understanding of the United State’s image in a difficult political arena. I was thrust into the limelight in many situations based on my nationality in my International Relations class. Although it was challenging at times, the experience and knowledge I have gained has proven to be extremely beneficial to furthering my education and eventual career.

Each individual will have different tastes when choosing a location. I choose Prague not knowing exactly what to expect at first. Before departing I bought several books regarding the local culture, sightseeing locations, and the nightlife. I was looking for a truly European experience and could not have found a better place to spend my time than in Prague. Regardless of where you choose to go, understanding the transportation system will be extremely important while abroad. I would even advise looking up the metro and bus lines before you depart and get an understanding of where you will be living in comparison to your school, grocery stores, Laundromats, and other sites that will be of importance to you. Once traveling to many other countries in Europe, I have come to the firm conclusion that Prague’s transportation is one of the easiest and clean
environments you could be in. Although signs will be in a foreign language, color coding makes this unavoidable task a breeze.

Problems large or small are likely to arise when studying abroad. Like I have previously mentioned, I had a maid in my flat to take care of most problems. For other concerns I could always contact my landlord who lived a couple floors up from me. He was an older man who was very courteous and helpful. Getting help from school proved to be a bit more difficult. The school administrators had a hard time keeping up with a large international pool of students yet they would eventually address my concerns. Depending on your location, you are guaranteed a different response. Eastern Europeans will prove to generally not care about your needs as you may wish and this will take getting used to. Don’t forget that while abroad, the study abroad team at KSU will always be there to help you out.

Preparing for your departure will also be an important step. Once securing all important documents, you must start the task of preparing your bags. I choose to bring one large suitcase and a backpack to count as my carry-on item on the plane. The airline you choose will also place restrictions on how much you might want to bring. I saved money before leaving so that I could buy some clothing items once abroad. If you do this, try not to get carried away as it will pose more problems when you plan to come back home. The study abroad office has paperwork with helpful travel tips. On this list it is important to take into account the different power source of your host country. I then purchased a couple international adapters and power surge protectors. These will be crucial items if you plan to bring a computer or other valuable electronics. Rolling your clothing will also be helpful and something that I never thought of before. It created a lost
more space in my suitcase. Depending on the location of the country you choose, clothing items should be appropriate for the weather conditions you will encounter.

My study abroad experience last spring in Prague was undoubtedly the best time of my life. I continuously think about the great times I had in Europe. Eventually I will go back to vacation and I’m sure you will feel the same way after your trip. Hopefully the advice I have shared with you will be of some help and I wish you safe travels!